Site Inventory Form State Historical Society of Iowa (December 1, 1999)	State Inventory No
1. Name of Property	
historic name Fairbanks Home Fo	or Funerals
other names/site numberField Site	e #: WH-121
2. Location	
street & number114 W. Fourth S	Street
city or town <u>Muscatine</u> Legal Description: (If Rural) Township	vicinity, county <u>Muscatine</u> p Name Township No. Range No. Section Quarter of Quarter
(If Urban) Subdivision Origina	al Town Block(s) 55 Lot(s) Lot 10
3. State/Federal Agency Certificat	
4. National Park Service Certificat	tion [Skip this Section]
5. Classification	box) Number of Resources within Property
Title	If Non-Eligible Property If Eligible Property, enter number of: Enter number of: Contributing
Historic Functions (Enter categories from	om instructions) Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)
07C02: Funerary/Mortuary/Funeral	
Architectural Classification (Enter ca 07A: Late 19 th & Early 20 th Century Movements	
	roof roof08A: Asphalt/Shingle
8. Statement of Significance	other NTINUATION SHEETS, WHICH MUST BE COMPLETED)
Applicable National Register Criteria (☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ More Research Red	commended B Property is associated with the lives of significant persons. C Property has distinctive architectural characteristics.

Site Number
District Number
ructed building, object, or structure. morative property. n 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past
ficant Dates
uction date □ S
dates
itect/Builder
•
N SHEETS, WHICH MUST BE COMPLETED)
,
d other sources used in preparing this form
Zone Easting Northing
date November 30, 2005
telephone <u>563-264-1550</u>
state IA zip code 52761
s with the completed form)
n relation to public road(s). s are taken as part of a survey for which the Society is to be to be included with the negatives/slides and the following Date Taken
his Line
: ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ More Research Recommended gnated district.
Date:
er. in 20 in 1 in 2

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7. Narrative Description

This is a two-story, three-bay, Prairie School style house. The 1928 Sanborn map notes "dwelling" as the use, but "funeral home" was noted on the 1946 Sanborn map, which also shows the rear addition. The house sits on a concrete block foundation. The walls are frame, clad in a stone or stucco veneer. The stucco and Perma-stone veneer was added around 1935 (Muscatine Journal, 1935, Section 3, Page 8). A rear addition is partially clad in steel. The main hip roof is clad in asphalt shingles, while the flatter roof of the rear addition is unknown, but most likely rubber. A large cement parking lot is located adjacent to the building on the west side. A concrete block outbuilding is located behind the parking lot. The back of the lot drops off sharply from the front. The parking lot and main funeral home sets on the higher ground, with the outbuilding and ground floor of the addition on the lower level. A set of steps on the west half of the lot and a ramped driveway on the east edge provides access between the two levels.

The front (north) elevation is a symmetrical facade with a centered, one and one-half-story, open pedestrian portico that covers the main entry into the building. The portico was likely added in 1935 when an extensive exterior remodeling project wascompleted; it was present at the end of the year ("Would You Double the Value of Your Investment," advertisement with photograph, Muscatine Journal, December 30, 1935, Section 3, Page 8). A flat roof with a mansard-style overhang covers the portico. A round arched opening on each side of the portico provides pedestrian access, while the front opening contains a three-sided stone enclosure that contains a funerary plant holder. The arch pillars of the portico are covered with vinyl cladding on the exterior and stone inside. The first story and one-half of the façade is clad in stone veneer that was added in 1935 during the exterior renovation. In addition to the centered entry, there are two pairs of windows on each side of the entry. Each window contains threeover-one-light, double-hung sashes. A single cloth awning covers each window pair. The sills are a single stone that stretches across the entire opening. Lintels are jack arches in the stone veneer. The remaining façade opening is an entry located at the far right that contains a flush-mounted solid door. It appears this entry was also added during the 1935 remodeling. Another feature that was added during the 1935 remodeling project was the installation of a ramp (Muscatine Journal, 1935, Section 3, Page 8). This decision showed remarkable foresight and innovation nearly 40 years before handicapped accessibility became an important national issue. The handicapped accessibility ramp with steel rail leads up to the portico from the west side parking lot. The second-story consists of a stucco-like finish to the walls, with two groups of three windows each centered across each half of the wall. The windows all contain three-over-one-light, double-hung sashes. A beltcourse separates the lower stone veneer from the upper level stucco material.

