

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 instruction 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 Pella Opera House
other names/site number None

2. Location

street & number 611 Franklin Street [] not for publication
city, town Pella [] vicinity
state Iowa code IA county Marion code 125 zip code 50219

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input 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> </u>	<u> </u> objects
		<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Number of contributing resources previously
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 sets forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. [] See continuation sheets.

[Signature]
Signature of certifying official
State Historical Society of Iowa
State or Federal agency and bureau

1/16/92
Date

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. [] See continuation sheet.

Removed from National Register.

Other, (explain:)

[Signature]

3/20/92

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)
Recreation and Culture: Theater & Auditorium

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)
Recreation and Culture: Theater & Auditorium

7. Description

Architectural Classification
 (enter categories from instructions)
Late Victorian: Romanesque

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone
 walls Brick

roof Membrane over wood frame
 other Stained glass

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The following additional comments are supplied in response to the NPS reviewer's request for more information concerning the present integrity of the Pella Opera House:

The Pella Opera House was originally determined ineligible as part of the state multiple property document because of a misunderstanding on the part of the SHPO staff regarding the degree of alteration to the facade. It was our understanding that an entire floor had been removed and that this had impacted the balcony and ceiling area of the theater space itself. The eligibility evaluation of the state opera houses was done quickly based upon available data in order to identify the best candidates for nomination at that time. In retrospect we should have determined the property as requiring additional documentation. In point of fact, an historic photograph of the building's original facade came to light after our determination of ineligibility. This photo clearly documented minimal losses to the facade. The multiple property document has not been accepted by NPS and requires considerable revision as it relates to architectural significance. For these reasons, the Pella Opera House nomination was processed individually.

The physical description of the property, both exterior and interior, was based on a rigorously critical evaluation. Much of the auditorium's interior retained its original plan and some of its surfaces and materials. Notable in this regard were the original proscenium frame above the stage and the elaborate pressed metal ceiling over the auditorium. The fourth floor was restored only above the windows and this was designed according to the historic photograph. Although the original 2/2 portions of the first floor windows were missing, they were carefully replaced to match original configuration. The stained glass lunettes above these are original to the building. Some liberties were taken in the reconstruction of the front door area. Although several steps originally led up to the front door, these were not rebuilt so as to make the building handicapped accessible. The transom area was also slightly redesigned. Because the historic photograph did not show the original front doors clearly, the new double doors were made conforming to a standard design in use circa 1900.

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)

Period of Significance

Significant Dates

Architecture _____

1900 _____

1900 _____

Cultural Affiliation

N/A _____

Significant Person

Architect/Builder

Henry DeGooyer, Architect _____

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

The following additional comment is supplied in response to the NPS reviewer's request for more explicit justification concerning significance claimed for the Pella Opera House as a manifestation of the community's boosterism:

The claim for significance under Criterion A has been deleted.

[X] See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET, ATTACHED

- 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 Report # _____
- See continuation sheet
- Primary location of additional data:
- State historic preservation office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Specify repository:
The Pella Opera House; P.O.B. 414, Pella, IA 50219

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Less than one acre

UTM References

A	[1] [5]	[50] [7] [1] [8] [0]	[4] [5] [8] [3] [6] [5] [0]	B	[] []	[] [] [] [] [] []		
	[] [] [] [] [] []		Zone	Easting		Northing		Zone
	Easting	Northing						
C	[] []	[] [] [] [] [] []	[] [] [] [] [] []	D	[] []	[] [] [] [] [] []	[] [] [] [] [] []	

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Lot 1 in Block 40, of the original plat of Pella, Iowa, commencing at the northwest corner of said Lot 1, thence south along the west line 120', thence east 10', thence north 120', thence west along the north line 10' to beginning. Also a strip 28' in width off the east side of Lot 2, Block 40, of the original plat of Pella, Iowa.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary of this nomination includes only the above named opera house.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title <u>William C. Page, Public Historian</u>	date <u>December 1990</u>
organization _____	telephone <u>515/243-5740</u>
street & number <u>520 East Sheridan Avenue</u>	state <u>IA</u> zip code <u>50313</u>
city or town <u>Des Moines</u>	

FEB 4 1992

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 7 Page 2

CFN-259-1116

DESCRIPTION

The Pella Opera House at 611 Franklin Street is located in the central business district of Pella about one block east of the intersection of Main and Franklin Streets. The surrounding neighborhood is predominantly commercial with residential areas beginning about one block east and one block south. Most of the buildings around the opera house are late Nineteenth or early Twentieth Century edifices. Although there are also examples of so-called Dutch Fronts (historic commercial facades altered by 1970s and 1980s interpretations of historic Netherlands architectural details), the historic setting of the opera house remains mostly intact.

