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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 Gourley's Opera House
other names/site number Star Theatre, S & S Theatre, Plains Theatre
NeHBS #SH08-15 OHBIN #05-24-05

2. Location

street & number Second St. N/A not for publication
city, town Rushville N/A vicinity
state Nebraska code NE county Sheridan code 161 zip code 69360

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>1</u>	<u> </u> objects
			<u> </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 C. Harrison Signature of certifying official May 16, 1988 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. Beth Boland 7/6/88

determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation & Culture: Theatre;
Music facility

Social: Meeting hall

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Religious Structure: Mission

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Other: One-part commercial block
with false front

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Unknown

walls Brick

roof Tin

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Gourley's Opera House is located on the north side of Second Street (Highway 20), midway on the block between Loofborrow and Sprague Streets. Built in 1914, the One-Part Commercial Block structure with its false front was originally next to Dave Gourley's electric light plant and was one of the first buildings electrified in Rushville. The brick structure is approximately 50 feet wide by 80 feet long. It has a peaked tin roof; the false front has panels inset between columns of brick. Entrance to the theatre is through a broad entrance similar in style to a movie house, with a box office and refreshment counter added during the theatre's later tenure as a moving picture theatre. "Plains" remains faintly visible on the movie-style marquee now attached to the front of the building.

The auditorium is 41 feet long from the proscenium opening to the back wall of the main floor. The balcony extends 19 feet further behind the main auditorium, its edge delineated by a wall approximately three feet high. It includes a projection booth in the center rear. Both the auditorium and balcony are raked, furnished with comfortable permanent opera seats. Stairs to the balcony are on either side of the auditorium, against the outside walls. The lower floor, beneath the auditorium, has an exceptional wooden floor; this area was used extensively for dances and roller skating, making this opera house unlike any others extant in Nebraska, in that it used two venues to fulfill all its functions. The *Rushville Recorder* for 28 Aug. 1914, praised the theatre as

... a handsome, comfortable and modern structure, fitted up with electric lights, fans, ventilators, and opera chairs. The scenery is well painted and the Italian garden scene is beautiful, and worthy of any metropolitan theatre. The scenery was painted by the Kansas City Scenic Co., and includes two handsome drop curtains, one containing advertisements of the business houses and one an ordinary curtain drop, with effective landscape. The seats are comfortable and sloped at such an angle that any one from any part of the house can see the stage.

Diagonal wings, added when the opera house became a movie house exclusively, disguise the original squared corners. It has an attractive tin ceiling showing some water damage.

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The proscenium arch measures 26 feet wide by approximately 13 feet high; ample wings of 11 feet, 3 inches fill each side of the slightly raked stage. Access to the backstage area from the auditorium is through broad doors on either side of the auditorium in the proscenium wall. The stage measures 17 feet, 6 inches from the curtain line to the back wall; it has a three-foot apron curving outward from the arch, which features a footlight trough.

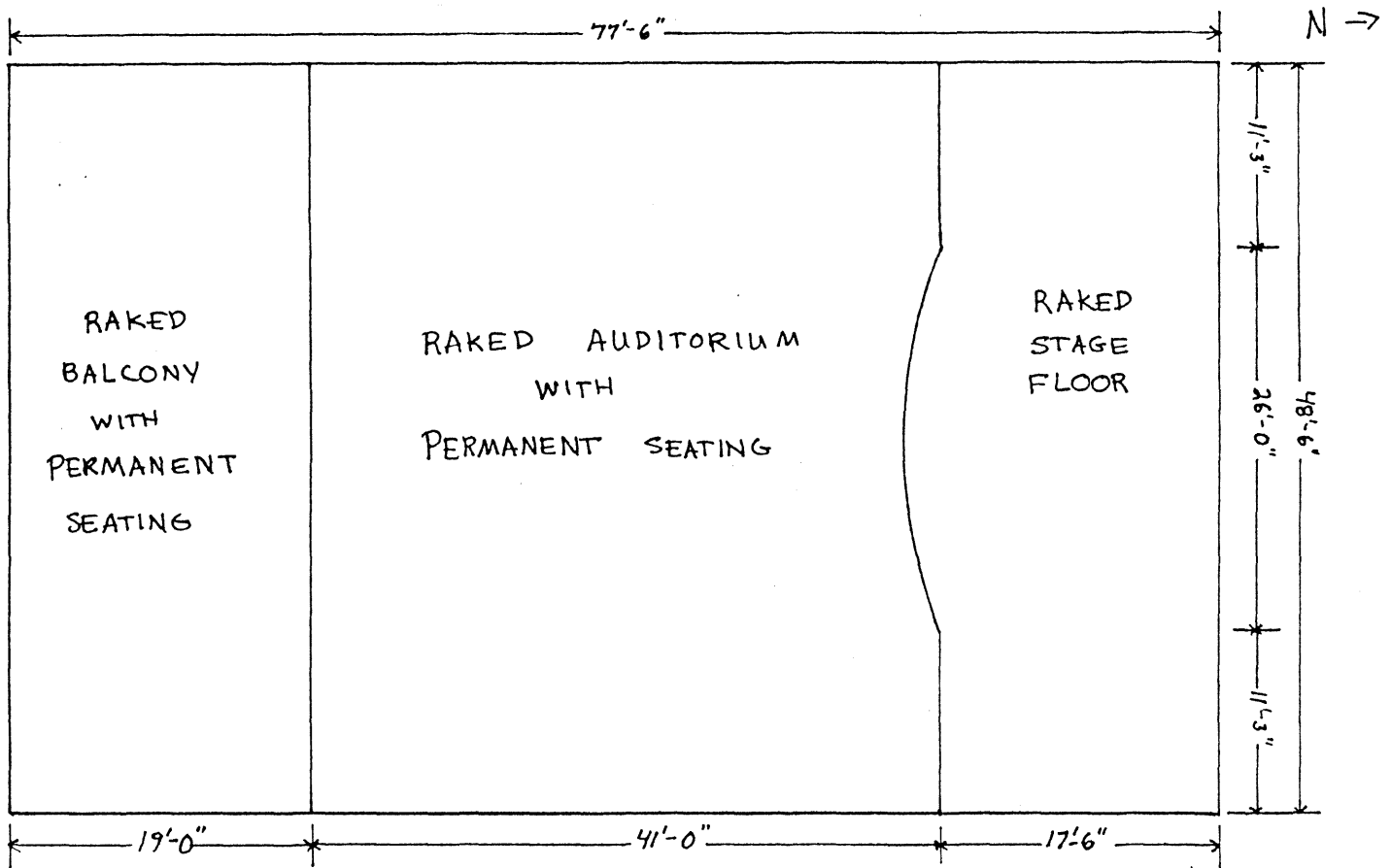
The structural and historical integrity of the building and theatre has been preserved.

