

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE:  
Kentucky

COUNTY:  
Fayette

FOR NPS USE ONLY

ENTRY DATE  
JUN 11 1975

1. NAME

COMMON:  
Same

AND/OR HISTORIC:  
The Opera House (and Yates Book Shop Building)

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:  
141 and 145 North Broadway

CITY OR TOWN:  
Lexington

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:  
Sixth

STATE:  
Kentucky

CODE:  
021

COUNTY:  
Fayette

CODE:  
067

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building (S) <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Both	<input type="checkbox"/> Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Being Considered
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress at 145	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commercial - 141 <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment		<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific
		<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Comments Opera House being re- stored as center for performing arts.

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:  
(145 North Broadway) Lexington Center Corp.; (141 N. Broadway) Edgar Yates

STREET AND NUMBER:  
141 and 145 North Broadway

CITY OR TOWN:  
Lexington

STATE:  
Kentucky

CODE:  
021

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
Fayette County Courthouse

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Main at Cheapside

CITY OR TOWN:  
Lexington

STATE:  
Kentucky

CODE:  
021

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
Historic Survey and Plan for Lexington & Fayette County, Ky.

DATE OF SURVEY: 1970  
 Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
Urban County Planning Commission (continued)

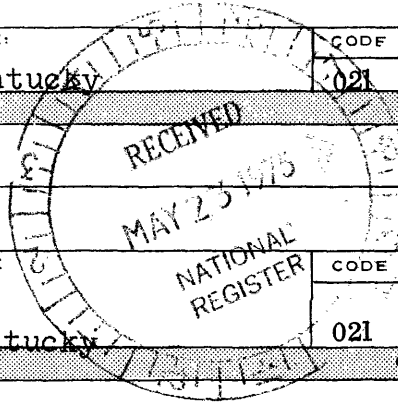
STREET AND NUMBER:  
227 North Upper Street

CITY OR TOWN:  
Lexington

STATE:  
Kentucky

CODE:  
021

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



STATE: \_\_\_\_\_

COUNTY: \_\_\_\_\_

ENTRY NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

FOR NPS USE ONLY

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

(Check One)

Excellent  Good  Fair  Deteriorated  Ruins  Unexposed

(Check One)

Altered  Unaltered

(Check One)

Moved  Original Site

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE (1842-1908; see Withey)

The Opera House was designed by Oscar Cobb, a noted theatrical architect from Chicago, and was officially opened on August 19, 1887, at its new location, 145 North Broadway. (An earlier Opera House on the corner of Main and Broadway was destroyed by fire in January of 1886.) The brick, three-story facade of the Opera House, facing Broadway, is divided into three horizontal elements. The lowest of these horizontal divisions is composed of two brick arches sprung from stone blocks with a sculptured stone column separating and supporting the arches. The top of this lower element is defined by a decorative iron rail and balcony which spans the full width of the facade. Above this balcony, four windows extend vertically for two floors, ending with brick arches over each window. The third floor level is defined within these window shafts by decorative inserts which form the heads of the lower windows and the sills of the upper windows. The semi-circular space above the flat head of the uppermost window has a decorative metal relief insert. The third facade element is a large formed iron sheet coping supported on a wood framework braced to the roof. This formed sheet iron has deep relief decoration and has the appearance of cut stone. The bottom banding of this coping contains, in highly stylized lettering "Lexington Opera House" with the date 1886 at both ends.

The building originally contained approximately 1,250 seats on the main floor, in two balconies and in two boxes on either side of the stage. The 596 auditorium and box seats were upholstered with Turkish morocco and velvet; and each was equipped with its own hat rack, cane and umbrella holder and a spring in the back for assisting persons going into their seats. According to the April 30, 1893 issue of The Kentucky Leader, it was one of the "costliest, handsomest and most convenient Thespian temples in the South, an object of cherished pride in the city." It had 250 gas lights, 35 sets of scenery, traps for bringing horses on stage, standpipes with water under pressure from the waterworks and abundant hose attachments that could flood the whole stage from the loft to the boards in a minute in the event of a fire. An innovative feature was a six-inch pipe running from Mr. Winston's ice factory to the Opera House, filled with water to lower the temperature in the theatre. The gas chandelier in the dome was the first one like it in the U.S. The cone of lights was accidentally inverted so that the apex was below, an advantageous design that led to its adoption by the manufacturing company.