The opera house was completed in 1900 from designs by Pella architect Henry DeGooyer. The building has four stories and is attached on each side to other commercial buildings. As the only four story building in Pella, the opera house stands out although this is somewhat modified because the building is located within the interior of the block rather than on a corner. The building is constructed of brick, orange in color, and said to be locally manufactured. Other commercial buildings in Franklin Street also employ a similar material. Herman Rietveld, prime mover behind construction of the opera house, also managed a local brick and tile works in Pella giving further credence to the claim. The opera house has a flat roof slightly sloping front to rear. The facade faces north and consists of four bays with entryway located in the second bay from the west. The building is rectangular and originally measured approximately 38'x120'. Architecturally the building shows the influence of Victorian Romanesque style.

The building rests on a stone foundation. The basement area is only partially excavated. The building consists of brick load bearing walls. The roof is flat and slopes slightly from north to south. It is visible only from the south otherwise being masked by parapets on the other elevations. There are no extant brick chimneys.

Fenestration is mostly 1/1 sash type windows except on the facade where the fenestration has more decorative treatment. The west elevation has most of the building's fenestration after the facade. It is placed irregularly here and reflects internal uses of the building rather than for exterior effect.

All of the building's architectural detail is located on the facade. The four bays already mentioned are flanked by brick piers which protrude slightly from the facade and extend all the way to the fourth floor. The bays are each equally wide. On the first floor, however, the second bay from the west contains the main entryway and this cavity is somewhat wider than the other cavities on the first floor. Main entryway features a double door with transom above it. The other bays on the first floor feature paired 1/1 sash windows with arches above them worked in several courses of protruding brick. The ellipse between arch and sash feature leaded and stained glass windows original to the building. The second floor repeats the archwork noted on the first floor and also retains original stained glass windows in the ellipses although the 1/1 sash are single rather than paired windows as on the first and fourth floor. Third floor has round windows with brickwork surrounding them in designs similar to the first two floors. The leaded and stained glass windows on the third floor are replacements. This floor, also called the mezzanine floor, comprises the balcony area of the building's auditorium. The second floor of the building is the main floor of the auditorium. Fourth floor has paired 1/1 sash in each of the four bays with brick sills and brick lintels. Brick arches are also situated above these windows surmounted by a cornice also worked in brick. There is a metal pediment at the cornice,

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

FEB 4 1992

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 7 Page 3

CFN-259-1116

triangular in shape, and containing "1900 Opera Block." Polychrome is achieved on the facade through the use of orange and light colored brick. The orange brick predominates while the contrasting light colored brick is used in the arches above the windows on each floor. The stained glass carries the polychrome effect further.

The building illustrates a local interpretation of the Victorian Romanesque style. This is evident through the use of polychrome in building materials and the brick arches above windows and doors. The use of round windows is somewhat unusual. They appear to relate to similar usage in other buildings in Pella, such as the building at 826 Main Street, and in some earlier residential housing in the community, notably a brick house on the Oskaloosa Road (Highway 163) east of Pella.

CHANGES IN USE

The Pella Opera House served legitimate theater between 1900-1918, although during the final decade or so performances were sporadic and the building also served as a motion picture theater and a hall for club meetings. The building was owned by an automobile service center for a short time. Sold again it was used for a farm produce business and warehouse. This business occupied the building in the 1920s and 1930s. Later uses were primarily retail, mostly recently as Pella's branch of the Gamble's national chain store.

1988-1990 REHABILITATION

In 1988 the Pella Opera House Commission was established to acquire, stabilize, and rehabilitate the Pella Opera House so that it could again function as a center for live entertainment in Pella. The commission is a private, non-profit organization based on volunteers. The Rolscreen Foundation of Pella supported the rehabilitation project through a major grant. Additional support was received from the Vermeer Foundation, two Iowa Community Cultural Grants, and numerous local donors.

During early planning, William J. Wagner, AIA, consulted the project. Lawrence M. Erickson, AIA, Wetherell-Erickson Architects of Des Moines, served as architect for the actual project.

