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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 for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name Oakland City Auditorium  
Other names/site number BT05-029  
Name of related multiple property listing N/A  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

## 2. Location

Street & Number 401 North Oakland Avenue  
City or town Oakland State Nebraska County Burt  
Not for publication  Vicinity

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:  national  statewide  local

Applicable National Register Criteria:  A  B  C  D

[Signature] SHPO/Director 1/25/19 Date  
Signature of certifying official/Title  
Nebraska State Historical Society  
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Commenting Official Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Title State of Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.
- determined eligible for the National Register.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature] Signature of Keeper 3.26.2019 Date of Action

Oakland City Auditorium  
**Name of Property**

Burt County, Nebraska  
**County and State**

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property** (Check as many boxes as apply)

- Private
- Public-local
- Public-state
- Public-federal

**Category of Property** (Check only **one** box)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

**Number of Resources within Property** (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Buildings
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	Sites
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	Structures
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	Objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register** 0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions** (Enter categories from instructions.)

GOVERNMENT: city hall, fire station  
EDUCATION: library  
RECREATION AND CULTURE: auditorium

**Current Functions** (Enter categories from instructions.)

GOVERNMENT: city hall  
RECREATION AND CULTURE: auditorium  
SOCIAL: meeting hall  
COMMERCE: other, yoga studio

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification** (Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT/ Art Deco

**Materials** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Foundation: Concrete; Façade: Brick, Stone, Glass; Roof: Metal

Oakland City Auditorium

Burt County, Nebraska

**Name of Property****County and State****Description**

**Summary Paragraph** (Briefly describe the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Oakland City Auditorium is a two-story brick Art Deco building on the northeast corner of North Oakland Avenue and East 4<sup>th</sup> Street in Oakland, Burt County, Nebraska. The building anchors the north end of the downtown commercial district. Designed by architect George Grabe and built by the Wilson Company for the City of Oakland in 1941, the building served the community as its city hall, fire station, auditorium, and public library. Its Art Deco styling is evident through vertical pilasters, and curved glass block windows, giving it a distinct stylistic expression from other buildings in the downtown core. Overall, the building retains a high degree of physical historic integrity.

**Narrative Description** (Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable.)

Burt County is a primarily rural and agricultural county in northeast Nebraska. It is approximately midway between Omaha, Nebraska and Sioux City, Iowa, located at the intersection of US Highways 77 and 32. In 1941, the city auditorium provided the historic anchor for the north end of the downtown commercial district. It was neighbored to the south by two- and three-story brick and stone commercial fronts providing services from restaurants, banks, attorneys, and retail outlets to the community residents. Today, Oakland is a small community retaining a population 1,244 in an area of just shy of one square mile.

Oakland City Auditorium was designed by George Grabe, a Fremont, Nebraska architect and was completed in 1941. Grabe is most noted for his school house designs and is credited with approximately 17 schools in communities across eastern Nebraska. Most of the schools were built in the 1920s. By the 1930s, Grabe began designing municipal auditoriums in the same geographical area. To his credit are auditoriums in Wayne, Fremont, Cedar Bluffs, Valentine, and Oakland.<sup>1</sup> The original design dated to 1938 when the city requested Public Works Administration funds for its completion. The funds were not forthcoming, and a two-year delay occurred before the city executed his design. The *Oakland Independent and Republican* noted in their special issue for the formal dedication exercises that Oakland, "Rose Above Disappointments to Attain Its New Hall."<sup>2</sup>

Grabe's concept for the two-story blonde brick building was in the Art Deco style with curved glass block corner windows. He designed the main façade with a central entrance sheltered by an asymmetrical curved aluminum and black awning. The awning extends along the west façade sheltering the four-bay central entrance and the former fire apparatus bay. The central bay with entry doors is recessed from the fire apparatus bay and defined by vertical pilasters with limestone caps that project above the roofline. The projecting stone caps have a chevron relief pattern. A curved wall element at the projecting fire apparatus bay is repeated at the southwest corner of the building and further emphasized at this corner by curved glass block windows at both the first and second story. A simple stone cornice is punctuated by the geometric stone pilaster capitals with chevron relief patterns and incorporates a band of rectangular black structural glass tile inserts. Historic photographs from period newspapers and the architect's plan indicate the original windows were double hung six-over-one panes on the main façade. However, all of these windows have been removed and replaced with aluminum one-over-one units.

Four single entry doors under the awning provide access to the main foyer. These doors have been replaced with dark aluminum frames with full height glass doors. The door opening's height and configuration remain unchanged. The words "CITY AUDITORIUM" are attached in individual letters to the top of the awning. Two original Art Deco style light sconces are

<sup>1</sup> "George Grabe (1883-1949), Architect". Biographical information taken from historic architects profiles at [www.e-nebraskahistory.org](http://www.e-nebraskahistory.org), accessed October 23, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> "Oakland Rose Above Disappointments to Attain Its New Hall." *Oakland Independent and Republican*, Oakland, Nebraska, January 24, 1941. P.2

Oakland City AuditoriumBurt County, Nebraska**Name of Property****County and State**

affixed between the doors. The light fixtures have a bronze colored frame with chevron pattern at the top of the fixture and are filled with frosted glass.

The most notable alteration on the first floor of the main façade is the infill where the former fire apparatus were stored. Originally wood and glass panel doors enclosed the area, but after the fire apparatus left the building in 1978 when the new fire station was constructed just north of the auditorium, the garage type doors were removed, and a permanent storefront was infilled in its place. This infill is composed of blonde brick in an attempt to match the brick on the rest of the building and has a central pedestrian door, flanked by fixed paired window openings on either side of the door. Further, the fenestration throughout the building has been removed and replaced with aluminum one-over-one window units.

