

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

Brown's Hall/Thompson's Opera House

AND/OR COMMON

Thompson's Opera House/Gem Theater

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

~~North Main Street, adjacent to Gem Theater~~

___ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Pioche

___ VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
Central Nevada

STATE

Nevada

CODE

32

COUNTY

Lincoln

CODE

36

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- ___ DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- ___ STRUCTURE
- ___ SITE
- ___ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- ___ PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- ___ BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

- IN PROCESS
- ___ BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- ___ OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- ___ WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

- YES: RESTRICTED
- ___ YES: UNRESTRICTED
- ___ NO

PRESENT USE

- ___ AGRICULTURE
- ___ MUSEUM
- ___ COMMERCIAL
- ___ PARK
- ___ EDUCATIONAL
- ___ PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- ___ ENTERTAINMENT
- ___ RELIGIOUS
- ___ GOVERNMENT
- ___ SCIENTIFIC
- ___ INDUSTRIAL
- ___ TRANSPORTATION
- ___ MILITARY
- OTHER: vacant

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Lamplighter Theater Association Christian Family

STREET & NUMBER

N. Main Street

CITY, TOWN

Pioche

___ VICINITY OF

STATE

Nevada 89043

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Lincoln County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

S. Main Street

CITY, TOWN

Pioche

STATE

Nevada 89043

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Design Concepts West

DATE

July 1982

___ FEDERAL ___ STATE ___ COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Nevada Division of Historic Preservation and Archeology

CITY, TOWN

201 S. Fall Street, Room 106, Carson City

STATE

Nevada 89710

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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

Brown's Hall/Thompson's Opera House, in Pioche, Nevada, is a two-story, Victorian commercial/theater structure, with design elements derived from the Greek Revival. Constructed in 1873, the building served as a suitable place for meetings, drama presentations, socials, fraternal club meetings, public dances, fund raising affairs and political rallies. The building's condition has deteriorated in recent years. It is currently unused and awaiting restoration.

Site

The town of Pioche in Lincoln County, Nevada, is located on US 93, 107 miles south of Ely, and 193 miles north and east of Las Vegas. Pioche was at one time southeastern Nevada's richest and most important mining camp. Brown's Hall/Thompson's Opera House is located on Main Street, in a commercial area. The facade faces west. Originally the opera house was freestanding. A modern building, used as a theater, was built against the south wall in 1937. The lot just north of the opera house is now vacant. The opera house is built up to the sidewalk, with no setback or landscaping. It sits on an irregularly shaped lot which roughly measures 92' x 88'.

Description-Exterior

Brown's Hall/Thompson's Opera House is a two-story, rectangular, wood frame, Victorian commercial/theater structure, with the gable end facing front, and a small, one-story, shed roof, rear addition. It is a temple-form building reduced to its decorative minimum, with a simplified reference to classical elements. The gable end is ornamented with a wide and heavy entablature with a boxed cornice and frieze.

The facade, facing west, is pierced by four regularly placed openings at each story level. At the first floor level three bays are comprised of tall double doors, with eight lights in the upper portion of each door and two wooden panels in the lower portion. The fourth bay consists of a small wooden door, opening into a steep staircase which leads up to the second floor. The second story level of the facade features four shorter double doors with lights in the upper portion and a wood panel at the bottom. All openings are now boarded over.

The building's main decorative feature was the covered porch with balcony which extended across the entire front facade. Five square posts with simple capitals supported the porch roof. Decorative elliptical arches under the porch eaves spanned the space between the posts. The balcony balustrade was solid and decorated with recessed rectangular panels. This porch has been removed.

The original facade had an overall well-balanced appearance. The tall double doors and porch posts gave the building a vertical thrust. The use of horizontal elements such as repeating bays and a projecting cornice, modified the vertical lines and produced a balanced facade.

The facade is covered with clapboard siding. The south side wall is sheathed with clapboard siding at the second story level only, with vertical board and battens at the first floor level. The north side wall is covered entirely with vertical board and batten siding. The north and south side walls are each pierced with three, double hung, two-over-

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 type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1873

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Aleck Brown

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Summary

Brown's Hall/Thompson's Opera House is significant for several reasons. It has made a continuous contribution to the cultural growth of Pioche. It is associated with prominent Pioche personality, Arthur S. Thompson. Additionally, Thompson's Opera House is one of only three, nineteenth-century opera houses remaining in Nevada. The other two, Piper's Opera House in Virginia City and the Eureka Theater in Eureka, are both listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Architecturally, the building remains a noteworthy example of a nineteenth century commercial/theater structure.

Associated Significance-Pioche

Pioche was at one time one of Nevada's richest and most important mining camps, yielding silver, lead and zinc. Settlement of Pioche began after the discovery of silver in the winter of 1863-64. Serious development of the area began in 1868 when San Francisco financier F. L. A. Pioche bought several claims and erected a smelter on the hillside. A camp formed around this activity later in the year. In 1870 two large and rival companies developed mines at Pioche and built stamp mills ten miles away. Silver production in 1870 amounted to more than \$600,000. Business and population grew along with the mining boom and the population of Pioche reached about 7,000 in 1870. In 1871 Pioche was chosen the county seat of Lincoln County.

In the mid 1870s the mining boom slowed and by 1876 the two large mining companies ceased major operations.