The Opera House has been remodeled and redecorated many times in its 88-year history. In 1890 electric lights illuminated the theatre for the first time, the same year Lexington got street lights. And in 1904 in order to present "Ben Hur" which involved a chariot race onstage, extensive remodeling was necessary; carpenters, machinists and electricians spent almost a month installing a new stage. According to The Morning Herald of February 17, 1904, the stage, when completed, was better equipped than the Broadway theatre where "Ben Hur" opened.

(continued)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**8. SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian |  16th Century |  18th Century |  20th Century  
 15th Century |  17th Century |  19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1870's or 80's-Yates Bldg.; 1886-87-Opera House

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal              | <input type="checkbox"/> Education        | <input type="checkbox"/> Political           | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric             | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering      | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic                | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry         | <input type="checkbox"/> Science             | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture             | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention        | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture           | _____                                    |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape        | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture     | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Theater  | _____                                    |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commerce     | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature       | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation      | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> Military         |  |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Music |  |  |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

According to Clay Lancaster, architectural historian, the intersection of Short Street and North Broadway during the mid-nineteenth century was the scene of local hostelrys; Keiser's Hotel standing at the northwest corner in the 1830's later became the Dudley House, Bruen House and finally the large Broadway Hotel, extending back to Sycamore (now Saunier Street). 141 North Broadway (formerly 33-37) was a part of a row of commercial buildings built on the site following the destruction of the Broadway Hotel by fire on September 14, 1873. One of the other buildings in this row was the two-story brick building on the corner, now razed, which housed the Lexington Post Office from 1874-1889. All of this "hotel property" was conveyed in 1874 by William Christie and a group of Lexington businessmen to the Broadway Real Estate Company which also developed the Lexington Opera House on the property adjacent to it. At various times in its history, 141 was the headquarters of W. Adams & Sons Marble Yards; G. Bonnyman, Shoemaker; and Furnes Mattress Factory; it currently houses Yates' Book Shop. Only the addition of the modern first floor shop prevents this from being an accurate representation of Victorian business buildings constructed throughout downtown Lexington in the last half of the nineteenth century. Few survive.

Its primary value, however, lies in its proximity to the newly created Short Street Historic District (created by the Fayette County Metro Council in February of 1975) and to the fact that it is next door to the once-elegant Opera House, now being restored by the Lexington Civic Center Corporation as Lexington's center for the performing arts. In fact, the Opera House (145 North Broadway) and 141 share a common wall; and the Civic Center Corporation hopes to obtain this property in the future for additional gallery and foyer space for the Opera House.

The Opera House itself came into being in 1886-1887 after the original Opera House on the Corner of Main and Broadway burned. The Broadway Real Estate Company conferred with Oscar Cobb, a theatrical architect from Chicago, and on June 4, 1886, H.L. Rowe of Lexington was awarded the contract for architectural services and overseeing the construction. Charles Scott was the first manager of the Opera House and guided its fortunes during a most illustrious period.

(continued)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

J. Winston Coleman, Jr. The Squire's Sketches of Lexington (Lexington, 1974)  
 Barton K. Battaile. Lexington Pictorial Nostalgia (Lex., 1974) p. 67, p. 64-65  
 Clay Lancaster. Survey Manuscript, III. "Early Street Vistas and Inventory of Antiquities", p. 2-3.  
Lexington Transcript: July 20, 1887.  
Lexington Herald-Leader, "Opera House Remodeling Stirs Many Memories and Exposes Old Seats in Second Balcony", March 15, 1970, and "The Historic Opera House - Can It Be Saved," June 10, 1973, by John Alexander.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			OR	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	° ' "	° ' "		38° 3' 00"	84° 29' 10"	
NE	° ' "	° ' "				
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

216 719476 / 4214120

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 1.3 acres

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE: Mrs. James Park, Jr.