The south façade fronts 4<sup>th</sup> Street and, though a secondary façade, it exhibits and retains all the formal detailing on the west façade. Four brick pilasters with chevron engraved stone caps project above the stone cornice line, and the black structural glass tile inserts repeat around the corner. The auditorium space extends to the east and is recessed from the main bay of the building, allowing the opportunity for another curved glass block window on both the first and second floors. The auditorium bay is clad in the same blonde brick as the main body of the building. Repeating the pilaster design on this façade are four stepped brick pilasters that also extend above the roof line, retaining the stepped configuration. Two pedestrian doors are located on this façade: one provides egress from the backstage area and one from the main auditorium space. Today these doors are unadorned metal doors painted tan. A lower level and stage level glass block window opening is located at the east end of the south façade. This glass block is a new replacement material.

The alley or west façade is narrow and has only a large brick chimney that extends above the roofline and two glass block windows with a pedestrian door at the center of the façade. Facing the alley, this elevation is minimally visible. The north elevation is utilitarian in nature, and the brick has been covered with stucco. This elevation has an original bump-out that houses a commercial kitchen and storage room off the auditorium space. A glass block window at the east end of the north façade illuminates the backstage space with three additional window units within the main auditorium space. There are three truncated windows that are located within the balcony area. Infilled window openings are located at the kitchen area. Due to neighboring buildings this façade is minimally visible. Another pedestrian door accesses the kitchen at this façade.

Upon entering the main doors, a vestibule with coffered ceiling and fixed transoms retains original glass globe and metal ceiling mounted light fixtures. A central corridor leads the visitor to the main auditorium space with visual cues inlaid in the two-tone terrazzo floor. Green edges, base, and stylized arrows are embedded in a red background pointing directly to the double auditorium doors. The corridor walls are clad with glazed tile on the lower half of the wall, with plaster to the ceiling. Coat racks line the corridor with a ticket booth inset under a stepped flat arch at the north side of the corridor. Adjacent to the ticket booth is a narrow door accessing the former men's room that is no longer used. Five plaques are hung in the corridor to identify those donors and sponsor groups responsible for construction of the City Auditorium.

The bay south of the corridor today houses the Oakland City Clerk's office. This area has been altered with modern finishes that include carpets, dropped ceilings, paneling, and storage bulkheads. An original safe is located in northeast corner of this room. This room was originally designed as the city council chambers. Across the main corridor is the former apparatus bay for the fire equipment. Today this has been finished for use as a meeting room by the Lions Club. The room has carpeting, dropped ceilings, and wood paneling. Adjacent to this room are a modern residential style kitchen and the public restroom facilities for the main floor.

The auditorium space itself is a large open room with maple wood floors, glazed ceramic tile walls with plaster above, and a center stage. A commercial kitchen with modern appliances and a storage room are located along the north wall of the space. The original swinging wood doors with diamond pane windows access the kitchen. Three food service pass-throughs with wood panel screens that raise to provide access also are retained. The space has always been a kitchen and retains its original footprint and cabinetry, but with updated appliances. Blue velvet stage curtains enclose the elevated performance area and a fluted proscenium arch surrounds the stage opening. Steps and side doors access the stage wings on each side of the stairs. These doors also lead to the lower level and a separate men's and women's restroom facility. The stage retains its foot lighting, and under stage storage drawers. The windows in this space have also been replaced with modern aluminum units. The original windows had three parts with a multi-pane fixed unit above a one-over-one double hung unit.

Oakland City Auditorium

Burt County, Nebraska

**Name of Property**

**County and State**

The balcony was part of the original design that was eliminated due to budget constraints. Its construction was made possible by private donations to enhance the space and expand seating. A donor plaque identifies the gift in the main corridor. The balcony provides approximately 125 seats bringing the total seating capacity of the auditorium to 600. The original folding wood chairs and simple metal pipe rail remain. Acoustic ceiling tiles are painted to match the walls and are original to the space. The balcony is steeply canted and retains its wood folding chairs. Many of the original wood doors retain their gold leaf lettering identifying their use.

Grey and red terrazzo stairs access the second floor and are located between the main corridor and the Lions Club meeting room. At the top of the stairs, the former community room has two-toned asbestos tile flooring, and is currently used as a private yoga and massage studio. This room also has painted paneling and a dropped ceiling. Of note at the east wall is a dumbwaiter that accesses the commercial kitchen below.

Across the hall to the south on the second floor is the former library space. Two original angled wood and glass paneled doors access the space that was the library and former police department office space. These spaces are now vacant and have modern finishes including dropped ceilings, paneled walls, and vinyl flooring. A women's restroom is also located at the top of the stairs adjacent to the balcony doors.

Much of the detail of the original design and construction is known by referencing Grabe's original plans, a copy of which is housed in the city clerk's office. Changes over time to the building include the addition of modern finishes within the office spaces, removal of all the windows, and the replaced storefront at the north end of the west façade

Overall, the Oakland City Auditorium retains a high degree of historic integrity. Its architectural style, physical layout, use, design, setting, and materials are all in-tact. Significant spaces such as the auditorium, balcony, kitchen, main corridor, and office and library spaces remain today. The city clerk's office retains is the only space that retains its original governmental use and despite the loss of original materials, retains a high degree of integrity in the other aspects of integrity. The fire station bay is the only interior space that has undergone significant alteration to convert it to a community room. The two-story brick structure designed by George Grabe served Oakland's civic needs from its construction through the current day, and despite some areas of vacancy, the building has been continuously occupied in it is original intent. The floorplan and auditorium space remain in original condition.

The building is in very good condition. Some evidence of water damage is notable around windows within the auditorium space and the lower level is generally unused, but overall the city has maintained the building commendably.