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Floor plan, Gourley's Opera House, Rushville



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

1914-1917

Significant Dates

1914

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

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

Gourley's 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 Rushville. As a facility for the performing arts, it offered productions such as touring stock companies, musical concerts, and home talent productions. (See following table of Representative Entertainments 1914-1917.)

This opera house is significant in the area of entertainment/recreation, since it provided a place where the whole community could gather to attend dances and moving pictures. (See following table of Representative Entertainments 1914-1917.)

This opera house is significant in the area of social history, because it gave Rushville a neutral, nonaffiliated location for Memorial Day and other civic services. (See following table of Representative Entertainments 1914-1917.) 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.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Buchan, Robert. Letters to the author. Rushville: 1986.
---. Personal interview. Rushville: 17 Oct. 1987.
---. Telephone interviews. Rushville: 19 May and 13 Oct. 1987.
Daniels, James. Personal interview. Rushville: 24 May 1987.
---. Telephone interview. Rushville: 13 Oct. 1987.
Fraser, Francis. Letter to the author. Rushville: 1987.
Gourley Opera House. Rushville site visits. 24 May and 17 Oct. 1987.
Rushville Centennial Committee. *A Century of Progress: Sheridan County, Nebraska 1885-1985*. Valentine, NE: LT Printing & Stationery, 1985.

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

Acres of property Less than one [1] acre

UTM References

A

1	3	7	0	7	8	8	0	4	7	3	2	4	5	5
Zone			Easting					Northing						

C

Zone			Easting					Northing						

B

Zone			Easting					Northing						

D

Zone			Easting					Northing						

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

This property is described as the east 50 ft. of Lots 11 and 12, Block 1, Original Town of Rushville, Sheridan 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 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, 1914, when Dave Gourley, the owner, was praised by the *Rushville Recorder* as an enterprising citizen ... who has given the town two such considerable improvements--electric lights and an up-to-date theatre" (28 Aug. 1914). 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. Gradually the Gourley Theatre catered solely to entertainment/recreation activities such as dances and movies.

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Gourley Opera House, Rushville
Representative Entertainments, 1914-1917

DATE	EVENT AND PERFORMERS
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Social History

May 1915 Memorial Day services

Entertainment/Recreation

Aug 1914 Moving pictures nightly
Nov 1915 Moving pictures of the Panama Exposition
Dec 1915 *Tam O'Shanter*, moving picture
Dec 1916 Firemen's Annual Ball, music by the Chadron Orchestra

Performing Arts

Nov 1914 The Perrys in *The Shepherd's Call*
Freshman, home talent by the Rushville H.S. Athletic Assn.
Nov 1915 Elwin Strong in *Monte Cristo*
Royal Hawaiian Dramatic and Concert Company
Wesselman Wood Stock Co. with Miss Olga Wood and Billie Young
Dec 1915 *The Devil's Disciple*
Nov 1916 The Hallowell Musical Co. of Chicago
Lawrence Demming Theatre Co. with *The Girl of His Choice*
Dec 1916 Miss M. C. Hutchinson, Literary Interpreter
Nov 1917 Lawrence Deming Theatre Co. with *The Yankee Doodle Boy*
The Community Quartet
Carl M. Dalton in *The Swede, the Tramp, and the Girl*
Dec 1917 *Montana*

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Photographs

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The following information is the same for all Rushville photographs:

NAME OF PROPERTY: Gourley's Opera House
CITY, COUNTY, STATE: Rushville, Sheridan, Nebraska
NeHBS SITE No.: SH08-15
OHBIN SITE No.: 05-24-05
NAME OF PHOTOGRAPHER: Christian H. Ehlers

PHOTO NUMBER: Rushville #1
DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH (and NEGATIVE NUMBER): 05-24-87 (8705/5:29)
LOCATION OF ORIGINAL NEGATIVE: Nebraska State Historical Society
DESCRIPTION OF VIEW INDICATING DIRECTION OF CAMERA: Exterior view, looking northwest at the south (front) and east facades.

PHOTO NUMBER: Rushville #2
DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH (and NEGATIVE NUMBER): 05-24-87 (8705/5:23)
LOCATION OF ORIGINAL NEGATIVE: Nebraska State Historical Society
DESCRIPTION OF VIEW INDICATING DIRECTION OF CAMERA: Interior view, looking north at the stage.

PHOTO NUMBER: Rushville #3
DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH (and NEGATIVE NUMBER): 05-24-87 (8705/5:25)
LOCATION OF ORIGINAL NEGATIVE: Nebraska State Historical Society
DESCRIPTION OF VIEW INDICATING DIRECTION OF CAMERA: Interior view, looking southwest at the west side of the auditorium.