A historic photograph of the building that has been identified is the photograph showing the 1935 remodel. The centered stone portico has a greater emphasis in the photograph because the current awning is missing, exposing the upper parapet walls of the feature. A less-textured stone appears to be inlaid across the front of the portico. The three-sided, stone funeral plant enclosure also appears more massive than the current appearance. The top stone on the enclosure is thicker than the current appearance. The fenestration on both the front and the west side appear to be the same. There also is

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no change with the low-sloping hip roof. A low, stone fence with matching pillars is also missing from the 1935 photo (*Muscatine Journal*, December 30, 1935, Section 3, page 7).

Historic photographs of the building are also shown on the funeral home's website, located at: http://www.nicholschapelhill.com. The front of the original building and its west side are visible in the photograph. It is unknown when the photographs were taken. The front of the original building contained what appears to be a centered, second-story door that opened onto the deck of the portico. A slightly later photograph shows the portico deck covered by an awning and possibly screened or enclosed. This centered entrance has been covered and is no longer visible. The rest of the historic façade openings remain. The portico remains but is now enclosed in newer siding and with a top covering designed to simulate a mansard roof. These appear to be the only changes to the façade. It does not appear the west side has been substantially altered.

The east elevation shows a continuation of the lower stone veneer and higher stucco along the original building. A side entry is located in the middle of the elevation on the first story. A canopy extends out from the entry. A ramped driveway extends along the entire length of the property and provides vehicle access to the side entry. A chimney is located immediately to the right of the centered entry and extends through the roof for several feet. The front half of this elevation contains a pair of windows on both the first and second stories. Each of the windows has the same design and features on the façade windows. The back half of the original building on the east elevation contains a similar window pair in the second story that is centered on the back half. A single, small, first-story window is located below this window. The second story also contains a third identical window pair located above the side entry door. The rear addition contains two windows on this elevation. Each window contains a one-over-one-light, double-hung sash. The two windows, which are not paired, are centered in the front half of the building.

The west elevation contains fewer openings. The original building has no openings in the front on this elevation. There is one first-story opening that is centered on the back half of the building. Two second-story openings flank the first-story window. Each window contains one-over-one-light, double-hung sashes. The beltline between the stone and stucco also continues on this side.

The rear addition appears on the 1946 Sanborn map, but is absent in the 1928 map. The back elevation, which drops below the grade at the front of the lot, contains a vehicle entry from the back alley. The entry is centered in the left half of the building and is covered by a solid, overhead steel door. Two five-by-five-glass block windows are centered on the right half of the building on the ground floor. Two one-over-one-light, double-hung windows are located above the glass block windows on the higher floor. The veneer/stucco design is maintained on the rear elevation. However, a false front has been installed at the top of the addition.

The more recent outbuilding appears to have been constructed since 1960. It is a rusticated concrete block building with a gable roof. There are no openings, except for a pair of flush-mounted, solid steel doors in the southwest corner. A variety of landscaping and other design work has been completed on the property. A knee-high, stone fence runs across the front of the property. Two groups of two pillars

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each are located at each end of the fence. The pillars are topped by triangular caps. Various shrubbery is located inside the stone fence. Shrubs and small trees also continue along the west side of the building and connect with another small garden area located behind the parking lot.

8. Narrative Statement of Significance

The Fairbanks Home For Funerals appears to be individually eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A & C. It does not appear to be part of the potential West Hill district, as it is located at the far east end of the survey area near downtown and is significant for commercial usage. Likewise, it is separated from the area included in the Downtown Commercial Historic District by non-historic buildings.

