

Dania Hall
427-429 Cedar Avenue
Minneapolis
Hennepin County
Minnesota

HABS No. MN-132

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Denver, Colorado 80225-0287

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

DANIA HALL

HABS No. MN-132

Location: 427-9 Cedar Avenue, (northeast corner of Cedar and South Fifth Street)
Minneapolis, Hennepin County, Minnesota

USGS: Saint Paul West Quadrangle

UTM Coordinates: Zone 15, 480530 Easting, 4979350 Northing

Present Owner: Minneapolis Community Development Agency (MCDA)
Midland Square Building
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Present Occupant: Unoccupied

Present Use: Unused

Significance: Dania Hall was built in 1886 by the Society Dania, a group of Danish immigrants. Although the initial intent was to provide a place to help their countrymen, the hall soon became a gathering place for all the people in the community. The Society did not restrict the use of the hall or entertainment to its members or to the Danish community; it was open to all and provided a significant community and cultural resource, providing a place for theater, dancing, meetings, concerts, banquets and bazaars.

Dania Hall is significant not only for the role it played in the social lives of the residents of Minneapolis, but also for its architecture. The Hall is representative of a building type developed to provide a social gathering place for residents. In general, this type of building had a theater on the top floor or floors of the building, meeting rooms on the middle floor, and retail establishments at the street level.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1886
2. Architect: Carl F. Struck
3. Original and subsequent owners:
 - 1886 Dania Hall Building Association
 - 1896 Society Dania
 - 1963 Phil Richter
 - 1968 Cedar-Riverside Associates
 - 1986 Minneapolis Community Development Agency
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Unknown
5. Original plans and construction: No original drawings or plans have been located. Early exterior photos show the building essentially in its current form.
6. Alterations and additions: At an undetermined date the corner first floor entry was moved to the center of the west elevation. Also at an undetermined time the first floor doors to the main stairway to the theater space were moved flush with the exterior. Undocumented interior partition changes have been made at different times. The roof was replaced in the spring of 1992 following a fire in July 1991.

B. Historical Context:

Dania Hall was built in 1886 by the Society Dania, a group of Danish residents in the Riverside neighborhood of Minneapolis. The organization was a benevolent association, providing assistance to new Danish immigrants arriving in the city. Due to the number of new arrivals, the Society formed a ten-member board to oversee the design and building of a hall to accommodate their demands. The Society selected Carl F. Struck as architect, and the building was completed on November 10, 1886. The initial intent was to provide a place to help their countrymen, however, the hall soon became a gathering place for all the people in the community. The Society did not restrict the use of the hall or entertainment to its members or to the Danish community, it was open to all and provided a significant community and cultural resource. It provided a place for theater, dancing, meetings, concerts, banquets and bazaars to take place in the community. Wedding receptions also took place in Dania Hall as did annual holiday events, making the building a focal place for social functions in Riverside.

The Riverside neighborhood began as a result of its proximity both to the fledgling city of Minneapolis, founded to take advantage of the waterpower of St. Anthony Falls, and to the Mississippi River, where continued development of industry occurred along its banks. People settled close to their place of employment; the location of industry dictated the location of residential areas. Riverside developed when industry took hold on the west bank of the river. The choice of newcomers to settle here, as opposed to other places, was due to the kind of industry and the kind of employment available. Since the Washburn Mill was next to Riverside, those ethnic groups familiar with milling and seeking employment that could accommodate their skills, naturally settled in this area. A characteristic unique to Riverside as opposed to other parts of Minneapolis, was that it began and remained the area where immigrants new to the city made their first homes. Once individuals attained economic stability and were able to purchase a house, they moved out of the area to other locations in the city. These new locations, in turn, became new neighborhoods with people of like, or similar, ethnic origins. This identity was to remain over a period of time and, in some cases, is still in existence today. Riverside, then, cannot be associated with a single group of people that claimed the area as its own and shaped its make-up. Riverside finds its identity in the diversity of the people, institutions and social organizations. Through the latter, the people marked or influenced the area before moving out to other parts of the city. This turn-over and rapid movement

of groups of immigrants in and out of the area gives Riverside a colorful and varied past, blurring distinctions of any single group as being dominant, yet recognizing the importance each nationality had in the development of the area.

