

June 2019

Forty years ago, Nollen Plaza was part of a plan with the Civic Center, both were built in 1979. A feature of the Plaza was a commissioned work of artist Claes Oldenberg. With his sculptress wife, Coosje van Bruggen, they created a three-story high, 57 feet long, tip to tip, metal umbrella. It is the Crusoe Umbrella.

The weight is 40,000 pounds/20 tons. The commission was for \$125,000, of which \$75,000 was pledged by Iowans and \$50,000 was a grant.

A documentary was made by Iowa Public Broadcasting of the creating of the sculpture from the drawings in Claes Oldenberg's studio in New York to assembly in Des Moines. The dome of the Capitol and the bridges over the Des Moines River all influenced his thinking in the design. Interviews of others involved in the project were also interview.



In 1982 a Des Moines Company ran an ad which featured the Umbrella in it. It wasn't regarded favorably. In a quote from Donald H. Zarley, a Des Moines patent attorney, in the Des Moines Register, said it was considered "not unlike any artist's creation" as far as the law is concerned. He said most artists will "accommodate reasonable non-profit uses" of their work, but they fight uses that might demean the work or reduce their won profits from it.

Planning for a redesign of the Plaza began in 2008 with the understanding that the Crusoe Umbrella would remain. It was sand blasted and repainted. The Plaza was rededicated in June 2015 as Cowles Commons.



The Meredith Corporation's big red trowel, Plantoir, on their front lawn, was also designed by the couple. It was on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New City prior to being purchased by Meredith.