Exterior

After the demise of the opera business, the interior of the building experienced many alterations although on the exterior they were restricted primarily to the facade. The four mezzanine windows had their original stained glass replaced with translucent glass. The first floor facade was considerably changed. The front door was relocated to the third bay from the west, windows were lowered and replaced with a 1960s store-front, and a wooden name plaque installed across the entire front. The first floor was all painted white. The parapet, all of the cornice, and a series of four arches on the facade were removed. These alterations were undertaken, it is said, with the intention of demolishing the building, although halted before extensive demolition took place. A one-story addition was also constructed on the rear of the building using concrete block. It was el shaped and measured 31'x16'.

FEB 4 1992

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 7 Page 4

CFN-259-1116

Although the 1988-1990 project was primarily a rehabilitation, restoration was the goal for the facade. The original orange colored bricks were carefully matched, the cornice and brick arches were restored using an historic photograph as a guide, and a metal plaque in the pediment custom made. The plaque reads "1900/Opera Block" as indicated on the historic photograph. Two of the original circular mezzanine windows were located in private ownership. Their design was replicated for the four windows. First floor fenestration was also replicated. The main entryway was relocated to its original location, and double doors and transom custom made in keeping with the period. The brick pier between the third and fourth bay from the west had badly deteriorated. This was reinforced with structural steel. The entire building was cleaned using a mildly acidic solution applied at low pressure and repointed with a mortar formula compatible to the original. An architectural drawing of the building as rehabilitated is attached, as a continuation sheet, at the back of this nomination.

On the west elevation, all window cavities had been bricked in. All but one of these were reopened and 2/2 sash windows installed. Both on the west and east elevations, the concrete caps on the parapets were replaced with clay tile-colored metal coping although there was debate within the commission whether this material was appropriate.

The one-story rear addition to the opera house was removed. This was a latter day addition and constructed of concrete block. A two-story addition was constructed in its place. Built of concrete block, it was faced with brick. This addition was necessary to make the stage area of the theater functional. It contains dressing rooms, storage areas, access halls, restrooms, freight elevation, and a kitchen. These conveniences were lacking in the backstage area of the original opera house.

Interior

The interior of the building underwent considerable alteration after the demise of the opera business and before purchase of the building by the Pella Opera House Commission. These alterations included obliteration of the auditorium by an extension of the mezzanine floor across it, and the removal of the auditorium stage, most of the lighting fixtures, and interior doors and woodwork.

It was decided that the new interior would be a rehabilitation rather than a restoration. This was for three reasons. First there remained no interior photographs as a guide. Originally, the auditorium did not function well for live entertainment and needed to be redesigned for this reason. Finally, there was need for modern conveniences such as restrooms, offices, and an elevator for patrons.

During the 1988-1990 rehabilitation project, the extension of the mezzanine floor was removed, the building was supported by structural steel, the stage was rebuilt, and lobby areas constructed. No pictures remained extant as models for this work. Some visual evidence uncovered during the project gave clues, such as paint on interior walls where the mezzanine had ended, as well as a few patches of original painted stencils. The cast iron joist hangers were uncovered on the second floor and these were recycled in the few instances where joists had to be replaced. Some structural steel was installed in the building because it was severely over-stressed in some places, particularly in the mezzanine. About 75% of the original pressed metal ceiling remained intact in the auditorium. This was retained with the balance patched with replacements. The original proscenium arch of the stage was also found to be intact. Constructed of pressed metal, this arch was preserved in the rehabilitation.

FEB 4 1992

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 7 Page 5

CFN-259-1116

The rear of the auditorium was foreshortened. This design was adopted for two reasons. First of all the original building was without restrooms in the public areas and current plans also called for elevators to the upper floors. Secondly, the spectators' sight lines of the stage within the auditorium were, according to the rehabilitation architects, very poor. The slope of the auditorium floor was slight and spectators in the rear of the first floor must have had trouble both in seeing over the heads of those in front of them and under the overhanging mezzanine above them. Similar troubles were noted in the mezzanine where sight lines to the stage from the rear were also blocked by the the mezzanine rail. For these reasons, the redesign of the auditorium foreshortened the rear.

Some original wood trim was found around windows and doors, and on baseboards. The profiles of this trim were used for replacements. Although the original wood trim originally was painted pine, new wood trim is fabricated of oak, stained, and clear finished. The colors of walls and ceilings were chosen to match patches of original paint found in various parts of the interior. Patches of original stencils were traced and then replicated in the interior.

Architectural drawings of floor plans and selected details are attached, as continuation sheets, to the back of this nomination.