Outside of the Mill and the employment it offered, the attraction in settling in Riverside was enhanced by low, and even nonexistent, rents. The flat area below Cedar Avenue on the river bank developed into an area of squatters, attracting the poorest immigrants due no rent collection. The Danish were the first to settle here in the 1870s and the area came to be known as the Danish Flats. In a brief time period, they moved up the hill to Cedar and the Flats became known as the Connemara Patch, due to the Irish becoming the dominant group in the area. Finally, by the 1890s, the Patch became known as the Bohemian Flats as a result of the influx of Czech settlers to the area. For each of the groups, it was their first place of settlement in the city, and as each group attained economic security and moved on, they were replaced by new ethnic groups wanting to settle near their place of employment. This area became a separate locale in the neighborhood. The rents were minimal and the residents could build their own shacks, often from scrap lumber floating down the river.

The Riverside neighborhood reached its peak in population and activity around the turn of the century. Thereafter the population slowly diminished due to people moving to new areas in Minneapolis, and fewer immigrants arriving to replace those leaving. The movement to new areas in the city was a direct result of the arrival of public transportation. The first horse-drawn trollies were installed in the city in 1876 and the first electric cars appeared in 1889. This enabled people to live away from their place of employment.

There were several other factors that contributed to the decline in population in the area. The reputation Riverside had for entertainment and saloons was greatly reduced by the Minnesota Dry Law, which greatly limited the sale of alcoholic beverages. The law went into effect in 1918, resulting in the closing of nearly a third of the Cedar Avenue storefronts. Although the halls were still open and Bond Komik, a popular form of entertainment, was still attracting the people, this was the beginning of the end for the area and its entertainment. Coupled with this, immigration, which had slowed during World War I, was virtually closed in the early 1920s. Consequently, there were few new families moving into the area to replace those moving up and out of the Riverside area. The final blow to the area and the economic attraction it held for new arrivals came from the Flats. Up until 1923, rents in the Flats had been minimal. From its beginning, it was

inhabited by squatters, making claim to a plot and making it into a home. In 1920 the deed to the Flats was signed over to a land speculator, C.H. Smith. His initial attempts to collect rent were unsuccessful, and it was not until three years later, in the company of his attorney and a police lieutenant that he received his first payment from the inhabitants. For those who still refused, workmen removed their furnishings and bulldozed their homes. By spring 1923, a quarter of the Flat's population had moved out. This continued and by 1931 the last house was removed.

Dania Hall is representative of a building type developed to provide a social gathering place for residents. This type became visible in the area for people to identify with and became a part of the community. In general, this type of building had a theater on the top floor or floors of the building, meeting rooms were on the upper floor, and the street level provided an area for stores. Architecturally, the building represents no new "style"; instead, new building types were created to respond to the unique set of circumstances arising from mass immigration and migration to developing areas.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Built in an area of two- and three-story commercial structures, Dania Hall forms a dominant feature at the intersection of Cedar Avenue and South Fifth Street. The architecture has been described as "High Victorian Eclectic," incorporating elements of Gothic, Moorish, and Queen Anne styles. The overall form is a four-story rectangular box with a square tower on the primary corner.
2. Condition of fabric: The building is in only fair condition due to a fire in July 1991, which resulted in removal of the roof and portions of the balcony. As a result, the building was left open to the elements through the winter, resulting in water damage to the interior finishes. The roof has been replaced and the building is now watertight. Aside from the collapsed portion of the balcony, the building is now structurally sound.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: 44' north-to-south; 95' feet east-to-west
2. Foundations: Random ashlar limestone
3. Walls: Common-bond red brick with limestone trim
4. Structural system, framing: Exterior walls are load-bearing brick. Interior supports are a combination of wood and cast-iron columns which support wood beams and joists. Replacement roof framing consists of steel trusses and bar joists.
5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: Small stoop at Cedar Avenue entry to second floor. Fire escape from second and third floors on east side. Modern bulkhead covers an areaway on south side.
6. Chimneys: Single chimney for boiler on north side; not visible from ground.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Two recessed aluminum doors in the center of the west facade lead to the first floor commercial space while a single aluminum door at the north end of the west facade leads to a stairway direct to the second floor. These doors all are glazed with plate glass and have glazed transoms. A single flush, steel door located at the west end of the south side leads to the primary stairway to the theater and balcony.
 - b. Windows: The first floor has large aluminum store-front windows with single panes. Typical windows on the upper floors are double-hung, each with a single pane.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The roof has a low slope from east to west with a mansard form incorporated into the west and south parapets. The replacement roof follows the original form. There originally were

dormers on the mansard areas, but these were not replaced following the fire.