Oakland City Auditorium  
**Name of Property**

Burt County, Nebraska  
**County and State**

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** Removed from its original location.
- C** A birthplace or a grave.
- D** A cemetery.  
A reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- E** A commemorative property.
- F** Less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance**

1941-1969

**Significant Dates**

1941-Date of dedication/occupancy

1956-Date fire staff leave building (apparatus remains in place)

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

George Grabe (architect)

Wilson Construction (builder)

Oakland City Auditorium

Burt County, Nebraska

**Name of Property**

**County and State**

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Oakland City Auditorium is significant at the local level under Criterion A for its association with the development of politics and government. It is also significant for its contribution to the development of entertainment and recreation in the community by providing a publicly accessible meeting space and performance area that housed a variety of events. The city fought hard to construct the building, particularly after a failed attempt at federally sponsored PWA funds, and the effort to pass bonds to pay for the construction costs privately. When completed in 1941, it housed the city offices, auditorium space, public library, and fire department. It is also locally significant under Criterion C in the area of architecture. Architect George Grabe, from neighboring Fremont, Nebraska, designed the building in the Art Deco style, and it remains a strong representation of that style in the city of Oakland. Today, the building remains the city clerk's office along with a mix of small commercial space and community rooms supporting the auditorium space. Oakland City Auditorium retains a high degree of historic integrity and its period of significance begins at its construction date in 1941 and extends through 1969, the fifty-year cut-off date established by the National Park Service. This date was chosen because the building continues to serve important entertainment/recreation purposes and still houses significant city offices, even though the library and fire station have relocated.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

**Historic Overview**

Sporadic settlement took place in the area in and around Oakland during the late 1850s and 1860s with settlers establishing blacksmith shops, mills, and farms. The fledgling community was named Oakland in 1868 in honor of John Oak, an early settler who established the post office. In addition to serving as the first postmaster, Oak also purchased part of the original townsite from the state of Nebraska in 1871. The community grew throughout the 1870s with commercial expansion that included a general store, hotel, druggist, and the beginnings of community and social spaces such as churches and fraternal organizations. The first of which were the First Evangelical Lutheran Church and the First Baptist Church. Banking institutions soon followed with the First National Bank constructed in 1879. Oakland's population reached 227 citizens in the 1870s. The city was incorporated in 1881 with 30 businesses, two banks, and one printing office. Railroads were an important factor in the community's development with the first, the Chicago and North Western Railway, arriving in 1880. Additionally, the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad arrived in Oakland in 1900, and bolstered the economy by providing expanded markets for farm commodities and access to supplies for general stores.<sup>3</sup>

As the city continued to grow, they expanded their public services and built a 40-acre park established in 1921, a swimming pool the following year, and a nine-hole golf course. The city paved 84 blocks of the community which eased some of the traffic as they were a large livestock and feed shipping point. The city's population peaked in the 1950 census reaching nearly 1500 people. However, it has remained consistently at approximately 1200 citizens for the past four decades.<sup>4</sup>

**Old City Hall and New Deal Programs**

Oakland city offices originally occupied a two-story, false-front, wood frame building constructed in 1881 as its city hall. The original building was located on Main Street and had significantly declined over the years contributing to the reasons and need for a new municipal building. By the late 1930s, the local paper, the *Oakland Independent and Republican*, was strongly in favor of a new building and was a constant advocate for the project. It reported that the old building was inadequate, an eye sore, unsafe, a fire-trap (even though it stored the fire truck), and that "the present city hall makes every citizen of Oakland who has any pride in his town hang his head in shame."<sup>5</sup> Politically, the time was ripe. The former building had been in use for nearly 60 years and continued to deteriorate. Furthermore, the economic environment of the 1930s provided financial incentives to support new construction. The paper asserted that funding from the Public Works

<sup>3</sup> "History of Oakland, Nebraska" excerpt taken from A History of Burt County, Nebraska From 1803 to 1929. The Ludi Printing Co., Wahoo, Nebraska, 1929. Accessed at [www.history.rays-place.com/ne/burt-oakland/](http://www.history.rays-place.com/ne/burt-oakland/), October 23, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Millicent Troupe, "Oakland, Burt County" Virtual Nebraska, Nebraska... Our Towns. Accessed at [www.casde.unl.edu/history/counties/burt/Oakland/](http://www.casde.unl.edu/history/counties/burt/Oakland/), October 23, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> "Oakland to Vote on City Hall Tuesday," *Oakland Independent and Republican*, Oakland, Nebraska August 12, 1938. P. 1

Oakland City Auditorium

Burt County, Nebraska

**Name of Property**

**County and State**

Administration should be pursued for the project. The agency's acronym, PWA, would come to be known for something else in Oakland by the time the building was completed.

The PWA was one of the federally funded make work programs established by the federal government to help pull the country out of the Great Depression of the 1930s. However, communities like Oakland that were heavily dependent on the agricultural economy had felt the effects of the decline of farm prices for most of the 1920s. Farm prices spiked drastically after World War I and fell the same as they had risen during the 1920s. Farm prices were the lowest in Nebraska history in 1932, and that struggle was amplified by a severe drought throughout the state and much of the Midwest. As a response President Franklin Delano Roosevelt set in motion a series of agricultural reforms and make-work programs as part of his New Deal policies after his inauguration. The New Deal responded to what Roosevelt saw as his greatest task of putting people to work.<sup>6</sup>

Under the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 (NIRA), multiple programs were established to provide public work relief projects, jobs, and direct relief payments for a variety of public improvement projects across the nation. One of the programs created the under NIRA was the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works.<sup>7</sup> Under this program loans were provided to local and state governments for the hiring of private companies who then employed local workers; workers were not employed by the PWA directly. This allowed local and state governments to undertake construction projects that otherwise would not have been feasible due to the poor economic environment while employing local community members. These public works projects bolstered American morale more than the dole because of the equal exchange: work for pay.<sup>8</sup>