CONCLUSION

The exterior of the Pella Opera House retains a high amount of design integrity. Its facade remains intact except for the restored parapet, cornice, and replacement windows and doors. Alterations such as these are not unusual on commercial buildings and the restoration of these elements returns the building's facade to its appearance in 1900. Although the interior of the building has lost its integrity, this interior has been stabilized, rehabilitated, and returned to serve its original function in the community.

FEB 4 1990

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 Page 2

CFN-259-1116

INTRODUCTION

Located in the heart of Pella's commercial district, the four story Pella Opera House visually dominates the block on which it is located. This four-bay wide, rectangular edifice is constructed of a locally manufactured orange-colored brick, said to be distinctive to Pella. Stylistically, the building exhibits the influence of the Victorian Romanesque with its large semi-circular arches above windows and doors and polychromatic exterior finish, provided in this instance by the usage of yellowish brick trim and rusticated brick. The building has recently been returned to its original function as a facility for live entertainment.

The Pella Opera House directly calls attention to the impact opera houses and halls had on the cultural life and attitudes of Iowa towns like Pella. Although this building served its original function as a full-time facility for live theater only a few years following its opening in 1900, performances took place sporadically until 1918 when the building was sold to an automobile garage business. The edifice served, nonetheless, as a focal point where people in and around Pella were brought into direct contact with a variety of cultural endeavors like live plays, orchestra concerts, lectures, etc., and indeed helped make them part of an emerging national popular culture. The Pella Opera House is significant under Criteria C as a fine local example of an opera house in Iowa. The building was designed by Pella architect Henry DeGooyer. The period of significance comprises the year 1900 when construction of the building began and was completed.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Pella was founded in 1847 by a group of colonists from the Netherlands who had emigrated to America seeking religious freedom. The pulpit has always provided a strong force in Pella's religious, social, and cultural life. This cultural life has historically shown predilections to music, due in part to the interest of Mareah Scholte, wife of Domine Henry Scholte, founder of the Pella colony. Mareah Scholte was a pianist trained in Paris, France before her marriage and immigration to Iowa. This interest in music has been continued by Central College, founded in Pella in 1854.

Prior to the turn of the Twentieth Century, the performing arts in Pella lacked a public auditorium for their presentation. The need was recognized. At the turn of the Twentieth Century, Central College in conjunction with the Young Men's Christian Association constructed a YMCA Auditorium near the college campus. The building was designed to provide a large public room for lectures, concerts, local dramatics, traveling companies, and other activities. It appears that this room was used by churches, for political events, as well as cultural activities. This building required some time to construct (the exterior stood complete in 1899 although the interior was unfinished), but by 1900 the YMCA Auditorium provided Pella with a suitable facility for cultural events. Although concerts at the auditorium appear to have drawn only fair attendance, the programs featured classical repertoire of vocal, piano, and instrumental music evincing professional expertise. Professor Henry Cox of the Central faculty, for example, opened a series of concerts in 1900 presenting violin, piano, and vocal music by Tartini and Gluck. ("The house should be crowded at these concerts," the *Pella Advertiser* reported).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

FEB 4 1992

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 Page 3

CFN-259-1116

CONSTRUCTION OF THE PELLA OPERA HOUSE

An earlier opera house, located on the corner of Union and West 1st Street in Pella burned in the late Nineteenth Century. Prior to 1900 there was some discussion in Pella about a new opera house, but one individual, Herman Rietveld, was its chief motivator. The *Pella Advertiser* reported on August 10, 1899, for example that "the proposition made by Mr. Rietveld to build an opera block, seems to have failed of the requisite support, and besides we learned...that we have a building, with ample stage and seating capacity for any performance." When construction of the opera house began in 1900, it took many people in the community by surprise. Cost of the building's construction was underwritten by the Pella Opera House Association. The officers of this association were H. J. van Vliet, president, George A. Stout, secretary, and Herman Rietveld, treasurer. Pella architect Henry DeGooyer designed the building. DeGooyer reportedly used the opera house at Sioux City, Iowa, as his model. Although DeGooyer is mentioned in the 1922 *Souvenir History of Pella, Iowa* as architect of the T. B. Tice House in Pella, little is otherwise known about the man. The opera house was formally opened in November 1900.