Funeral directors Roy Fairbanks constructed this building to house both his new funeral business and his family around 1925. At that time there were five funeral homes operating in the community. This one is the only one to continue to have a funeral home operate at the same location today. Roy's son Robert, who came to Muscatine in 1923 with his family, joined his father in the business in 1934. The funeral home was significantly remodeled in 1935. Robert purchased his father's interest in 1936. Robert Fairbanks became heavily involved in community and civic activities. He was a member of the Elks Lodge, past president of Muscatine Rotary, director of the Children's Nursery Center and was the former director of the Muscatine Development Corporation and the Muscatine Chamber of Commerce. In addition, although the first story of the building has been altered, those changes occurred in 1935 and reflect an owners' effort to upgrade and improve his business location. The changes included a major remodeling of the building's front, using Perma-stone, a relatively new simulated masonry product. The owner's decision to use the new product and install other innovative features, such as the handicap ramp and a lighted fountain, created a unique and modern face for the business. These improvements were recognized in the December 1935 issue of National Mortician, a national publication. The Fairbanks Home For Funerals is the longest operating funeral home in Muscatine still at its original location. With its remodeled façade and other features, it presents an architectural style that no other funeral home in Muscatine provides. The only known construction permit is one issued in 1963 for unknown repairs ("Building Permits," Muscatine Journal, December 30, 1963, Section 5, page 2). Thus, the Fairbanks Home For Funerals appears to be individually eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A & C.

Roy L. Fairbanks bought this property from H.F. and Della Boston on December 26, 1924 (Book 63, page 402). Sanborn maps from 1919 and before show the lot had been vacant, except for a small outbuilding that was located there during the late 1800s and early 1900s. After purchasing the lot, Fairbanks constructed his initial two-story business/residence. This most likely occurred in 1925, and the 1927 directory is the first directory with the 114 W. Fourth address. The funeral home's website confirms a 1925 construction date and describes the new building as "lowa's first formal funeral chapel" (accessed on-line at www.nicholschapelhill.com). According to this website, the J.W. Rankin funeral business was purchased by Roy Lorenzo Fairbanks and his wife Grace Cecil (Aten) Fairbanks on October 9, 1923. The

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Fairbanks had been in the funeral business in Buda and Pana, Illinois, with Roy's father, Lorenzo Dow Fairbanks, prior to moving to Muscatine. The 1920 census lists Roy Fairbanks as a mortician in Pana, Illinois. His household included himself Roy (34), his wife Grace (36), daughter Lucille V (15), and son Robert W (12). Grace Fairbanks was one of the first women in Iowa to be licensed as an embalmer (January 1924). Her original Iowa license maintains its place of prominence today, on the west wall of the funeral home office (accessed on-line at www.nicholschapelhill.com).

The listing in the 1927 directory identified the building as the Fairbanks Funeral Home, with Roy Fairbanks on the second story. Although the 1928 Sanborn map describes the building as a dwelling, the earlier directory reference would appear to indicate the building was originally constructed as a funeral home, with housing on the upper story. The dual listing of the funeral home and dwelling on the second floor was maintained in city directories of the 1930s. In the mid-1920s and early 1930s, there were five funeral homes operating in the community. In addition to the Fairbanks Funeral Home, the 1927 city directory listed M.P. Goff at 202 W. Second; Earnest Hoffman at 300 E. Second; N.W. Meyers at 401 E. Seventh; and Wittich Bros. at 210-212 Cedar. All four of the earlier services had been established at their locations for many years. Goff first appeared in the 1900 directory and continued to operate through the 1927 directory before disappearing. Hoffman had a shorter operating window, appearing in the 1923-24 directory at 527 Mulberry, then moving several times before disappearing after being listed in the 1946 directory at 214 E. Fourth. N.W. Meyers was another undertaker who was operating in Muscatine in the mid-1920s. This service was located at 401 E. Seventh. The Wittich Bros Funeral Home split into the Ralph J. Wittich Funeral Home and the George M. Wittich Funeral Home around 1934. Another interesting note from the 1927 directory is that none of the services identified themselves as funeral homes before 1927. After Fairbanks listed his undertaker service as a funeral home, the other services quickly adopted similar identities.

