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United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

MAY 24 1988

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

NATIONAL REGISTER

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 The Auditorium
other names/site number NeHBS #FMO5-65; OHBIN #03-14-01

2. Location

street & number 160 N. 9th
city, town Geneva
state Nebraska code NE county Fillmore code 059 zip code 68361

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: private, public-local (checked), public-State, public-Federal
Category of Property: building(s) (checked), district, site, structure, object
Number of Resources within Property: Contributing (1), Noncontributing (0), Total (1)

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.
Signature of certifying official: James A. Hanson
Date: May 16, 1988
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. (checked)
determined eligible for the National Register.
determined not eligible for the National Register.
removed from the National Register.
other, (explain:)
Signature of the Keeper: Beth Boland
Date of Action: 9/28/88

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation & Culture: Theatre;

Music facility

Social: Meeting hall

Government: City hall

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation & Culture: Theatre,

Auditorium

Government: City hall

0

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Two-part commercial block

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Unknown

walls Brick

roof Tar

other Concrete decorative diamonds

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Auditorium is located at 160 North 9th St., approximately a block north of the Fillmore County Courthouse. Constructed in 1915 by the town of Geneva, it was reported to cost \$20,000. The Two-Part Commercial Block brick structure has a flat roof protected by a tar coating, which is pitched to the west. The exterior includes decorative brickwork and concrete diamonds, but remains utilitarian in appearance. Access to the auditorium is through the spacious lobby, which is entered from the outside through wide double doors under a permanent awning. The lobby, which has undergone some remodeling, contains the ticket sales area.

The auditorium is 53 feet wide by 64 feet long, from the back wall to the proscenium opening. Although the exterior has a number of windows, none of them are visible from the inside. The balcony, reached by a wooden staircase on either side of the auditorium, is raked, with permanent seating surrounding a projection booth. The balcony, extending 10 feet beyond the rear of the lower level of the auditorium, is 28 feet deep at the sides and 24 feet wide at the center of the curved rail. Although the rear of the balcony contains original opera house chairs, the lower portions and the main floor seats were moved in when the Rialto Movie Theatre went out of business. The auditorium has its original tin ceiling, but is currently covered with a blown-in coat of newsprint. Plaid carpeting in the aisles also came from the Rialto. The current seating capacity is 347.

The elaborate proscenium arch, decorated with gilt leaves and buttons, measures 32 feet wide by 19 feet, although a tormenter fills approximately the top five feet of this space. The stage is 20 feet deep from the proscenium opening to the back wall. One trap door is center stage, but no longer useable. Although the original stage curtains do not remain, the rollers are still in place. Catwalks allow access to the upper areas of the stage. Ample wings, 10 feet 6 inches wide, include stairways down to the dressing rooms under the stage. These dressing rooms have undergone extensive refurbishing. They open under the stage to the pit, which is about three feet deep and four feet, 6 inches wide, curving around the footlight trough and extending two feet beyond the edge of the four foot apron. This deep pit was the only complaint about the building at its December, 1915 opening: "If the architect was ever inside of a theater he certainly never had any experience as a performer in the orchestra. The pit is three feet deep and quite narrow. The orchestra leader cannot see the stage, a vital defect," but went on to add, "The rest of the building is so satisfactory that no one will feel like grumbling much about the orchestra pit" (*Nebraska Signal*, 16 Dec. 1915). The structural and historical integrity of the building and theatre has been maintained.

