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NATIONAL REGISTER

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name I.O.O.F. Hall and Opera House  
other names/site number NehBS #WT02-8 OHBIN #04-26-06

2. Location

street & number Main St. N/A Not for publication  
city, town Bladen N/A Vicinity  
state Nebraska code NE county Webster code 181 zip code 68928

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u>      </u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>      </u>	<u>      </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>      </u>	<u>      </u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>      </u> objects
			<u>1</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: Opera House Buildings in Nebraska 1867-1917  
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.  
James W. Hanson May 17, 1988  
Signature of certifying official Date  
Director, Nebraska State Historical Society  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:  
 entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.  
 determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.  
 determined not eligible for the National Register.  
 removed from the National Register.  
 other, (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

Beth Boland 7/6/88

## 6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation & Culture: Theatre;  
music facility  
Social: Meeting hall

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation & Culture: Theatre;  
Auditorium

## 7. Description

Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: One-part commercial block

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Unknown  
walls Brick  
roof Unknown  
other Decorative brick trim

### Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The I.O.O.F. Hall and Opera House is located on the west side of Main Street on the block between Frances and Mariel Streets, at the edge of the business district. Constructed in 1912-1913 by the I.O.O.F. Lodge of Bladen, the utilitarian One-Part Commercial Block brick building has understated brick arches above a row of five second-story windows on the front facade, above both doors on the main level, and a double row of decorative bricks along the top of the building. The structure is approximately 95 feet long by 40 feet wide. Access to the auditorium is through a double door under a small wooden semicircular awning into a 10-foot deep lobby.

The auditorium is 58 feet long from the proscenium opening to the back wall of the house, by 37 feet wide. The theatre has no balcony, although a raised projection booth fills the rear of the auditorium above the lobby space. The burnished arch is surrounded by a border of lights. The floor of the auditorium is raked. Permanent seats, believed to be original, fill the auditorium space, with the exception of a center aisle.

The proscenium arch measures 20 feet wide by approximately 12 feet high. Wings of 8 feet, 6 inches fill each side of the stage. No dressing rooms exist. The stage measures 23 feet from the curtain line to the back wall. The backstage area is accessible from the auditorium through narrow doors on each side of the auditorium in the proscenium wall. The original apron has been replaced by a larger one to increase the acting space. No trap doors are visible.

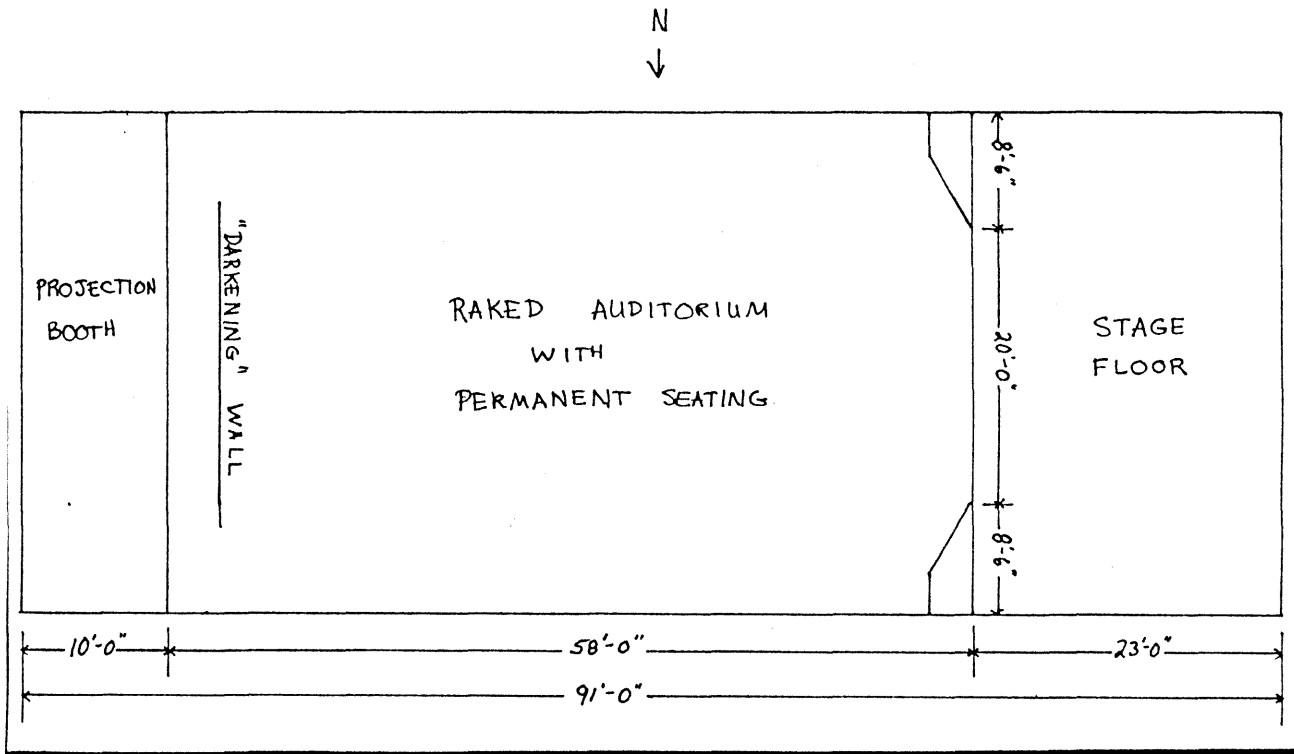
The structural and historical integrity of the building and theatre has been preserved.