ORGANIZATION: Lexington-Fayette County Historic Commission DATE: 3/20/75

STREET AND NUMBER: 187 Market Street

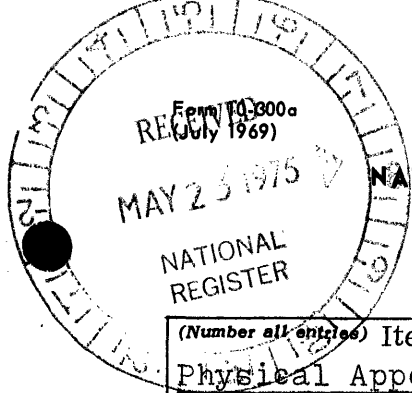
CITY OR TOWN: Lexington STATE: Kentucky CODE: 021

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

<p>As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:</p> <p>National <input type="checkbox"/> State <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Local <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Name <u>Eduard W Meador</u></p> <p>Title <u>State Historic Preservation Officer</u></p> <p>Date <u>5/20/75</u></p>	<p>I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.</p> <p><u>[Signature]</u>                  Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation</p> <p>Date <u>6/11/75</u></p> <p>ATTEST:</p> <p><u>[Signature]</u>                  Keeper of The National Register</p> <p>Date <u>JUN 10 1975</u></p>
--	--

UTM OK  
HR

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
Kentucky	
COUNTY	
Fayette	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
	JUN 11 1975

(Number all entries) Item Number 7

Physical Appearance - Page two

The Opera House is in the process of being restored to its original condition and appearance by The Lexington Center Corporation to be used as a theatre and performing arts center. Cost of renovation is estimated at \$1.675 million. Remodeling will include removal of the false ceiling that was installed when the theatre was converted to show motion pictures, re-opening of the two balconies in the auditorium and the boxes, restoration of the ornate plaster work above the proscenium and at the entrances and boxes, restoration to the original color scheme and reconstruction of the stage area to accommodate modern stage equipment. Modern heating and air conditioning will be installed, the building completely rewired and seating will be approximately 1,200. Plans include the preservation of the light board, one of the few remaining operable installations of its vintage anywhere in the U.S., and the "fly loft" for their historical value, though modern equipment will be installed for production purposes.

141 North Broadway is privately owned and houses a book store on the first floor. Despite this modern shop front, its Victorian architectural character is evident. Dating from the 1870's or '80's, this commercial building has been kept in good condition and has a pressed tin ceiling on the second floor. It shares a common wall with the adjacent Opera House (145 North Broadway), and its facade blends pleasingly with its neighbor's.

The facades of the second and third floors are composed of five round-headed windows beneath arches of purpose-molded bricks with the arches springing from pilasters. The centermost arch on both second and third floors is taller, a reflection of the entrance bay of the first floor. Demarcation between second and third floors is articulated by dentils and a string course capped by a course of purpose-molded brick. The facade terminates today in a parapet with four half windows rounded at the top but not aligned with openings below. The present parapet resulted when a Queen Anne bonnet-style cornice shown on early photographs was removed and rebuilt in its present form.

