

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Springer Opera House

AND/OR COMMON

Springer Opera House

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

105 Tenth Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Columbus

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

3rd

STATE

Georgia 31902

VICINITY OF

CODE

13

COUNTY

Muscogee

CODE

215

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Springer Theatre Company

(Mr. Jack Bell, Chairman of the Board  
of Trustee, P. O. Box 1622)

STREET & NUMBER

105 Tenth Street

CITY, TOWN

Columbus

VICINITY OF

STATE

Georgia

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Muscogee County Courthouse - Deed Book

STREET & NUMBER

Court House Square

CITY, TOWN

Columbus

STATE

Georgia

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Historic Columbus Building Inventory

DATE

6/1/67

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Columbus Museum; Building Inspector's Office; Columbus-Muscogee  
County Planning Commission Office; Historic Columbus Foundation Hdtqs.

CITY, TOWN

716 Broadway, Columbus, Georgia

STATE

## 7 DESCRIPTION

### CONDITION

EXCELLENT  
 GOOD  
 FAIR

DETERIORATED  
 RUINS  
 UNEXPOSED

### CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED

### CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Springer Opera House designed by architect Daniel Matthew Foley was built in 1871 by Francis Joseph Springer, who had immigrated to Columbus, Georgia from Alsace. A remarkable number of its original characteristics have been retained.

The Opera House is enclosed in a three-storied solid red brick building, which was formerly a Victorian hotel. This massive structure occupies the northeast corner of First Avenue and 10th Street, and measures 145' x 150'. (The upper stories are now used for storage, and only the Opera House has been restored.) The upper two stories of the facade are enhanced by evenly-spaced windows framed with pressed-metal lintels and stone sills. A pressed-metal cornice also decorates the entire building.

The two front entrances are sheltered by a marquee which was added in 1902. The foyer, 14' x 29'-8", has a double doorway (6'-2") on the west wall. The foyer's gray-and-white marble floor is original. The cranberry flocked wallpaper is a reproduction of wall covering used during the period. A painted panelled wainscoting, 3'-6" high, is below the wallpaper. The foyer now boasts a Victorian crystal chandelier.

The double coorway from the foyer leads to a room 19'-3" x 24'-6" with one window 4' 1-1/4" x 8', which has been made into a theatre museum. A plaster medallion and another Victorian crystal chandelier adorn the ceiling.

At the north end of the foyer are double doors, 7-1/2' 2-1/2" wide, entering the rear of the auditorium; the seats, facing east, are served by two main aisles and side aisles. The seating area of the auditorim measures 65' x 68-1/2'; its seating capacity is 450.

The audience faces a stage 41' deep x 76' wide with a proscenuim arch 33' wide and 39' high. An extensive wooden grid, one of the very few left in America, flies 65' above the stage. The extensive use of wood as a building material has resulted in excellent accoustics for the building.

The original brass chandelier has been restored to its former elegance and hangs from the auditorium ceiling. A single row of tulip lights outline the supporting curve under the first balcony; many of these are original and exact duplications have been made for those which have disappeared through the years. Three-prong chandeliers hang in each box; many of these were found in the hotel rooms which surround the Opera House and were utilized in the boxes.

Stencilled borders, typical of the Victorian period, highlight the auditorium. The highly decorated border outling the proscenium arch is in its original state. The decorative work on the ceiling had to be restored due to severe

(Continued)

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES                      1871                      BUILDER/ARCHITECT                      Daniel Matthew Foley

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Springer Opera House was opened in February of 1871. How Mr. Springer obtained financing for this sophisticated and elegant structure just six years after Appomattox is a mystery. The opening production was a "Grand Amateur Concert" presented by the ladies and gentlemen of the Trinity Episcopal Church. Through the years the theater continued to be a favorite with amateurs from throughout the Chattahoochee Valley area, but it has also played host to every great name of the late 19th and early 20th century American theater. Because of this, the theater is of national if not international importance.

Extensive research has been done regarding productions and performers appearing at the Springer. Microfilm detailing these accounts, beginning in 1871, has been exhaustively researched. The following list of personalities, including dates of appearance, shows not only actors but boxers, lecturers, and statesmen. The significance of this only partial list speaks for itself:

- |                                  |                               |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Katie Putnam - 1871              | John L. Sullivan - 1892       |
| Buffalo Bill (W. F. Cody) - 1875 | Otis Skinner - 1892           |
| Edwin Booth - 1876               | Booker T. Washington - 1895   |
| Frank Mayo - 1876                | Will Rogers - 1904            |
| Fay Templeton - 1876             | James Jeffries - 1905         |
| Blind Tom - 1879                 | John Philip Sousa - 1906      |
| Pat Rooney - 1880                | Marie Dressler - 1910         |
| Oscar Wilde - 1881               | Victor Herbert - 1911         |
| Lotta Crabtree - 1883            | Irving Berlin - 1918          |
| Tom Thumb - 1876 & 1883          | George M. Cohan - 1919        |
| Joe Jefferson - 1884             | Maude Adams - 1919            |
| Mrs. John Drew - 1885            | Irene Dunn - 1922             |
| Lillie Langtry - 1888            | Jeanette MacDonald - 1924     |
|                                  | Franklin D. Roosevelt - 1928  |
|                                  | Sir Harry Lauder - 1921       |
|                                  | Ethel Barrymore - 1930 & 1931 |