HERMAN RIETVELD

Herman Rietveld (1864-1959) was, at the turn of the Twentieth Century, one of Pella's most colorful businessmen, civic leaders, and promoters of the community. Born and educated in and around Pella, Rietveld graduated from Central College in 1888. He trained to become a Protestant minister. While attending Central, Rietveld worked as a bookkeeper for the Pella Drain and Tile Company. Upon his graduation, he entered business in Pella rather than the clergy. Rietveld possessed an engaging personality, flair for business, and considerable ambition. His business activities included manager of the Pella Drain and Tile Company (which, in 1899, employed 20), a management interest in the Union Coal Company (an enterprise which built up Harvey, Iowa), treasurer of the Peoples Savings Bank of Pella, and manager of the Van Vliet Stock farm. In addition to these activities, "he constitutes a building association of his own, putting up numerous houses, and personally looking after their plan and equipment" (*Pella Advertiser*, November 2, 1899). The Pella Drain and Tile Company also manufactured brick and its use in opera house construction probably was intended to showcase it. Rietveld also participated heavily in civic offices. He was a member of the Pella School Board, treasurer of the City of Pella, and a member of the Iowa House of Representatives.

In spite of Rietveld's energy, he experienced great business misfortune. He seems to have been a businessman who went from one project to another without carrying through to profitable conclusion projects already begun. Rietveld described this failure himself:

I spent \$100,000 in building up Pella, but like my graduating class in old Central [he was the single 1888 graduate], had to do this alone, too. And if that wasn't enough, I like a big fool, started to build Harvey, for \$35,000 more and when I got done with this, it was not worth 35 cents... Well, next I started two banks in Pella, dug clay, coal, sand and a financial grave for myself and my family. Oh, yes, I named the Pella Chronicle and the Pella Booster too, and all under the delusion that I was doing right and helping Pella" (Letter to the *Pella Chronicle*, June 11, 1931).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

FEB 4 1992

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 Page 4

CFN-259-1116

Rietveld's participation in underwriting construction of the Pella Opera House was substantial. He seems later to have acquired the total interest in this building. He traded it in 1905 to an Omaha, Nebraska man in exchange for farmland in northwestern Nebraska.

Rietveld subsequently moved from Pella and settled on a 100 acre farm he had bought near Fairfield, Iowa. He and his family lived there for ten years. Rietveld also reported that he acquired title to large tracts of land in northwestern Nebraska (*Pella Chronicle*, April 12, 1906). In 1926 Rietveld relocated to Longview, Washington where he was circulation manager for the *Longview Daily News* for several years (*Pella Chronicle*, June 11, 1931). Rietveld ultimately returned to Marion County, Iowa. He died in Knoxville, the county seat, in 1959.

Rietveld was an individualist. His autobiographic letters have the color of Mark Twain's prose. Rietveld later freely admitted his lack of financial ability, characterizing his life "ambition gone wild; judgment rotten." His support for the opera house seems to have been a case in point and, ultimately, one reason for his financial undoing in Pella.

Although Rietveld's connection with the Pella Opera House is not claimed under National Register Criterion B in this nomination, as more information comes to light regarding his contributions to the upbuilding of Pella's commerce, Criterion B might become an option for claiming additional significance.

THE PELLA OPERA HOUSE AS A BUSINESS

The Pella Opera House suffered obstacles to success from the beginning. Another auditorium already served the community. The lack of strong patronage of live entertainment posed a challenge to commercial success of these businesses in small Iowa towns at the time. The management of the Pella Opera House failed to distinguish between the audiences for popular culture and for the performing arts and received criticism for its programming from both quarters. Finally, the rise of motion pictures heralded the demise of the opera house movement across the nation as well as in Pella. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the Pella Opera House did not succeed as a business.

What was the commercial market for live entertainment in Pella? The answer to this question proved a stumbling block for opera house management. The title "opera house" was always a misnomer for these facilities. All kinds of popular entertainments as well as the performing arts took place within them. In Pella, for example, "What Happened to Jones?," the grand opening production at the opera house, received a mixed review from the *Pella Advertiser*. "The play itself was devoid of any real plot to give it an interest...Those who wished something funny were well amused. Those who wished something dramatic were disappointed" (November 22, 1900).

