

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PH0673927

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED MAY 1 1979

DATE ENTERED

JUN 20 1979

**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 Institute Hall

AND/OR COMMON

The Opera House, Memorial Hall, Natchez Museum

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER  
111 South Pearl Street

— NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Natchez

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT  
Fourth

STATE

Mississippi

CODE

28

COUNTY

Adams

CODE

1

**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 COMMERCIAL EDUCATIONAL ENTERTAINMENT GOVERNMENT INDUSTRIAL MILITARY MUSEUM PARK PRIVATE RESIDENCE RELIGIOUS SCIENTIFIC TRANSPORTATION OTHER:**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

City of Natchez

STREET &amp; NUMBER

City Hall, P.O. Box 1185

CITY, TOWN

Natchez

VICINITY OF

STATE

Mississippi 39120

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Office of the Chancery Clerk  
Adams County Courthouse

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Courthouse Square

CITY, TOWN

Natchez

STATE

Mississippi 39120

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Statewide Survey of Historic Sites

DATE

1978

— FEDERAL  STATE — COUNTY — LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Mississippi Department of Archives and History

CITY, TOWN

Jackson

STATE

Mississippi 39205

# 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		

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

Situated on the southeast corner of Pearl Street at Bracken Alley in downtown Natchez, Institute Hall is a two-story rectangular brick Greek Revival auditorium with gabled roof pierced by four inside end brick chimneys. The westerly facade and the western end bays of the six-bay northerly and southerly elevations are stuccoed and surmounted with a parapet composed of molded panels set within paneled and molded pedestals. The bays of the stuccoed portion of the building are defined by pilasters, which are paired where they come forward at the center bay of the three-bay facade to support a full-height pedimented portico. The second story, or principal floor, is lighted in the stuccoed area by mullioned windows with double-hung sash framed by shouldered architraves. The remaining windows of the second floor are mullioned, with flat brick arches and wide wooden sills.

Access to the interior is provided on the facade by doorways located in each of the three bays on the first-floor level. The main entrance doorway, located in the center bay, is composed of double-leaf eight-panel molded doors that open onto a stair hall. In the center of the easterly wall of the stair hall were originally a pair of double-leaf doors, one of which has been replaced by a piece of plywood framing an air conditioning unit. The surviving original door, set within a shouldered architrave with paneled jambs, is adorned with a decorative diaper-work pattern of glazed hexagons. The doorway opens onto a long hallway with flanking rooms intersected midway by a cross hall, the arched openings of which have been filled with twentieth-century walls and doors. The ground-floor doors and windows have molded architraves with two fasciae, the windows have flared jambs, the wooden mantelpieces are pilastered, and the bases are simply beaded. The doors are two-paneled, like all of the other interior doors, but are unmolded on the ground floor.

Two matching staircases with massive turned newels and turned balusters run along the northern and southern walls of the stair hall. Each stair makes two quarter turns, with winders at beginning and end. The stairs continue to the balcony of the auditorium in an enclosed flight. The doorway into the auditorium matches the shouldered architrave doorway of the ground floor, except that both of the original double-leaf doors were replaced in a 1921 renovation. The integrity of the auditorium itself is remarkable. Paired pilasters located at either end of the stage support an entablature, the ceilings are coved, and the plaster cornice is original on all but the eastern wall, which was added in the 1921 renovation to enclose the sides and top of the stage. The bases have two fasciae and are molded, original chair railing encircles the room, and the shouldered architraves of the windows are adorned at their peaks with wooden or plaster cornucopias beneath ornaments. Four cast-metal ceiling ornaments (two behind the enclosed stage) and a large cast-metal, perhaps plaster, ceiling centerpiece appear to be original. The balcony is railed with large turned balusters. Worthy of preservation are the 1920s lighting devices and applied decorative ornamentation of patriotic theme.