The Springer continued as a legitimate theater through World War I and well into the 1920's, but then the Great Depression began to make itself felt, and finally and most effectively killed off the road shows, which were the life blood of it and other theaters like it throughout the country. It became a movie house, and began its long slide into near-oblivion.

(Continued)



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water damage, but the original tracings were authentically reproduced. Money has not yet allowed for the replacement of the stencilled areas under the first balcony, but tracings of the design have been preserved.

The ceiling of the auditorium is approximately 60' in height. There are two balconies, the first seating approximately 250 people, has been restored for functual use. The second balcony, or "peanut gallery" was originally reached from a First Avenue entrance, and is in the original state with its wooden benches in tact. It is currently being used only for production lighting.

Due to stringent fire laws in the State of Georgia, steel enclosed staircases have been installed on either side of the auditorium in order to make the second balcony acceptable under current regulations.

Three tiers of boxes flank each side of the proscenium arch. The boxes are adorned with columns boasting pressed-metal capitals. The lower level of boxes is elevated 3-1/2' from the auditorium floor; each box accomodates four seats. Original stencil work has been restored in the boxes.

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The Springer was closed even as a movie house in 1959. The building stood deserted and vacant. There were numerous plans for it, most of which involved tearing it down. It seemed that time had run out for the Opera House. Attempts were made to save it, but none got off the ground, due to lack of funds, lack of leadership, or both.

In 1964 a group of interested citizens formed the Springer Board of Trustees, a board of the Springer Theater Company, and things began to move. The Trustees worked out a purchase agreement with the owner, and more on faith than anything else, launched a restoration attempt. It met wonderful community support, and, in addition, gained the endorsement of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Adding another dimension to the restoration and providing visual evidence of the Springer's past is a Theater Museum off the entrance lobby. It was initiated as a project of the Junior League of Columbus, and contains photographs, portraits, costumes and other memorabilia of the great names that have played the Opera House.

Adding to the significance of the Opera House is its location. It is directly across the street from a fourteen story, \$12,500 million dollar Government building now under construction in the city of Columbus. It is also one block from a proposed civic center.

The Springer was recognized by the Georgia Historical Commission with the placement of a marker in 1967. In addition, it has recently been recognized by the "Connie" Award of the Society of American Travel Writers (September 5, 1971, in Helsinki, Finland). This was awarded "for the inspired work of...community leadership in Columbus, Georgia...saving the Springer is almost without parallel because it was entirely a local achievement unaided by Federal, State, or National foundation funds." ✓

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Hornblow, Arthur, History of Theater in America (2 vols.)  
Freedley, George & Reeves, John A., History of the Theater  
Crawford, Mary Caroline, Romance of the American Theater  
Green, Abel and Laurie , Jr., Joe, Show Biz from Vaudeville to Video  
Moses, M & Brown, J. M., American Theater as Seen by Its Critics  
Hartnall, Phyllis, Oxford Companion to the Theater (3rd Edition)  
Morehouse, Ward, Matinee Tomorrow  
Hughes, Glenn, History of the American Theater (1900-1950)  
Blum, Pictorial History of the American Theater  
Cohan, William, Laugh Makers  
Mahan, Katherine, Showboats & Soft Shoes  
Blumenthal, F. W., Columbus on the Chattahoochee, pp, 363

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**CONTINUATION SHEET**

ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 1

"All that lot, tract or parcel of land, with the improvements thereon, situate, lying and being in the City of Columbus, County of Muscogee and State of Georgia, and known and designated on the map or plan of said City of Columbus as City-lot Number Two Hundred and Forty-six (246), said lot being contained within the following boundary lines, to-wit:

Beginning at the northeast corner of the intersection of First Avenue and Tenth Street, and running thence north along the east side of said First Avenue, One Hundred and Fifty (150) feet, more or less, to be north line of said lot number 246; thence east One Hundred forty-seven (147) feet Ten (10) inches, more or less, to the east line of said lot; thence south along the east line of said lot, One Hundred and Fifty (150) feet, more or less, to Tenth Street; thence west along the north side of Tenth Street, One Hundred Forty-seven (147) feet and Ten (10) inches, more or less, to the place of beginning,--containing one-half acre, more or less, and being the premises on which the building known as "The Springer Opera House Building," and the two brick stores immediately north of it are located."