The Pella Opera House presented nationally recognized performing companies and artists. They included the Chicago Opera Company, the Weber Grand Concert Company, the Hungarian Court Orchestra of Budapest, Patricolo's Concert Company, Wallack's Theatre Company, and the Chase-Lister Theatre Company. Attendance at performances was generally disheartening. H. S. Rhynsburger, manager of the opera house in 1903-1904, attempted to improve the situation by earlier curtains so farm families could return home more conveniently and by guaranteeing a high moral tone

FEB 4 1992

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 Page 5

CFN-259-1116

to productions. *The Pella Chronicle* noted, however, that "it seems impossible for the best attractions to draw good houses in Pella..." (December 23, 1904).

The YMCA Auditorium competed for audiences interested in the performing arts. Located on the Central College campus, cultural events at the college naturally used this facility.

Finally, the opera house management itself lacked professional expertise. Management had difficulty in programming appropriate entertainments. Opening nights were disappointments in terms of attendance ("a fair house greeted the opening of the opera season in Pella"). They were also disappointments for audiences in terms of comfort. "The building could not be properly heated owing to the fact that permanent floors were not yet put in..." The architect for the building's rehabilitation in 1988-1989 says that the audience's sight lines from the balcony to the stage were also inadequate, indicating inexperience on the part of the original architect.

Madeline Vanderzyl has traced 20 changes in ownership of the Pella Opera House between 1902 and 1913, eight changes in 1906 alone. An attempt was made to diversify commercial operations within the building to help increase its profits. In 1905, for example, the Scenic Entertaining Company introduced moving pictures in the opera house. In 1906, Gladstone and Rich Sybenga housed a soda pop bottling works in the basement, hoping that soft beverages available at intermissions would increase attendance. In time, however, fewer and fewer performances were given. Between 1912 and 1913, Vanderzyl found no newspaper advertisements for opera house performances. In 1916 the Women's Federated Club of Pella began to rent the Opera House. They established a club room in the building and conducted an Artists Course in the auditorium. Hoping to put behind the failures of the opera house, the club renamed the facility the "Federated Club Building." Vaudeville acts continued from time to time to be presented. In 1916 the club opened a ladies' rest room in the building where women shopping in Pella could meet, rest, and care for their children. A matron was employed to manage the rest room. The rest room project corresponds with a trend through the midwest at a time when progressive women were bettering their communities with public improvement projects.

In 1918 the opera house was sold to the White Way Auto Company. "The opera house building has been standing idle for a number of years, except for a room used by the Ladies' Federated Club as a rest room." (*The Pella Chronicle*; November 28, 1918). Hardly more than a month later, the building was again sold to the Farmers Produce business. This operation poured the cement floor on the first floor. These two sales effectively ended all use of the building as a theater.

REPRESENTATION IN OTHER CULTURAL RESOURCES SURVEYS

In 1974 Stephen J. Stimmel conducted a windshield survey of Pella. This surveyor included the Pella Opera House in this survey. The building was photographed, located on a city map, given an inventory number, and an Iowa Site Inventory form was completed for it. The top portion of the facade, this survey reports, was said to have been removed to comply with fire regulations.

In the late 1970s, the Central Iowa Regional Association of Local Governments (CIRALG) conducted a reconnaissance survey of Marion County, Iowa, including the City of Pella. This survey inventoried

FEB 4 1992

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 8 Page 6

CFN-259-1116

the Pella Opera House and evaluated it as potentially eligible for nomination to the National Register. This evaluation was made prior to the present rehabilitation of the building.

In 1989 W. C. Page, Public Historian of the Dunbar/Jones Partnership, conducted an intensive historical and architectural survey of the central business district in Pella. This survey was restricted to commercial buildings and surveyed no residential properties. The survey evaluated the Pella Opera House (Site #26) as having key architectural significance and the potential for key historical significance.

Near the end of this nomination process, Madeline G. Vanderzyl, Archivist of Central College in Pella, completed a compilation of newspaper articles about the Pella Opera House. This comprehensive collection documents the cultural and commercial ups and downs of the opera house. This research also shows that the Pella Opera House was included in a national publication Julius Cahn's Official Theatrical Guide of opera houses in the United States and recognized as a legitimate theater.

POTENTIAL FOR HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

Although the site's potential for archaeological research is, as yet, unevaluated, there appears to be little if any in this regard.

CONCLUSION

When first constructed, the Pella Opera House contributed a major addition to Pella's central business district. The building continues today to dominate its immediate surroundings and is a fine local example of an opera house in Iowa. Although ultimately unsuccessful as a business operation, the Pella Opera House also calls attention to the importance Pellans attached to the performing arts and illustrates the financial commitment private individuals were willing to make to improve their community, boost local economic development, and bring live entertainment to Pella.