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Floor plan, I.O.O.F. Opera House, Bladen



Credit: P. Leitner, Draftsman

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Performing Arts  
Entertainment/Recreation  
Social History

Period of Significance

1913-1917

Significant Dates

1913

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Johnson, first name unknown (builder)

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The I.O.O.F. Hall and Opera House is significant for its association with and in reference to the historic context "Aesthetic Systems: Itinerant and Local Performing Arts in Nebraska" and the property type of "Opera House Buildings in Nebraska, 1867 to 1917." Under Criterion A, this opera house is significant in the areas of the performing arts; entertainment/recreation; and social history, on a state level, as a well preserved example of an opera house building in Nebraska. The building retains a high degree of historical integrity, possessing the physical and associative characteristics to make it an eligible member of its property type.

This opera house is significant in the area of performing arts for bringing a variety of entertainment to the community of Bladen. As a facility for the performing arts, it offered productions such as musical concerts, touring stock companies, dialect plays, magicians, minstrel shows, and Hawaiian specialties. (See following table of Representative Entertainments 1913-1917.)

This opera house is significant in the area of entertainment/recreation, since it provided a place where the whole community could gather to attend moving pictures, lectures, and dramatic readings. (See following table of Representative Entertainments 1913-1917.)

This opera house is significant in the area of social history, because it gave Bladen a neutral location for fraternal and agricultural meetings. (See following table of Representative Entertainments 1913-1917.) In the days before radio, television, and sound movies, activities at the opera house were anticipated for days or weeks ahead of time. It provided a place for people to get together to have a good time and forget their troubles over crops, weather, taxes, the railroads, and the generally hard life of settling the Great Plains.

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Bladen Opera House Centennial Book Committee. *Bladen: The First 100 Years*.  
Marceline, MO: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1986.  
Boyd, Judy. Telephone interview. Bladen: 24 Mar. 1987.  
---. Letters to the author. Bladen: 1986, 1987.  
Boyd, Phil. Telephone interview. Bladen: 24 Apr. 1987.  
---. Personal interview. Bladen: 26 Apr. 1987.  
Cooper-Skjelver, Mabel R. *Webster County: Visions of the Past*. N.p.: Mabel  
Cooper-Skjelver, n.d.  
I.O.O.F. Hall and Opera House. Bladen site visit. 26 Apr. 1987.  
Sidlo, Florence. Letter to the author. Red Cloud/Bladen: 1987.  
Webster County Register of Deeds. I.O.O.F. Opera Hall [Bladen] public records.  
11 Sep. 1987.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

D. Layne Ehlers (see below)

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreeage of property Less than one [1] acre

UTM References

A 

1	4
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5	3	4	4	2	0
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4	4	6	3	4	1	0
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Zone Easting Northing