In 1935, the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works was renamed the Public Works Administration (PWA). The PWA funded more than 34,000 projects between 1933 and 1939 at a cost of over \$6 billion. Although the goal of the PWA to impact unemployment and increase small business and industry nationwide was not fully met, it did have an impact on temporary employment relief. Most importantly for the Oakland City Auditorium, the program provided the federal government with a mechanism to grant funds to local governments. With the nation's attention now focused on combating Nazi Germany and the Empire of Japan, the PWA was abolished in June 1943; its primary functions were merged into the Federal Works Agency.<sup>9</sup>

Public perception of Oakland's need for a new city hall was largely based on the deteriorated condition of the existing 1881 building. Squeaking floors, sagging roof and floor joists, and unstable stairs were a constant reminder of the inadequacy of the dated building. The paper noted that the old city hall was so run down that it swayed in the wind.<sup>10</sup> The Holmquist family gifted the city land on which to construct a new building in memory of the late A.C. Holmquist, Sr. Holmquist was a former mayor of Oakland, active community supporter, and served more than 30 years on the school board. The site was located on Main Street (now Oakland Avenue) and was considered part of the old Hulbert estate property. The city accepted the property and agreed with the family that construction of a new city building would start within 18 months. If the city could not meet this goal, the property would revert to the family. They chose to pursue a PWA grant that had the potential to provide up to 45 percent of the construction cost of the new building.<sup>11</sup>

Following the donation, C.C. Neumann and Dr. L.P. Johnson, both representatives of the Chamber of Commerce, lead a committee to collect signatures on a petition to request PWA funds for the project. The city filed a grant and requested PWA funds using the plans prepared by George Grabe, an architect from Fremont, Nebraska. The election to approve the project was held on August 12, 1938, with 515 of 574 voters approving the ballot. The city council approved the petition at

<sup>6</sup> Jill Dolberg. "New Deal Work Relief Projects in Nebraska." Draft National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form, March 22, 2010. E1.

<sup>7</sup> "Transcript of the National Industrial Recovery Act (1933)," accessed at <http://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=66&page=transcript>, January 9, 2019

<sup>8</sup> Robert Leighninger, Jr., *Long Range Public Investment: The Forgotten Legacy of the New Deal*, (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), P.80-1.

<sup>9</sup> Dolberg, E4.

<sup>10</sup> "Disappointments" P. 12

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



Oakland City Auditorium

Burt County, Nebraska

**Name of Property**

**County and State**

their meeting on August 16, 1938 and Grabe was hired to design the project. The city requested a special bond election to approve the \$30,000 budget for the project, believing the PWA would fund a portion of the cost. Planning continued for the new building, however, the PWA funds were not forthcoming. In November 1938, Oakland Mayor C. A. Russell sent a telegram to Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes requesting an update on the status of their funds. H. A. Gray, Ickes' assistant, replied and informed Mayor Russell that "substantially all of the money appropriated by the 1938 act has now been allotted and we can offer you no encouragement at the present time regarding your allotment for this project."<sup>12</sup> Gray went on to explain that the primary purpose of the program was to support and create employment quickly, and in order to meet that need the agency encouraged applications that exceeded their funding availability. The agency was determined to expend every dollar allocated to them. He explained that their effort to contact municipalities was to offer "informed assistance" in filing their applications, and not to actually solicit the applications. The city's confusion over this intention is clear and their disappointment at the loss of funds was great.<sup>13</sup>

Though the project was put to sleep after this lack of funding, it became a topic of conversation at social gatherings and civic meetings across town during the winter months of 1938 and 1939. The PWA was still an active organization, but the community lost confidence that they would be granted funds to construct their building. However, the year of planning and discussions fueled a revived conversation about a new city hall, and the city again began to feel energized about the opportunity. Not to be deterred, the sentiment prevailed that if they wanted a new building, they had to figure out how to fund it themselves. The same committee of Neumann and Johnson presented a second petition to the city council to support a new bond election, this time requiring the people of Oakland to support the entire cost of the building. Negotiations with the Holmquist family succeeded in a new agreement to extend the time stipulations of their land donations.<sup>14</sup>

A second vote was required, and on April 2, 1940, the election shattered all voter records with 596 voters casting ballots and 444 in favor of the bond issue to fund a new city auditorium for an increased cost of \$35,000.<sup>15</sup> Oaklanders passed the vote for the second time in two years, and "in general realize the need of a structure to replace the dilapidated shack that now passes for a city hall."<sup>16</sup> The community's distaste for the PWA program was emphasized in editorials and the slogan adopted by many that, the "decision was made to go ahead again on a different PWA-Privately, Without Aid basis."<sup>17</sup> Work began in earnest to clear the site and begin construction. Funding for the project, though overwhelmingly supported by the sale of bonds, was further bolstered by private donations. Oakland American Legion Post number 48 and the Legion Auxiliary announced that they contributed nearly \$900 of their building fund to the city with no stipulations except that it be used for the new city hall building. Oakland Woman's Club also donated over \$700 to furnish the library. Ground was broken on the new building on July 1, 1940. Construction efforts at the site were considered Oakland's top free attraction.<sup>18</sup>

Upon accepting bids and proceeding with contract awards, the city realized they had to cut back on some of the design features to stay within budget. One of which was the auditorium balcony. Again, private donations came through when eight Oakland men contributed \$100 each with an additional \$200 from Oakland band funds to generate \$1000 to construct the balcony. The eight were wealthy community supporters and included Victory Gylfe, Elmer V. Colson, Dr. L.P. Johnson, A.L. Neumann, Herman Von Essen, W.B. Engdahl, Emily W. Nelson and C.C. Neumann. Along with the balcony, these funds also added a storage room for the band equipment located off the upstairs community room on the north side of the building.<sup>19</sup>

Construction on the building from July 1940 through January 1941 was efficient and employed many local residents. Much fanfare and celebration was given to the city for constructing the building using their own funds rather than pursuing other

<sup>12</sup> "PWA Official Answers Wire on City Hall" *Oakland Independent and Republican*, Oakland, Nebraska: November 11, 1938. P1

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> "Disappointments" p1

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> "PWA Official Answers" P 1

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> "Donors Make Possible City Hall Addition." *Oakland Independent and Republican*, Oakland, Nebraska, July 26, 1940.