The alterations appear to have been completed on the building around 1934, though they may have began as early as 1929. According to the company's website, "on July 2, 1927, the Fairbanks were joined by their son, Robert W., who had just graduated from the Cincinnati College of Embalming. Their business continued to grow and by 1928, they had outgrown their new home. In 1929, the Fairbanks added on to the Home almost doubling it in size. It was at that time the new perma-stone facade, formal pond and landmark pillars were added. The facility was recognized as "a gem of the West Hill neighborhood" and the standard by which other funeral homes were measured" (accessed on-line at www.nicholschapelhill.com). Robert apparently worked as an employee for his parents during this time, but in 1934 became a partner in the business. He then purchased his father's interest in the business in 1936 (Muscatine Journal, 1977, 3). Other information suggests that the dates on the website may not be completely accurate. The renovation work done by the funeral home was recognized in an article in the December 1935 issue of the National Mortician, a national publication of the funeral industry. The article describes the recent work at the building, thus occurring in 1935. It is doubtful that the magazine actually waited years after the completion to report the work, but it is possible that the work actually extended over a longer period of time, with the first alterations in 1929. Likewise, perma-stone was not available until 1929, and it was likely a few years before it would have been known well enough for this application.

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Finally, the 1935 remodel date would coincide with the period immediately after son Robert became a partner in the operation.

According to excerpts from the article that were printed in the Muscatine Journal, "the exterior of the Fairbanks Home for Funerals at Muscatine, lowa has been completely remodeled, and the details of the project, as well as an examination of the improvements effected and their benefits should prove valuable from the standpoint of suggesting ideas to other funeral directors who are considering putting on a better front." The article went on to describe the project. "Many progressive ideas have been incorporated in this project, such as the electrically light outdoor foundation and the concrete ramps in place of steps. The numerous improvements are immediately apparent ..." The article encouraged other funeral directors to consider similar actions. "Take a look at your place today, view it by day and by night. How does it strike you? If you were one of the other thousands of people who pass your door regularly, would the building impress you favorably?" it asked. The article suggested the appearance of the business could impact sales and profits and said businesses that had completed the types of improvements similar to what the Fairbanks had done would enjoy increased business volume. The article continued by expanding on the exterior improvements. "Modernization of all exterior walls with permastone, a colored cement composition stimulating variegated limestone, was a feature of the work. This is enhanced with textured stucco and cast stone trim," it concluded (Muscatine Journal, 1935, 8). The Columbus, Ohio based Perma-Stone Company claimed to be the "originator of moulded stone facing," beginning "Stonewalling America," CRM, 1995, operations in 1929 (McKee, accessed on-line at http://crm.cr.nps.gov/archive/18-8/18-8-6.pdf).

The 1936-37 city directory shows Roy Fairbanks is still listed as living on the second story, but in the 1938-39 directory, Roy's wife Grace is identified as the second floor resident. This likely shows Roy died shortly after selling his interest in the company to his son, although no record of his death was located. Grace however continued to be listed as the second-story resident through the 1946 directory. The Fairbanks Funeral Home continued to operate as one of four funeral homes in the community. In addition to Fairbanks, Meyers Funeral Home, George M. Wittich Funeral Home and Ralph J. Wittich Funeral Home all were listed in the 1936-37 Muscatine City Directory. All four continued to be listed through the 1943 directory. Although it was not listed under Funeral Homes, the Earnest Hoffman Funeral Home also apparently operated during this time, reappearing under Funeral Homes in the 1943 directory. However, the Earnest Hoffman Funeral Home was not listed after that directory. The Fairbanks Funeral Home, both Wittich funeral homes and the newly reorganized Riley-Meyers Funeral Home, were all listed in the 1946 city directory. In 1949, the same funeral homes were still operating, but the Riley-Meyers Funeral Home had been renamed the Riley Funeral Home.

Grace remarried and on May 14, 1949, Grace Fairbanks Fling and her husband John W. Fling sold the property to Robert W. Fairbanks (Book 126, page 517). Grace died in 1963. After Grace remarried and moved, Harry and Mabel Leedy were listed as the second story residents in the 1949 through the 1956 city directories. Robert and Adelma Fairbanks were then recorded as residents in the 1958 directory. Two daughters had previously moved from the home. Robert Fairbanks was heavily involved in community and civic activities. He was a member of the Elks Lodge, past president of Muscatine Rotary,

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director of the Children's Nursery Center and was the former director of the Muscatine Development Corporation and the Muscatine Chamber of Commerce. He continued to run the Fairbanks Home for Funerals through the 1940s and 1950s, until his death in 1977 ("Long-time funeral home operator Fairbanks dies," January 3, 1977, 3.) There was little change in the local funeral home industry from 1950 until 1977, when Robert Fairbanks died.