C 

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B 

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Zone Easting Northing

D 

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

This property is described as Lot 8 and the north half of Lot 9 of Block 6 in the Original Town of Bladen, Webster County, Nebraska.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire town lot(s) that have been historically associated with this property.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title D. Layne Ehlers, Principal Investigator  
organization OHBN Study date April, 1988  
street & number 2302 South 11th telephone 402/435-6946  
city or town Lincoln state NE zip code 68502

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The period of significance is derived from the original construction date of the building, 1913, when the Oddfellows erected a "long needed place for entertainment and public gatherings" (*Bladen Enterprise* 24 Jan. 1913). The period of significance continues through 1917, the year considered to signal the end of the opera house era in Nebraska, based on declining numbers of touring companies nationally and rising numbers of movie houses and automobiles. The proximity of Red Cloud (18 miles) and Hastings (27 miles), which had moving picture theatres and large community auditoriums meant that as more Bladen residents bought cars, activities in those nearby cities became a more viable option. Limited choices in the I.O.O.F. Hall and Opera House doomed it to a dwindling number of sporadic events, primarily significant under the category of social history.

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I.O.O.F. Hall and Opera House, Bladen  
Representative Entertainments, 1913-1917

DATE EVENT AND PERFORMERS

Social History

Nov 1913 Illustrated lecture by MWA Camp at Bladen  
Nov 1914 Meeting of the Farmer's Grain & Supply Co.

Entertainment/Recreation

Oct 1913 Moving pictures  
Nov 1913 Lecture by Dr. James Hedley on 'What Is a Man Worth?'  
Nov 1914 Lecture by H. V. Adams  
Nov 1915 Granville Jones, humorist  
Nov 1916 Lecture by Clyde Wilson McCord on 'Loyalty to the Home Town'  
Nov 1916 Dramatic readings by J. Frank Fouche

Performing Arts

Mar 1913 The Starrs, musical entertainers  
Fisher Shipp Concert Co.  
Sep 1913 William F. Lewis Stock Co. with *Just Plain Molly*  
Oct 1913 Hillman No. 1 Ideal Stock Co. with Ida Root-Gordon and Harry Sohns  
*in The Thoroughbred*  
Nov 1914 Peterson & Vierra's Concert and Dramatic Co. of Hawaiians  
Dec 1914 Hillman's Ideal Stock Co. with Ed Furguson and Shirley Mayberry  
Terry's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*  
Nov 1915 Edna Earle Crum Concert Party  
*The Two Oles*  
William F. Lewis Stock Co. in *The Maid and the Minister*  
Dec 1915 *The Frame Up* with Miss Floy Mann  
Oct 1916 *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* with Marie Fuller & City Company  
William F. Lewis Stock Co. in *The Gypsy Outcast* and *Polly and Her Pals*  
Nov 1916 Poluhni & Co., magicians  
Nov 1917 Vierra's Royal Hawaiians  
Star Minstrel Show  
Dec 1917 The Cambridge Players in *The Rivals*  
Miss Clara Dyer recital  
Fred Byers Stock Co. with *Jones of the U.S.N.*

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Photographs

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The following information is the same for all Bladen photographs:

NAME OF PROPERTY: I.O.O.F. Hall and Opera House  
CITY, COUNTY, STATE: Bladen, Webster, Nebraska  
NeHBS SITE No.: WT02-8  
OHBIN SITE No.: 04-26-06  
NAME OF PHOTOGRAPHER: Christian H. Ehlers

PHOTO NUMBER: Bladen #1  
DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH (and NEGATIVE NUMBER): 04-28-87 (8704/2:6)  
LOCATION OF ORIGINAL NEGATIVE: Nebraska State Historical Society  
DESCRIPTION OF VIEW INDICATING DIRECTION OF CAMERA: Exterior view, looking southwest at the east (front) and north facades.

PHOTO NUMBER: Bladen #2  
DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH (and NEGATIVE NUMBER): 04-28-87 (8704/1:37)  
LOCATION OF ORIGINAL NEGATIVE: Nebraska State Historical Society  
DESCRIPTION OF VIEW INDICATING DIRECTION OF CAMERA: Interior view, looking west at the stage.