Oakland City Auditorium

Burt County, Nebraska

**Name of Property**

**County and State**

federal aid. Newspaper accounts noted that, "not so much as a nickel's worth of government assistance or outside aid was contributed."<sup>20</sup> They continued to laud that theirs was a different kind of PWA-Privately, Without Aid. The city was praised for their effort to complete the building Privately, Without Aid. Karl Stefan, Third District Congressman from Nebraska posted the newspaper articles on his office wall and shared the story with other legislators who visited him in Washington, D.C. Apparently, much conversation in Washington focused on the progressive nature of the small Nebraska community and their desire for a new city hall building completed without federal aid. Newspapers from surrounding counties also lauded the effort.<sup>21</sup>

The dedication of the new city hall took place on Sunday, January 26, 1941 at 3:00 in the afternoon with a formal banquet, singers, and speakers. The festivities continued throughout the week as Oakland celebrated what it considered one of the most outstanding events in their 60-year history. Highlighted in newspaper accounts around the building dedication was the following: "Aunt Jemima, famed negro singer, will come here Tuesday to entertain with her songs and supervise the serving of the pancakes with which her name is associated." Free pancakes were served most of the day.<sup>22</sup>

Aunt Jemima was the world's first ready mix pancake mix developed by Chris Rutt and Charles Underwood of the Pearl Milling Company in 1889. The company traded ownership over the years until it landed in the hands of the Quaker Oats Company in 1926. Marketing introduced in 1890 included an actress that portrayed the Aunt Jemima character. Nancy Green was a storyteller, cook, missionary worker and the first to bring the character to life. She traveled to promote the mix at noteworthy events such as the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. She was such a huge success that special security was provided to her booth at the Exposition and she was signed to a lifetime contract to travel on promotional tours across the country. She was 56 years old at the time, and she retained her position until she was killed in a car accident in 1923. In 1933 Anna Robinson portrayed Aunt Jemima at the Century of Progress Exposition, the second Chicago World's Fair. She traveled the country extensively promoting the product and earned enough money to support her family and buy a 22-room house that she used to rent rooms to boarders.<sup>23</sup> According to [www.blackthen.com](http://www.blackthen.com) Robinson will be distinctly remembered by the company. They provide the following quote, "Never to be forgotten was the day they loaded 350 pounds of Anna Robinson on the Twentieth Century Limited and sent her to New York in the custody of the Lord and Thomas Advertising Agency to pose for pictures."<sup>24</sup> The company designed entire campaigns around her and arranged for personal appearances with Hollywood celebrities and at famous places. She was so successful for the company that her advertisements were among the highest read of their time. The company commissioned a portrait of her by well-known artist Haddon Sunblom, and her likeness became the image on the packaging. Robinson remained on the Quaker Oats payroll until her death in 1951.<sup>25</sup> Though her name was not confirmed, because of the popularity of the character and her employment with the company, it can be assumed that Robinson was the "Aunt Jemima" character who came to Oakland to serve pancakes.

Success and acceptance of the building was apparent immediately after its construction when its public meeting rooms were put to use. Events from fraternal society dances, garden club meetings, rural carrier meetings and city and county events all populated the place. Within months, the old "rickety and a laughing stock" city hall was razed.<sup>26</sup>

The library space was largely stocked, supported and funded by the Oakland Woman's Club. They donated a total of \$757.83 upon completion of the new building. The group raised money while active and donated to the library after they disbanded. Though the group was defunct at the time of their final donation, local member Katherine Boyd was recognized for her active part in developing the library.

<sup>20</sup> "City Awaits Dedication of City Hall." *Oakland Independent and Republican*. Oakland, Nebraska, January 24, 1941.

<sup>21</sup> "Congressmen Get Kick Out of Local PWA Hall." *Oakland Independent and Republican*. Oakland, Nebraska, February 7, 1941. P7

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> "Our History." [www.auntjemima.com/our-history](http://www.auntjemima.com/our-history), accessed January 11, 2019.

<sup>24</sup> "Living Trademarks: The Women Behind the Faces of Aunt Jemima." [www.blackthen.com](http://www.blackthen.com), accessed January 11, 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> "Wrecking Crew Starts Razing Old City Hall." *Oakland Independent and Republican*. Oakland, Nebraska March 7, 1941.

Oakland City Auditorium

Burt County, Nebraska

**Name of Property**

**County and State**

Oakland City Auditorium was fully occupied by the library, city hall, auditorium, and fire apparatus for many years. Thus serving the need of the community to modernize and centralize their government services. The Fire Department fully relocated to new quarters in 1978 when a new building was constructed one block north for their exclusive use.<sup>27</sup> Sometime after this new fire hall was dedicated, the overhead garage doors were removed and a brick infill to match the existing façade materials was installed in its place, marking the most notable change on the main façade of the building. The space where the fire apparatus was stored was then converted to a meeting room with contemporary finishes including carpet, wall paneling, a dropped ceiling, and a residential kitchen and restroom facilities.