On the rear of the building is a double-tiered three-bay arcaded brick portico enclosed on the second-floor level with original doors and windows but open on the ground level. The portico served as the primary entrance to the building for the school children of the Natchez Institute, the property contiguous on the rear.

# 6 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input 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 1853 Original construction Weldon Brothers (carpentry)  
 1921 Renovation REYNOLDS & BROWN (masonry)  
 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE C. Sedgwick Moss (1921 renovation)

Erected by the first free school system in Natchez, Institute Hall is a rare surviving example of a Greek Revival auditorium building. Although neglected by the owner, the City of Natchez, and adapted for a wide variety of uses throughout its long history, Institute Hall retains its integrity. The Natchez Institute, said to be the first school in Mississippi to offer a full course of free instruction, opened in 1845, through the generosity of Alvarez Fisk (A.P. Merrill, "Addresses Delivered at the Dedication of the Natchez Institute," July 4, 1845, Natchez-Adams County Public School Archives, Natchez), early Natchez philanthropist (who resided at Choctaw, listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the Neibert-Fisk House). In 1850, the Board of Visitors of the Natchez Institute recorded in its annual July report that it was contemplating erection of a hall of "suitable dimensions to accommodate all who attend [the school's] anniversaries...." (Annual Reports of the Board of Visitors and the Board of Examiners of the Natchez Institute, July, 1850, Natchez). In 1851, the Board of Visitors decided to embark upon the construction of Institute Hall, to be located on a "lot of land contiguous to the rear of the school-house [Natchez Institute], and fronting on Pearl Street...." (Annual Reports, July, 1851). On July 4, 1853, the Institute Hall building was sufficiently complete to be occupied for the first time, for the city's Independence Day celebration (The Natchez Daily Courier, June 30, 1853, p. 2).

The main contractors for Institute Hall were George and Thomas Weldon for the carpentry and Reynolds and Brown for the masonry (Minutes, Board of Selectmen, Natchez, May 5, 1852). No mention of the designer of the building appears in the city records or newspapers; however, the Weldon brothers may have designed it, since they are credited with having designed two other significant Greek Revival public buildings in the state, the courthouses in Raymond and Vicksburg (Raymond, Hinds County, and Vicksburg, Warren County; Statewide Survey of Historic Sites; Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson). Goodspeed's Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi, published in 1891, describes the Weldon brothers (George, Thomas, and also William) as being at one time "the wealthiest and most extensive contractors and builders in the state of Mississippi (vol. I, p. 328). Reynolds and Brown were the most prominent brick masons of antebellum Natchez, and Stanton Hall, a National Historic Landmark, is probably their most famous accomplishment (Mississippi Free Trader, Apr. 5, 1858, p. 1).

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, Institute Hall was the main entertainment center for Natchez, and its auditorium space also served as a public skating rink (The [Natchez] Daily Democrat, Feb. 2, 1894, p. 3). In 1883, the public library was established in a portion of the basement (The Daily Democrat, Apr. 15, 1883, p.2), a use that continued until 1965, when the present public library building was completed (Eleanora Gralow, director of Armstrong Library, Natchez, interviewed by Mary Warren Miller, research consultant, at Natchez, Feb. 20, 1979). The building was occasionally

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Biographical and Historical Memoirs of Mississippi. Chicago: The Goodspeed Publishing Company, 1891.

Gralow, Eleanora, director of Armstrong Library, Natchez. Interviewed by Mary Warren Miller, research consultant, at Natchez, Feb. 20, 1979.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Less than one acre

QUADRANGLE NAME Natchez, Miss. - La.

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A 15 651530 3492539

B               

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C               

D               

E               

F               

G               

H               

## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

See attached photocopy of nominated property outlined in red on city tax map. The nominated property is located on map 2, block 1, parcel 12.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Mary Warren Miller

Research Consultant

ORGANIZATION

DATE

Private Consultant

February 20, 1979

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

506 High Street

(601) 442-9786

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Natchez

Mississippi 39120

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL     

STATE     

LOCAL X

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Elmer B. Hilliard

TITLE

State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

April 16, 1979

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST: Charles Adams  
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER  
Robert Smith  
CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE 6.20.79

DATE 6/19/79

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 & 9 PAGE 1

8 - SIGNIFICANCE

referred to as the Opera House during the 1880s (The Daily Democrat, Feb. 10, 1887, p.2).