See continuation sheet

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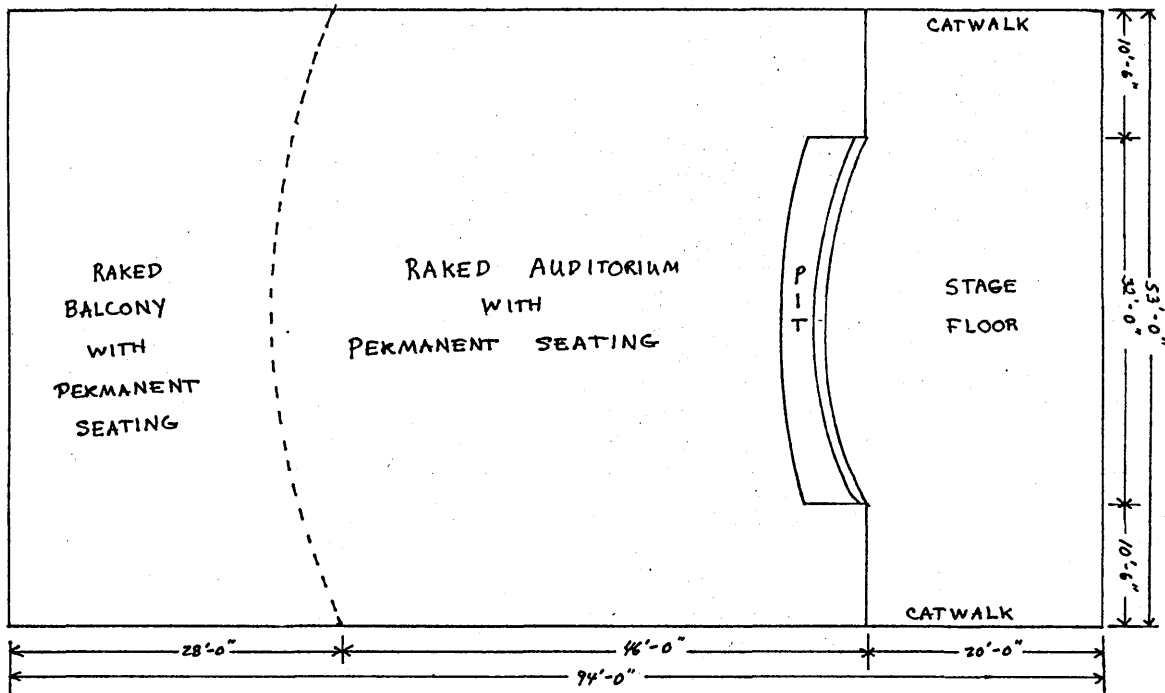
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

Floor plan, The Auditorium, Geneva

N →



Credit: P. Leitner, Draftsman

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Constructed in 1915 as the City Hall and Auditorium, the two-story brick rectangular building, which displays a flat roof with stone coping, is utilitarian in appearance, incorporating brick patterning and corbelling as the primary decorative features. Stone belt courses divide the building into horizontal divisions. Approximately two-thirds of the building houses the theater space, while the remainder is used for city offices. The main (east) entrance at the street level leads to the auditorium space, while the entrance at the southeast corner of the building provides access to the City Hall offices. The building continues in use today as city offices, and the Geneva Arts Council presently uses the Auditorium space as a community theater.

The Geneva Opera House, built in 1883, and the New Opera House, in the 1899 Fraternity Temple building, are no longer extant.

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
1915-1917

Significant Dates
1915

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Significant Person
N/A

Architect/Builder
Deuel, first name unknown (architect)

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

The Auditorium 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 Geneva. As a facility for the performing arts, it offered productions such as musical concerts, touring stock companies, and home talent productions. (See following table of Representative Entertainments 1915-1918.)

This opera house is significant in the area of entertainment/recreation, since it provided a place where the whole community could gather to attend edifying lectures and motion pictures. (See following table of Representative Entertainments 1915-1918.)

This opera house is significant in the area of social history because it gave Geneva a neutral, nonaffiliated location for bazaars and other community gatherings. (See following table of Representative Entertainments 1915-1918.) 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.

The period of significance is derived from the original construction date of the building, 1915. It was considered a significant improvement over both the Geneva Opera House, built in 1883, and the New Opera House occupying the third floor of the 1899 Fraternity Temple building. The *Nebraska Signal* reported, "It

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

The Auditorium. Geneva site visit. 14 Mar. 1987.
Fillmore County Register of Deeds. The Auditorium [Geneva] public records. 6 Aug. 1987.
Fulton, Vaughn. Telephone interview. Geneva: 11 Mar. 1987.
Mersch, Evelyn. Letters to the author. Geneva: 1986.
Nebraska Signal. 13 May 1915 - 20 Dec. 1917.
"New City Hall." *Nebraska Signal* 16 Dec. 1915.
Turek, Bill. Letter to the author. Geneva: 22 Aug. 1987.
---. Personal interview. Geneva: 14 Mar. 1987.
---. Telephone interview. Geneva: 11 Mar. 1987.
Whitley, D.L. Letter to the author. Geneva: Jul. 1987.
Wythers, Jeri. Letter to the author. Geneva: 10 Mar. 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