After Robert's death, Robert Lamb apparently acquired an interest in the business, which changed its name to Fairbanks-Lamb Funeral Home. Jeffrey Nichols purchased the company from Adelma Fairbanks in 1988. Nichols was a great-great-grandson of A.G. Whittaker, who founded one of the parent companies that eventually grew into the Fairbanks Funeral Home.

Of the five funeral homes operating in the community in the 1920s, this is the only one with a funeral home still operating at the same location. In addition to the Fairbanks Funeral Home, the 1927 city directory listed M.P. Goff at 202 W. Second; Earnest Hoffman at 300 E. Second; N.W. Meyers at 401 E. Seventh; and Wittich Bros. at 210-212 Cedar. All four of the earlier services had been established at their locations for many years. Goff first appeared in the 1900 directory and continued to operate through the 1927 directory before disappearing. Hoffman had a shorter operating window, appearing in the 1923-24 directory at 527 Mulberry, then moving several times before disappearing after being listed in the 1946 directory at 214 E. Fourth. N.W. Meyers was another undertaker who was operating in Muscatine in the mid-1920s. This service was located at 401 E. Seventh. It eventually was purchased by the Riley Funeral Home, which continued to operate at 401 E. Seventh until it combined with another earlier firm, the Ralph J. Wittich Funeral Home, and relocated to 1931 Houser. That occurred around 1997. The Ralph J. Wittich Funeral Home had actually been formed around 1934 when the Wittich Bros Funeral Home had split into the Ralph J. Wittich Funeral Home and the George M. Wittich Funeral Home. The George M. Wittich Funeral Home had remained at the parent company's 210-212 Cedar location, while the Ralph J. Wittich Funeral Home had moved to 216 W. Third. The George M. Wittich Funeral Home moved to a new location at 2907 Mulberry around 1983. With the Ralph J. Wittich-Riley Funeral Home move to Houser Street in 1997, of the five funeral homes that were operating in Muscatine in 1927, only the Fairbanks Funeral Home was still operating at the same location. The Jeffrey S. Nichols Funeral Home acquired Fairbanks around 1988. However, it did not move and at the present time still operates at the same location. It will mark its 80th year of operation at the same location next year (2007).

Nichols continues to own the property. Currently, there are three funeral homes operating in Muscatine: the Jeffrey S. Nichols Funeral Home (Fairbanks), Ralph J. Wittich-Riley-Freers Funeral Home, and George M. Wittich Funeral Home.

9. Major Bibliographical References

"Building Permits," Muscatine Journal Year-end Review, December 30, 1963, Section 5, page 2.

City Directories, Muscatine. Various publishers, 1856-1959. Available as the Musser Public Library.

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Deed/Abstract Records, Recorder's Office, Muscatine County Courthouse, Muscatine, Iowa.

"Fairbanks Home For Funerals," advertisement with photographs, *Muscatine Journal*, December 30, 1938, Section 6, page 12.

"Long-time funeral home operator Fairbanks dies," Obituary, *Muscatine Journal*, January 3, 1977, page 3.

Jeffery S. Nichols Chapel Hill Funeral Home & Crematory website, accessed on-line at http://www.nicholschapelhill.com, 2006.

McKee Milkovich, Ann. "Stonewalling America," accessed on-line at http://crm.cr.mps.gov/archive/18-8/18-8-6.pdf, 2006.

"National Publication Praises Improvements at Fairbanks' Home," *Muscatine Journal*, December 30, 1935, Section 3, page 8

Sanborn Map Company. "Muscatine, Iowa," Sanborn fire insurance maps. Pelham, NY: Sanborn Map Company, 1883, 1888, 1892, 1899, 1907, 1912, 1919, 1928. Accessed online at: Sanborn.umi.com.

"True Today," advertisement, Muscatine Journal, December 30, 1946, Section 5, page 10.

"Would You Double the Value of Your Investment," advertisement with photograph, *Muscatine Journal*, December 30, 1935, Section 3, page 7.

Location Map



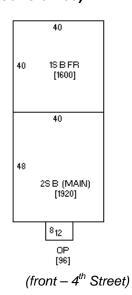
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Plans of buildings on site (from assessor's office)



Photograph of building (digital image)