Although a number of late 19th-century commercial facades survive facing these two across the street, demolition of the structures directly adjacent to them has left them visually isolated, although reinforcing each other. The round arches of the Opera House repeat those of the earlier structure, while emphasizing by their vertical linkage the greater height of the Opera's facade. The later emphasis on verticality may also be seen as a reflection of the architect's Chicago associations, evoked as well by the independent treatment of the spandrels between stories. The overscaled recessed consoles, triangular "gables", and fans, while "Queen Anne" or Free Renaissance in motif, are also highly abstract in arrangement, and suggest the festive function of the building without violating the sense of facade architecture.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	Kentucky	
COUNTY	Fayette	
FOR NPS USE ONLY		
ENTRY NUMBER		DATE
		JUN 11 1975

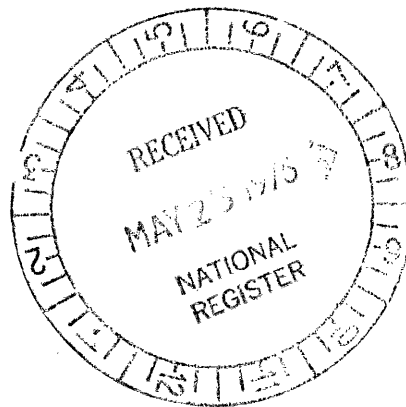
(Number all entries)

Significance-Page two

Lexington quickly became a major theatrical center in the late 19th century because of its first rate performances and the quality of its theatre facility. J. Winston Coleman, author of The Squire's Sketches of Lexington, noted that the Opera House "...long had the reputation of being 'the best one-night stand in the nation'." This was due to Lexington's convenient location for acts travelling the major circuits between Louisville and Cincinnati and Knoxville or Chattanooga. In addition, New York productions being readied for Broadway openings sometimes "warmed up" here.

From its official opening on August 19, 1887, with the Lizzie Evans Stock Company production of "Our Angel," the Opera House was a success. It attracted local groups such as Prof. R. de Roode's Kinder Symphony and the Stith Family Singers as well as the truly famous of the day - George M. Cohan, the Barrymores, Victor Herbert, John Phillip Sousa, Lillian Russell, Mrs. Tom Thumb, Edward Everett Horton, Will Rogers, Al Jolson, Mae West, the Marx Brothers, Eddie Cantor, Fannie Brice, Eddie Foy and the Seven Little Foys, to mention just a few. And several extravaganzas particularly stand out. Besides the spectacular "Ben Hur" in 1904, the stage was flooded for the "Henley Regatta" in 1890, and most of the action took place in rowboats. In 1893 "A Country Circus" brought to the Opera House stage 100 animals and a mile-long parade making up the entire third act. Around the turn of the century, Vaudeville and burlesque began to replace legitimate theatre in the public's affection. With the advent of films all theatres went into decline, the Opera House having the dubious distinction of offering the first motion picture in Lexington.

The Opera House has a past that will be hard to duplicate, but its future as Lexington's center for the performing arts is assured. Its original architectural character has been retained, and it will continue to play a large role in the cultural life of this community.



(20)

ST. PHULS

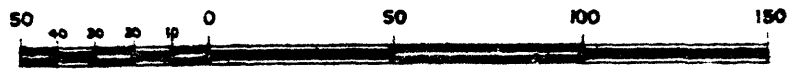
R.G. CHURCH.



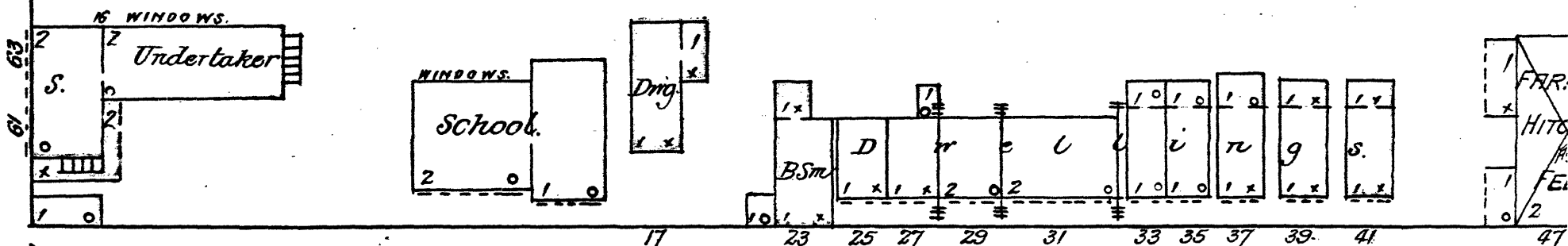
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LIGHTS: GAS.  
36' TO EAVES.