Acreage of property Less than one [1] acre

UTM References

A

1	4
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6	1	8	3	5	0
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4	4	8	6	9	4	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 all of Lots 65 and 66, and all of Lot 67 except the south 52 feet, of Block 4, Original Town of Geneva, Fillmore County, Nebraska.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire town lots that have been historically associated with this property.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title D. Layne Ehlers, Principal Investigator
organization OHBIN 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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was indeed a novel experience to walk directly from the sidewalk into a modern lobby and walk directly through the door and over a solid floor of cement to a comfortable seat in an opera chair with no stairs to climb" (16 Dec. 1915:4). The period of significance continued through 1917, the year considered to signal the end of the opera house era in Nebraska, even though because it was built at the end of the era and functioned as a civic center for a number of years, eventually serving first as a movie house and then as a community auditorium once again during the 1980s. Three Geneva movie houses--the Palm, the Grand, and the Midwest--offered it considerable competition, as well.

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The Auditorium, Geneva
Representative Entertainments, 1915-1918

DATE EVENT AND PERFORMERS

Social History

Nov 1917 Red Cross bazaar and fair

Entertainment/Recreation

Nov 1916 Lecture by Andrew Johnson
Feb 1917 Lecture by Arthur Walwyn Evans
Nov 1917 Motion picture
Nov 1917 Lecture and motion picture by Sgt. Hanley, "Why the Allies Will Win the War"
Dec 1917 Motion picture
Jan 1918 Lecture by Dr. G. Whitfield Ray, "The Story of South America"
Mar 1918 Lecture by Dr. Arthur Walwyn Evans, "What America Means to Me"

Performing Arts

Dec 1915 *The Dutch Detective*, home talent
Grace Hall-Riheldaffer and Alexander von Skibinsky Co.
Royal Gwent Welsh Male Singers
Poluhni & Co.
Sep 1916 *His Honor the Mayor* with Harry Sohns by the Hillman Ideal Stock Co.
Oct 1916 L.A.C. Orchestra
The Trail of the Lonesome Pine by the Snedeker Co.
Nov 1916 Mysterious Smith Co.
Miles Berry's *Don't Tell My Wife*
Dec 1916 Hallowell Musical Co.
Mar 1917 Apollo Concert Co.
May 1917 May Festival, presenting *Sylvia* by home talent; Carl Frederick Steckleberg, violinist; and *The Golden Legend*, a home talent cantata
Sep 1917 Hillman's Stock Co. in *The Boy Who Came Back*, *The Movie Man* and *Daughters of the Rich*
Oct 1917 William C. Cushman's *The Toymaker's Dream*
Oct 1917 Loseff's Russian Quartet
Feb 1918 Ionian Serenaders

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Photographs

Section number _____ Page 1

The following information is the same for all Geneva photographs:

NAME OF PROPERTY: The Auditorium
CITY, COUNTY, STATE: Geneva, Fillmore, Nebraska
NeHBS SITE No.: FM05-65
OHBIN SITE No.: 03-14-01
NAME OF PHOTOGRAPHER: Christian H. Ehlers

PHOTO NUMBER: Geneva #1
DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH (and NEGATIVE NUMBER): 03-14-87 (8703/2:35)
LOCATION OF ORIGINAL NEGATIVE: Nebraska State Historical Society
DESCRIPTION OF VIEW INDICATING DIRECTION OF CAMERA: Exterior view, looking northwest at the east (front) and south facades.

PHOTO NUMBER: Geneva #2
DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH (and NEGATIVE NUMBER): 03-14-87 (8703/2:26)
LOCATION OF ORIGINAL NEGATIVE: Nebraska State Historical Society
DESCRIPTION OF VIEW INDICATING DIRECTION OF CAMERA: Interior view, looking west at the stage.

PHOTO NUMBER: Geneva #3
DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH (and NEGATIVE NUMBER): 03-14-87 (8703/2:22)
LOCATION OF ORIGINAL NEGATIVE: Nebraska State Historical Society
DESCRIPTION OF VIEW INDICATING DIRECTION OF CAMERA: Interior view, looking east at the north wall and center of the auditorium.