Eight years later the library realized their need for new space. The library closed for six weeks in 1986 to move from their upstairs rooms at the City Auditorium to their newly leased building located in the former Nelson Hatchery on Third Street, just one block away. The larger space afforded approximately 3,000 square feet to the library on one level which tripled the space of the old library. After 45 years in the City Auditorium the second-floor facility closed to move to its more modern home with extended hours and greater accessibility. This would be the fifth home for the library since its inception when the first library opened in 1915 in a 5 x 7-foot room in the back of the Oakland State Bank Building. It then moved to the basement of the First National Bank Building and followed that to the upstairs of the implement building which is now the Masonic Lodge. All of these locations, along with their longest-term residency in the 1941 City Auditorium were on Main Street.<sup>28</sup>

Since its construction, the auditorium space provided Oakland and its citizens with its only significant indoor performance area. It is significant in the area of entertainment and recreation because it provided a functional space for school performances, city band performances, and special events. Its central location, designed theater space, and accessibility to the public are part of its important story. For the first time in its history, Oakland was able to host indoor entertainment events, not only for traveling theatre companies and musicians, but for important events for the community. Immediately upon its completion, community organizations hosted their annual meetings, dances, and celebrations in the auditorium space. In the 1940s, organizations such as the Rebekah lodges held regional meetings in the Auditorium. The kitchen was an important feature because it provided an area for food preparation and serving. This elevated the auditorium into a full-service event space, rather than just a meeting space where refreshments would have to be catered and brought in by outside vendors. The Oakland High School used the auditorium for larger productions that could not be housed in the school such as their 1956 performance of the "Brother Goose" production, a three-act comedy that drew crowds not only from Oakland, but neighboring communities. The space was also used for educational events such as a sewing machine care, clinic and workshop in 1949.<sup>29</sup>

Local organizations like the Chamber of Commerce and 4-H held their annual banquets and Jamborees in the space. An extensive and exhaustive list of the annual events, dances, dinners, and social meetings that were held in the auditorium could be documented through intensive local newspaper research. However, the individual events are not as critical to the entertainment/recreation area of significance as is the establishment of the building as the default location for these important and landmark local events. Also, for the first time in their history, the community had a venue to offer traveling entertainers. In the 1940s and 1950s, some of these included the comedy and music act of Dorsey and Fiore who performed as part of the Oakland Harvest Festival in 1949. This was their first appearance in the Midwest after appearing on television shows in Boston.<sup>30</sup> In the same year, the auditorium hosted a major musical attraction. Consisting of a 100-member operetta comprising 70 singers and a 30-member orchestra, "The Desert Song" from the Council Bluffs Civic Music Society in Iowa, performed in the Oakland Auditorium.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>27</sup> "500 Attend Fire Hall Dedication Sunday." *Oakland Independent and Republican*. Oakland, Nebraska. February 7, 1978. P1.

<sup>28</sup> "Patrons' Praises Spark Opening of New Library." *Oakland Independent and Republican*. Oakland, Nebraska, May 8, 1986. P29.

<sup>29</sup> "Sewing Clinic" *Oakland Independent and Republican*, October 27, 1949.

<sup>30</sup> "Comedy Act" *Oakland Independent and Republican*, September 8, 1949.

<sup>31</sup> "Major Musical Attraction." *Oakland Independent and Republican*, November 3, 1949.

Oakland City Auditorium

Burt County, Nebraska

**Name of Property**

**County and State**

During the 1950s and 1960s, local bands also played the auditorium stage. Oakland native turned Lincoln architect Dan Worth and his band "The Lip" played the Oakland stage in the mid-1960s. Other area garage bands and budding performers participated in concerts, as entertainers for school formals like Prom, and area music festivals.<sup>32</sup>

Reflections on the importance of the auditorium were documented in a January 25, 1990 opinion column "Independently Speaking" by Dewaine Graham who noted that the building is commonly known as and considered "The Meeting Place" and that in 1989 there were 419 club meetings and events held in the auditorium. Though this is outside the period of significance for the property, it illustrates the value of the public space and how that value continued to grow over time.

**City government**

After the building's completion in 1941, it served the city of Oakland as the hub of city government. As the home of the City Clerk's office, the building provided the municipal administrative services responsible for fulfilling statutory requirements of the position including managing elections and records for the town. The clerk's office provides the public record of the official actions of the city government. Supporting these legal and regulatory actions were the civic interests presented in the library space. The city's responsibility to provide fire protection to the community resided in the building. This building is significant because since its construction it has served to manage the functions of the city's elected offices and daily management.

**Architecture**

George Grabe designed the building for the city as part of its initial funding effort in 1938. He was chosen because of his successful design for the Fremont Municipal Auditorium, also listed in the National Register (NPS #02000773). Fremont Municipal Auditorium also has Art Deco elements, but without the rounded corners and applied details of its smaller cousin in Oakland. Grabe was born in Germany in 1883 and came to America with his family as a young child. He started a construction business in Omaha after marrying at the age of 18. In 1914, Grabe partnered with John Helleberg, Sr. and began practicing architecture. He moved his practice to Fremont in 1928 and is most noted for his schoolhouse designs of which he designed approximately 17 in the 1920s. The following decade, he designed five municipal auditoriums in Wayne, Fremont, Cedar Bluffs, Valentine and Oakland, Nebraska. Two of which, the Wayne Municipal Auditorium (NPS #02000273) and the Fremont Municipal Auditorium are listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Grabe embraced the modern architectural styles of the times as his buildings reflect Art Deco and Art Moderne styles.<sup>33</sup> He died in 1949 in an automobile accident.