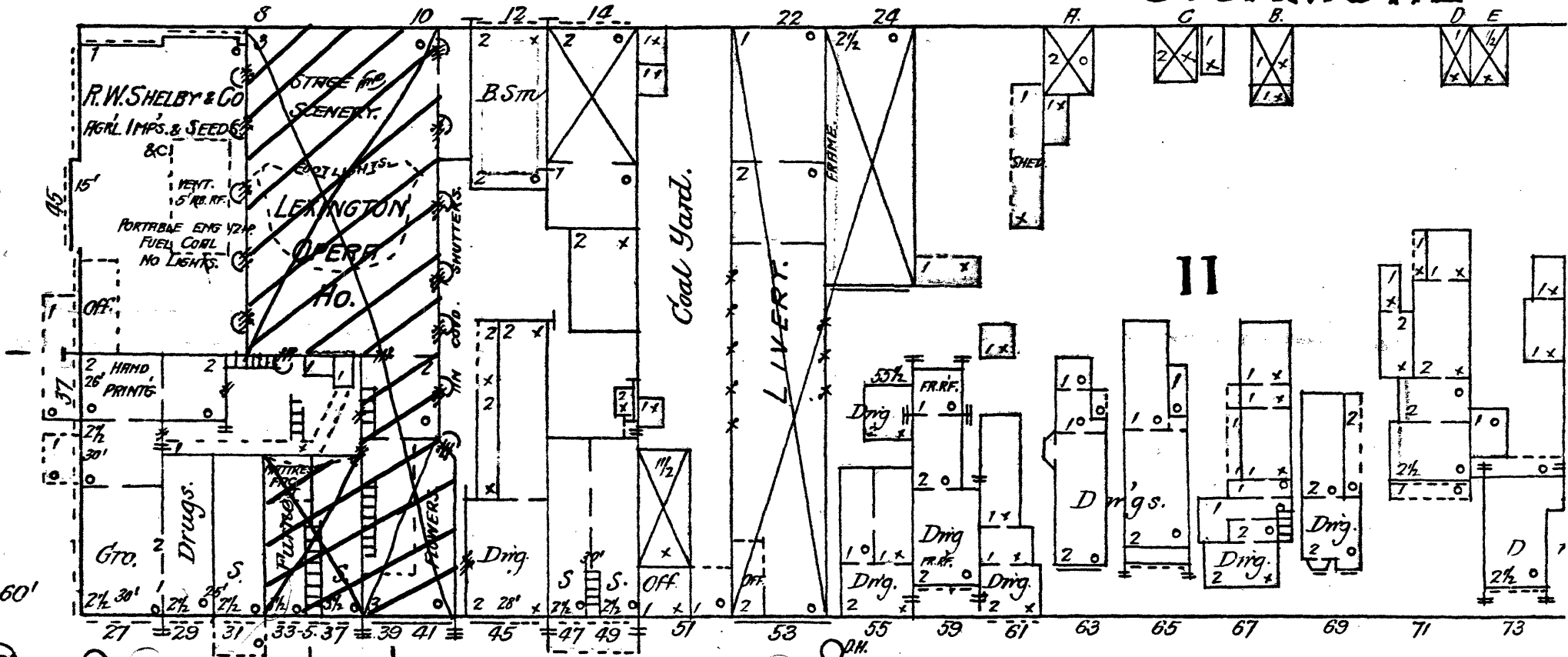
Scale of Feet.



Latitude: 38° 3' 00"  
Longitude: 84° 29' 10"



SYCAMORE



N. BROADWAY

(12)

(17)

141 145