The only major renovation of the building was undertaken in 1921, as a memorial to the veterans of World War I. The architect for the sympathetic renovation was C. Sedgwick Moss (plaque, Institute Hall), a partner in the Natchez building firm of Bost and Moss (The Natchez Democrat, Jan. 5, 1921, p. 5), which constructed many of the early twentieth-century buildings in Natchez, the First Baptist Church being the most conspicuous effort (Ibid.). Following the 1921 renovation, Institute Hall became known as Memorial Hall.

Over the past several decades Institute Hall has been sadly neglected and a leaky roof and moisture problems have resulted in loss of some of the original plaster cornice. The basement area is used for storage by the city, and also houses a V. F. W. office and the headquarters of a charitable organization. In 1968, Herbert Allen leased the auditorium space of the hall to install his large collection of regional artifacts and memorabilia. In 1977, the collection was acquired by the Natchez Historical Society, which continues to exhibit the Allen collection in the auditorium. The building is open daily, free of charge, to those who wish to view the exhibits and see the building. It is hoped that eventually funds will be available for its preservation and restoration.

9 - MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Merrill, A.P. "Addresses Delivered at the Dedication of the Natchez Institute,"  
July 4, 1845. Natchez-Adams County Public School Archives, Natchez, Miss.

Mississippi Free Trader, Apr. 5, 1858.

Natchez, Miss. Annual Reports of the Board of Visitors and the Board of Examiners  
of the Natchez Institute. Armstrong Library, Natchez. Microfilm

The [Natchez] Daily Courier, June 30, 1853.

The [Natchez] Daily Democrat, Apr. 15, 1883, Feb. 10, 1887, Feb. 2, 1894.

The Natchez Democrat, Jan. 5, 1921.