The Art Deco style was a modern movement of decorative arts and architecture that began in the 1920s. It typically relied on bold designs, clear lines, vibrant colors and patterns. Geometric shapes and bright color schemes were often prominent features. Its development originated in France just before World War I, and unlike many architectural styles, the movement was prominent through all areas of decorative arts, jewelry, fashion, transportation resources, and everyday objects. The name came from the *Arts Decoratifs* from the 1925 Paris Worlds Fair International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts. The exhibits reflected luxury, glamour, and technology. Rare and expensive materials such as ebony, ivory, stainless steel, and crystal were incorporated into buildings, decorative arts, and automobiles. The exuberance of the style became more subdued during the Great Depression in the 1930s, and in some cases evolved into the more simplistic Streamline Moderne style. This iteration of Art Deco featured curving forms with smooth, transparent, or polished surfaces. Art Deco is credited as one of the first international styles but was relatively short lived as it virtually ceased with the beginning of World War II and a political influence that dictated strictly functional and unadorned modernism.<sup>34</sup>

Art Deco buildings typically have a sleek linear appearance with stylized and geometric ornamentation. Grabe achieved all the tenets of the style, not only through the design of the exterior, but the applied decorative arts inside the building. Features such as the glass and metal light fixtures, escutcheons and door hardware and terrazzo floors all represent stylized

<sup>32</sup> Recollections of Dan Worth, email exchange, November 8, 2018.

<sup>33</sup> David Murphy, "George Grabe (1883-1949), Architect," in David Murphy, Edward F. Zimmer and Lynn Meyer, comps. *Place Makers of Nebraska: The Architects*. Lincoln; Nebraska State Historical Society, December 18, 2014. Accessed October 23, 2019 at <http://www.e-nebraskahistory.org>

<sup>34</sup> Leland M. Roth. *Understanding Architecture: Its Elements, History, and Meaning*. Icon Editions a division of Harper, Collins, New York, New York, 1993. PP70-85.

Oakland City Auditorium

Burt County, Nebraska

**Name of Property**

**County and State**

Art Deco elements. He further incorporated the elements of geometric shapes, curving forms, transparencies and polished surfaces in small scale, but distinct ways throughout the building. The pilasters on the main façade retain their stone caps and geometric relief while those on the south façade have a ziggurat brick pattern that enhances the surface texture of the building. He further incorporated black structural glass tile inserts as a type of beltcourse just below the cornice. The shiny black glass is reflective of ebony that is often used as an element in Art Deco decorative arts. Grabe fully incorporated his vision not only in the applied ornaments of the building façade, but in the footprint itself. The curved corner walls with curved glass block windows are illustrative of the style.

**Summary**

Today the City Auditorium is home to the City Clerk's office and a meeting room used by the Lion's Club. The auditorium space remains intact with a high degree of physical integrity and is used for local band performances, plays, dances, and other celebrations. Upstairs, the library space is empty, and the former community room is now used as a yoga and massage studio. The building is being nominated under National Register Criterion A for its significance at the local level in the areas of Politics/Government and Entertainment/Recreation.

In the area of Politics/Government the building provided the first space to consolidate city services and represents a communal effort to design and build a functional central space for local government affairs. The concerted effort and support of the citizens of Oakland to fund the construction without government assistance contributes to the significance and illustrates the determination of the city political organizations and the voting public to build this landmark for the community. The community saw the design, construction, and funding of the building as an area of great pride and it represents that significant story in Oakland's local political history. The building has served as the hub of city government since its completion. The day-to-day management of municipal activities, up to the current day, continues to express the important political and governmental role the building plays in a functioning municipality.

In the area of Entertainment/Recreation, the auditorium space provided not only a gathering spot for performances by local bands, high school events, and community celebrations, but attracted national and regional theatre and entertainment troops for the first time in Oakland's history. It became the meeting place for almost all local groups and provided a venue for educational seminars, annual meetings, fundraisers, dances, dinners, and many other similar activities.

The building is also significant at the local level under National Register Criterion C for its architectural significance to the community of Oakland. Fremont architect George Grabe designed the Art Deco property specifically for the needs of the community and incorporated the Deco design features throughout the interior and exterior of the building. At the local level it epitomizes this style and is an expressively modern building on their main commercial street.

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**9. Major Bibliographic References**

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**Bibliography** (Insert bibliography here – cite the books, articles and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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Oakland City Auditorium

Burt County, Nebraska

**Name of Property**

**County and State**

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*Oakland Independent and Republic, Oakland, Nebraska.*

- "Proceedings of the City Council." July 29, 1938
- "Oakland To Vote on City Hall Tuesday" August 12, 1938
- "PWA Official Answers Wire on City Hall" November 11, 1938
- "Vote on City Hall Again Tuesday." March 29, 1940
- "Donors Make Possible City Hall Addition" July 26, 1940.
- "Oakland Rose Above Disappointments to Attain Its New Hall." January 24, 1941
- "City Awaits Dedication of City Hall." January 24, 1941
- Various events and activities, April 18, 1941
- "Wrecking crew Starts Razing Old City Hall." March 7, 1941
- "Woman's Club Gave \$757.83 for Library." March 21, 1941
- "Congressmen Get Kick Out of Local PWA Hall." February 7, 1941
- "Brother Goose" and "Rebekah Meeting", May 2, 1946.
- "Dorsey and Fiore Perform." September 8, 1949.
- "Sewing Machine Clinic." October 27, 1949.
- "Major Musical Attraction." November 3, 1949
- "Chamber of Commerce Annual Banquet." January 5, 1950.
- "Fire Department Moves to Newly Acquired Quarters." December 6, 1956
- "500 Attend Fire Hall Dedication Sunday." July 6, 1978
- "Patrons' Praises Spark Opening of New Library." May 8, 1986
- "Independently Speaking" January 25, 1990.