- b. Cornice: A decorative cornice runs along the tops of the west and south sides. Originally made of cast iron, this cornice has been replicated in molded fiberglass.
- c. Dormers, tower: Grouped dormers with pressed metal ornament were originally located on the mansard areas of the roof. These were not replaced following the fire, but representative pieces were salvaged to permit future reconstruction. A square tower is located in the southwest corner. This tower originally had a peaked roof, but this was replaced with a flat roof following the fire.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: A deep basement underlies the entire building. It is divided by masonry walls into four primary spaces: two storage areas to the west, a large central space, and a mechanical area to the east. An areaway to the south originally provided exterior access to the central room, but this has been covered.
- b. First floor: The first floor primarily is an open retail area; this area originally was divided into two spaces. There is a small raised sales area and office at the southeast corner of the large space. The east end is occupied by a wide stairway which provides access to the upper floors and is the primary access to the theater area. A narrow stairway at the northwest corner leads to the second floor.
- c. Second floor: The second floor is divided into a variety of offices in an irregular arrangement. The two stairways continue to the third floor.
- d. Third floor: The third floor contains a level-floor theater area with a stage at the west end. The east end of the floor is separated from the theater by partitions and contains the main stairway and a single room.

- e. Balcony: A horseshoe-shaped balcony with a stepped floor surrounds the theater on the north, east, and south sides. The balcony originally was supported both by wood columns and by suspension rods from the roof trusses. The rods failed during the fire, leading to a partial collapse of the south portion of the balcony.
2. Stairways: A broad open-well wood stairway on the east side of the building leads from the first floor to the balcony. There are turned balusters and square newels with decorative moldings. A narrow stairway below this one leads to the basement.

A straight-run stairway leads from the northeast entry to the second floor. This stairway continues in a "U" form from the second floor to the third floor. There also is a stairway under this one leading from the first floor to the basement, but it is not interconnected with the upper portions of the stairway.

3. Flooring: The preponderance of the flooring is wood strips of an unidentified species. The first floor has ceramic tile installed over the original flooring.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls are covered with painted plaster on wood lath. Ceilings on the first, second, and lower portions of the third floor are painted pressed metal. In some areas of fire damage the pressed metal has been removed, revealing stenciled plaster. There is no ceiling on the upper portion of the theater space.
5. Openings
 - a. Doorways and doors: Interior doorways are cased with painted, molded wood trim. The doors are raised-panel wood doors. Many of the doorways have glazed transoms.
 - b. Windows: Windows casings have painted, molded wood trim. The window sash, themselves, also are painted wood.
6. Decorative features and trim: There is painted, molded wood trim surrounding the proscenium.

7. Hardware: Simple cast-iron hardware is used throughout the building.
8. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating: Steam heat for cast-iron radiators is supplied by a single boiler in the east end of the basement.
 - b. Lighting: The basement has simple suspended incandescent lights while the first and second floors have suspended fluorescent fixtures. There are ceiling-mounted incandescent fixtures with decorative glass globes below the balcony; other theater lighting was destroyed by the fire.
 - c. Plumbing: Plumbing is limited to water closets and lavatories on the first and second floors.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The building runs east to west with its main (shorter) elevation facing west to Cedar Avenue and its secondary (long) side facing South Fifth Street. The unadorned east side faces a parking lot; the north wall is common with a commercial structure. Other buildings along Cedar are two- and three-story commercial structures, mostly with aluminum storefronts on the first floor and masonry on the upper floors.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early Views:

Dania Hall ca. 1920. Photograph in Prints and Photos collection of the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul.

B. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources

Building permit files, City of Minneapolis.

Heath, Richard L. "Riverside Neighborhood: The First Hundred Years." Lecture presented at the presentation of the Riverside Preliminary Plan Report to the Minneapolis City Planning Commission, August 4, 1966. Located in Minneapolis City Archives, Minneapolis City Hall.

Torbert, Donald. Significant Architecture in the History of Minneapolis, 1969. Located in the Art Library, University of Minnesota, and other University libraries.

2. Secondary and published sources

Armitage, Dan, and the West Bank Historical Collective. "The Curling Waters: A West Bank History," Minnesota Daily, September 27, 1973. p. 15.

Hampl, Pat. "West Bank - Reminiscences." Unidentified manuscript in files of the Hennepin County Historical Society.

St. Anthony Falls Rediscovered, Minneapolis Riverfront Development Coordination Board, Minneapolis, MN., 1980.

C. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

Files of the Society Dania

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This material was prepared as a project for Architecture 5143, Historic Building Research and Documentation, a class offered in the College of Architecture and Landscape Architecture at the University of Minnesota (Minneapolis). The class project was prepared under the direction of Robert C. Mack, FAIA, in cooperation with the State Historic Preservation Office of the Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota. Historical data was prepared by Colleen Oslund and Susan Sorensen. Architectural data was prepared by Lisa Anderson. Drawings for Dania Hall were compiled by members of the class, University of Minnesota, April - June 1992.

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