INSTITUTE HALL  
MAP 2  
BLOCK 1  
PARCEL 12

RECEIVED  
MAY 1 1919  
NATIONAL  
REGISTER

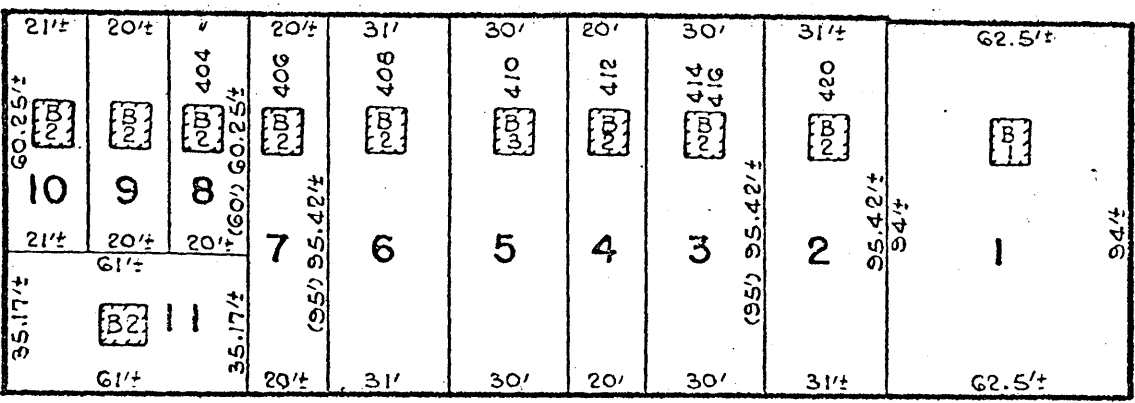
STREET

PEARL

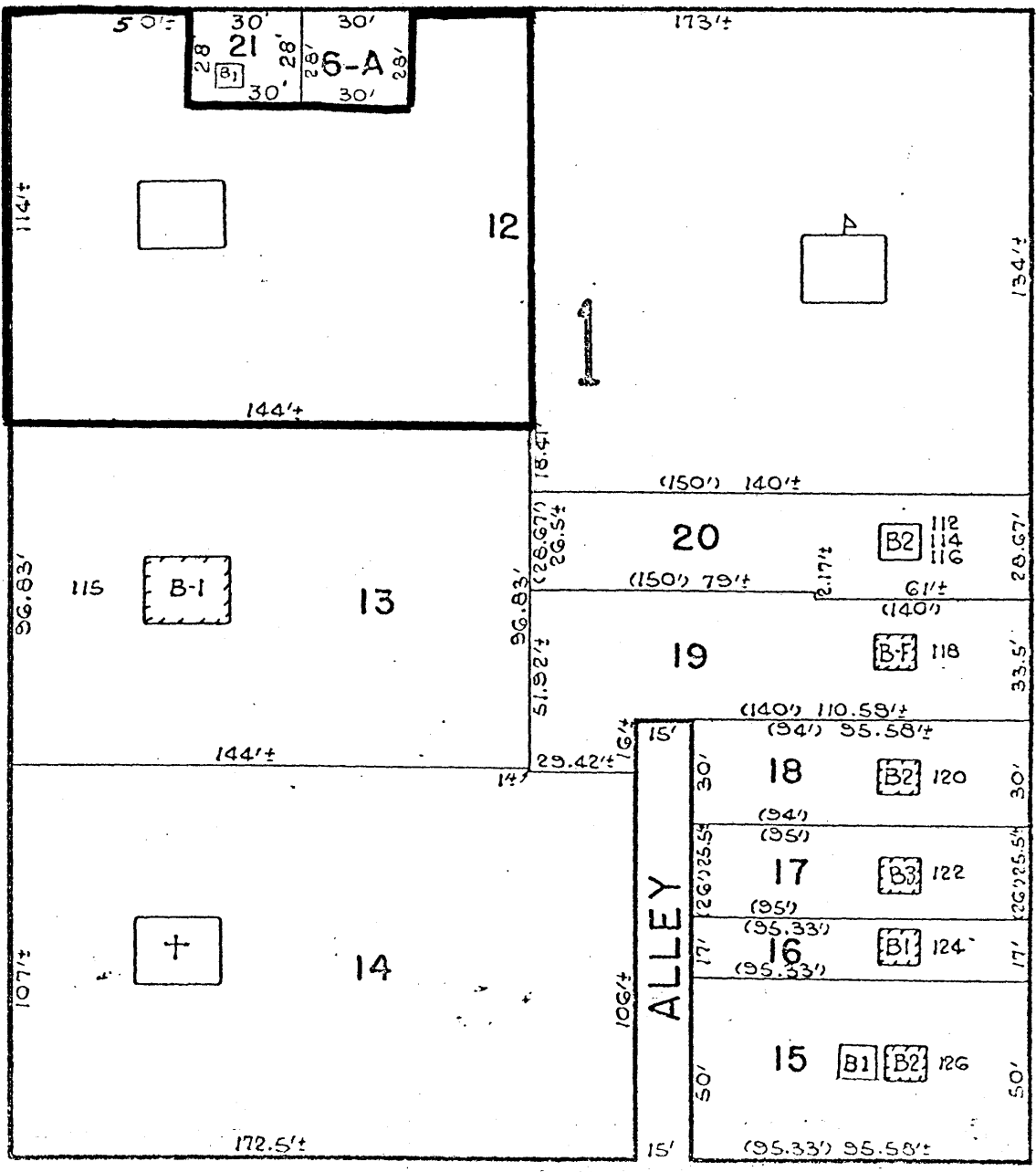
MAIN STREET

STREET

COMMERCE



BRACKEN ALLEY



STATE STREET