**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 #
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other (Name of repository)

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): BT05-029

**10. Geographical Data**

Oakland City Auditorium Burt County, Nebraska  
**Name of Property** **County and State**

Acreeage of property Less than 1 USGS Quadrangle Oakland

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

- |    |          |                  |           |                   |
|----|----------|------------------|-----------|-------------------|
| 1. | Latitude | <u>41.836970</u> | Longitude | <u>-96.466421</u> |
| 2. | Latitude | _____            | Longitude | _____             |
| 3. | Latitude | _____            | Longitude | _____             |
| 4. | Latitude | _____            | Longitude | _____             |

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The legal description for the Oakland City Auditorium is lots 15-16 on Block 5. It is bounded by East 4<sup>th</sup> Street on the south and North Oakland Avenue on the west. To the north is a narrow alleyway that separates the auditorium from another city government building. To the east the auditorium is bounded by a one-lane alleyway.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary includes all the property historically associated with the Oakland City Auditorium.

---

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Melissa Dirr Gengler  
organization Historic Resources Group, Inc. date November 30, 2018  
street & number 2840 Calvert Street telephone 402-770-5877  
city or town Lincoln state NE zip code 68502  
email Melissa@hrg-nebraska.com

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**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Oakland City Auditorium  
Name of Property

Burt County, Nebraska  
County and State





Oakland City Auditorium

Burt County, Nebraska

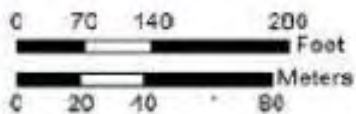
Name of Property

County and State



**Oakland City Auditorium**  
**410 North Oakland Avenue**  
**Oakland, Burt County, Nebraska**

1:2,000



**Legend:**



**Proposed NRHP Boundary**

Oakland City Auditorium

Burt County, Nebraska

**Name of Property**

**County and State**

**Photographs**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

**Photo Log**

Name of Property Oakland City Auditorium

City or Vicinity Oakland County Burt State Nebraska

Photographer Melissa Dirr Gengler Date Photographed October 4, 2018

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera.



1. View of west (main) elevation; view east.

Oakland City Auditorium  
Name of Property

Burt County, Nebraska  
County and State



2. View showing west and south elevations at intersection of Oakland Avenue and 4<sup>th</sup> Street; view northeast.



3. View of south elevation from 4<sup>th</sup> Street; view northwest.

Oakland City Auditorium  
Name of Property

Burt County, Nebraska  
County and State



4. View of east elevation facing alley; view west.



5. View of north elevation; view southwest.

Oakland City Auditorium  
Name of Property

Burt County, Nebraska  
County and State



6. Detail view of canopy, sign, and pilasters at west elevation; view east.



7. Interior corridor leading to auditorium showing terrazzo floors and looking east.

Oakland City Auditorium  
Name of Property

Burt County, Nebraska  
County and State



8. View of auditorium stage and space, view looking northeast.



9. View from auditorium balcony, view looking east.

Oakland City Auditorium  
Name of Property

Burt County, Nebraska  
County and State



10. View of kitchen doors in auditorium space, view looking north.



11. View of main corridor showing ticket booth and stepped arch, view looking northeast.

Oakland City Auditorium  
Name of Property

Burt County, Nebraska  
County and State



12. Interior of Oakland City Clerk's Office, view looking east.



13. Interior terrazzo stair leading to second floor library, community room, and balcony. View looking east.



Oakland City Auditorium  
Name of Property

Burt County, Nebraska  
County and State



14. Former library space on second floor, view looking northeast.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

CITY AUDITORIUM





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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Nomination

Property Name: Oakland City Auditorium

Multiple Name: \_\_\_\_\_

State & County: NEBRASKA, Burt

Date Received: 2/14/2019      Date of Pending List: 3/7/2019      Date of 16th Day: 3/22/2019      Date of 45th Day: 4/1/2019      Date of Weekly List: \_\_\_\_\_

Reference number: SG100003570

Nominator: SHPO

Reason For Review:

X Accept       Return       Reject      3/26/2019 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments: An excellent art deco/moderne building with minor alterations constructed as a new Deal project. The building has been central to the town's government as well as a center for entertainment and social gatherings.

Recommendation/ Criteria: Accept / A & C

Reviewer Jim Gabbert      Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2275      Date \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION:    see attached comments : No    see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.



January 30, 2019

Jim Gabbert  
NPS-National Register of Historic Places  
1849 C Street, NW  
Mail Stop 7228  
Washington, DC 20240



Re: Oakland City Auditorium, Oakland, Burt County, NE

Dear Mr. Gabbert,

Enclosed is the complete nomination packet for the Oakland City Auditorium, in Oakland, Burt County, Nebraska. The enclosed contents are as follows:

- The signed first page of the Oakland City Auditorium nomination;
- One (1) archival disc with the true and correct copy of the nomination for the Oakland City Auditorium to the National Register of Historic Places in PDF format; and
- One (1) archival disc with the photographs for the Oakland City Auditorium nomination.

If you have any questions regarding the submitted materials, feel free to contact me at the phone number or email address below.

Sincerely,



David L. Calase  
National Register Coordinator  
Nebraska State Historic Preservation Office

Phone: 402-471-4775  
Fax: 402-471-3100  
[david.calase@nebraska.gov](mailto:david.calase@nebraska.gov)

Enclosures (3): Signed National Register nomination cover sheet  
1 disc with Nomination  
1 disc with National Register Photographs

1500 R Street  
Lincoln, NE 68508-1651  
P: 402.471.3270  
P: 800.833.6747  
F: 402.471.3100  
[history.nebraska.gov](http://history.nebraska.gov)