Mining activity was minimal in the 1880s and 1890s. At the turn of the century Pioche received a boost when the Union Pacific Railroad extended a branch line from Caliente to Pioche. In 1912 the mines picked up and began to produce regularly. From 1937 to 1958 Pioche was an outstanding lead-zinc producer.

Today, Pioche's mining industry has waned. Suffering, from the traditional boom-bust cycle of a mining town, its population has declined. Many of its historic buildings now stand empty.

Significance as a Cultural Resource

Brown's Hall was erected by Aleck Brown in September of 1873 to meet Pioche's growing need for a suitable place to hold drama presentations, socials, fraternal club meetings, public dances, fund raising affairs, and political rallies. Opening night boasted the presentation of the stage play "Pygmalion and Galatia". Lead parts were played by professionals from San Francisco. Over the years Brown's Hall was the site of such activities as:

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two light windows at the second story level. Near the rear of the second story, on each side, was a door, reached by an exterior staircase.

Attached to the rear of the second story of the building is a one-story, shed roof, vertical board and batten sided addition. This addition, which houses the stage, has a ceiling level higher than the main building. The rear of the opera house is built up against a hill which enables this rear one-story addition to be attached to the second story level of the opera house.

Structurally, the building is heavy-timber framed with wood posts and beams forming the outside walls. Heavy wood posts support the center of the main hall floor. Over the main hall is a clear span ceiling.

Description-Interior

The opera house consists of a ground level originally intended for use for commercial purposes, with the main hall on the second story level. The main hall is entered from the street level up a rather steep flight of stairs which enter the rear of the hall. Also located at the rear of the hall are a few small offices and store rooms. The stage occupies the east end of the main hall. Dressing rooms are located at the east end of the ground level.

Alterations

The building has deteriorated somewhat since built and it has suffered the loss of several distinguishing features. The front porch is gone. Door and window openings have been boarded over. The new building immediately to the south hides the opera house south side wall.

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L. Bach's dancing classes, the Independent Social Club's "Bon Bon" party, and the Philalethic Literary Society's fair to raise money for a library.

On September 10, 1891, ownership of Brown's Hall was transferred from Aleck Brown to Arthur S. Thompson, a prominent Pioche merchant. The building underwent substantial renovation that included a new floor and an enlarged stage. At the same time the name of the building was changed to Thompson's Opera House. The opera house was utilized in the 1890s by troupes of traveling thespians who brought drama, vaudeville and music to the area. It was also the site for community Christman Programs, Fourth of July exercises, and political rallies.

Following Thompson's death in 1905 his sons, Charles and Frank, assumed ownership of the building. In 1907 they approached Salt Lake City financiers for money to improve the building and the following year they remodelled the building. New storaged fixtures were added, dressing rooms were enlarged, and a new lighting system was added.

In the twentieth-century Thompson's Opera House was used primarily to show movies rather than for live stage plays. The first silent motion picture was shown at Thompson's Opera House in February 1915. In the 1930s the name of the building was changed from Thompson's Opera House to the Gem Theater. A new, modern movie theater was constructed adjacent to the old opera house in 1937, and the opera house quickly lost its usefulness.

Today, the building stands empty. Plans call for restoring the building and using it compatibly to house festivals, displays, stage plays, community dances, and public meetings.

Association with Significant Persons

The opera house gains significance from its association with Alexander Sharp Thompson and his sons, prominent Pioche businessmen. Alexander Thompson (1841-1905) was a native of Pennsylvania. In 1856, enticed by the gold rush, he moved to California. Five years later he moved to Nevada, settling in Pioche in 1871. During his early years in Pioche, Thompson was employed by saloon keeper D. A. Fulkes. Upon the death of Mr. Fulkes, Thompson succeeded to that gentleman's business, of which he had been in charge for many years. Leaving the saloon business, Thompson switched to the mercantile business.

Thompson purchased Brown's Hall on September 10, 1891, and repaired the building, renaming it Thompson's Opera House. After Thompson's death in 1905 his store and opera house passed into the hands of sons Charles A. Thompson and Frank P. Thompson. This partnership dissolved when Frank moved to Idaho. During WWII Charles closed the A. S. Thompson Company store and devoted his time to running the opera house, which he renamed the Gem Theater.

Significance as a Nineteenth-Century Opera House

Thompson's Opera House is significant as one of only three, nineteenth-century opera house/theaters remaining in Nevada. Built in 1873, it is also the oldest; the Eureka Theater in Eureka, Nevada, dates from 1879, while Piper's Opera House in Virginia City dates from 1883. Opera houses played an important role in Nevada, enabling Nevada's relatively isolated rural communities to enjoy the same entertainment and cultural activities that were more readily accessible to residents of larger metropolitan centers.

BROWN'S HALL/THOMPSON'S OPERA HOUSE
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Architectural Significance

Thompson's Opera House is a good example of a typical, nineteenth-century, western boom town, commercial/theater building. Throughout the nineteenth-century, the basic plan of the commercial building remained fairly constant. They were rectangular structures, constructed to a height of two or three stories. Facade organization was standard: facades were divided horizontally into two layers with a storefront level and upper level and vertically divided into bays, with double doors at the first floor level. Ornamentation was predominately restricted to the roofline and the projecting front porch with balcony.