

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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RECEIVED JUN 8 1981  
DATE ENTERED JUL 1 1981

**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

Baker Building

AND/OR COMMON

White Building or Baker Opera House

**LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

16 West Blackwell Street

—NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Dover

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

~~23rd~~ 13

STATE

New Jersey

— VICINITY OF

CODE  
34COUNTY  
MorrisCODE  
027**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: vacant**OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Town of Dover Redevelopment Agency (publicly owned)

STREET &amp; NUMBER

37 North Sussex Street

CITY, TOWN

Dover

STATE

New Jersey

— VICINITY OF

**LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Morris County Courthouse

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Washington Street

CITY, TOWN

Morristown

STATE

New Jersey

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

New Jersey Historic Sites Inventory: Dover

DATE

1980

 FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Office of Cultural and Environmental Services

CITY, TOWN

Trenton

STATE

New Jersey

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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

The Baker Building is the most imposing commercial building of its era (c. 1884) to have survived in Dover and serves as a pivotal landmark on Blackwell Street, Dover's main street. Standing three stories tall with a dominating four story corner tower, this brick structure with iron framing had commercial spaces on the first floor, office spaces on the second, and the Baker Opera House on the third. Polychrome mortar accents the building's bays and decoratively layed brick and stone detailing adorns its Eclectic Design.

Sitting on a corner lot, the Baker Building is rectangular in plan, three bays wide on Blackwell Street and nine bays deep (originally eleven) on Warren Street. The structure stands three stories tall with an imposing tower rising an additional story in the NW corner, breaking through the console bracketed roof cornice. Oculi appear on three sides of the tower between the third and fourth levels. The pyramidal tower roof has a wooden pediment inset on each side. Square panels beneath may have held clock faces. Chimneys were once located behind the tower along the Warren Street facade.

The exterior wall fabric is red brick laid up in common bond with red and white mortar. Red mortared brick horizontal and vertical bands articulate the second and third stories forming slightly unevenly spaced bays of single and paired windows, decorative or imbricated spandrels and white mortared brick walls. 1/1 trabeated sash windows with segmentally arched or round arched heads are throughout. Lintels, sills, and keystones are rock-faced granite. "Baker Building" appears in granite in relief on the Blackwell Street facade.

The ground floor panelled pilasters are cast iron supporting a cast iron cornice. Wood panels painted like a quaint storefront facade cover the first level fire-damaged drug store entrance on Blackwell Street. On Warren Street one bay is infilled with brick, as it always has been, and three bays retain plate glass shop fronts dating from a late 19th or early 20th century alteration.

A fire on January 1, 1969, destroyed Whites Drug Store on the first level of the Blackwell Street facade. The fire rose up the eastern stairwell charring some rooms on the upper levels. Tin ceilings at the first level prevented serious fire damage above. Original cast iron columns set on brick piers and new steel beams temporarily brace the structure in this section. Vacant commercial and office spaces make up the other areas on the first and second levels. The top level at the rear is the Baker Opera House Auditorium. The stage is only a raised platform in a large open room. Windows light the space on the Warren Street side and a large tin medallion decorates the center of this, the largest tin ceiling in the county. Walls throughout the interior are in need of repair, but details, framing and hardwood floors remain intact.

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HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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Baker Building, Dover

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7. DESCRIPTION (Continued)

There have been few significant changes to the exterior of the Baker Building. Two bays to the rear of the building containing equipment and dressing rooms were removed in the late 1940's. This section may have been built separately, as a 1901 Sanborn map shows a different roof shape and a firewall between the two sections. The reconstructed wall was decorated with a Mail Pouch sign that contributes to the character of the building. Two windows on the third floor of the Warren Street facade were reconstructed as doorways leading out to a fire escape which has since been removed. The finial on top of the tower has also been lost. In 1980, the building underwent exterior facade renovation. The tower roof was replaced, bricks sensitively cleaned and repointed, cornices were repaired, details painted, some windows reinstalled, and the false decorative storefront facade added to Whites. Plans are presently underway to totally restore the structure and renovate the interior for office and commercial spaces. Restoration of the Baker Building is hoped to encourage an overall downtown revival, and interest in its restoration has already received wide public and private support.

# 8 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 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 checked="" 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      1884

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Baker Building, or Baker Opera House, is an example of social and architectural aspirations which late Victorian prosperity brought to Dover. As a gathering place for civic and recreational purposes and as a physical landmark, it has been an important part of the town's central business district since it was built for William H. Baker, a local businessman and entrepreneur, c. 1884. It remained the center for performing arts in town for 25 years, contributing to Dover's longstanding claim as the show business capital of Morris County. Today, it is the most imposing commercial building of its era to have survived in Dover and serves as a pivotal landmark on Blackwell Street.

Dover's position as a transportation hub and trans-shipment port resulted in a proliferation of hotels, boarding houses, and places of popular entertainment in the mid 19th century. It became the entertainment center of Morris County. Perhaps the most important and popular entertainment was provided by the Orchestra Halls, Opera Houses and Theaters that opened in downtown Dover. The earliest known Opera House was Moller's Opera House and Orchestra Hall, 16 North Sussex Street, built about 1860. Moller's operated unrivaled until 1884, when William H. Baker built the Baker Building, a commercial block and auditorium.

Baker's Opera House occupied the third floor of the building and provided a dramatic change in the type of entertainment offered to the citizens of Dover and Morris County. No longer were acts strictly of local origin. Acts were solicited from throughout the New York metropolitan area and, in time, the Opera House became a regular stop on the New York City theater circuit. After a regular stint on Broadway, shows came to Dover via the Morris and Essex Railroad. The cast members often stayed in the Park Hotel across the street from the Baker Building and the accompanying stage equipment costumes, and scenery were stored in portions of the building designed for such purposes. After a brief stay in Dover, shows continued on to their next stop on the circuit while new acts and shows were brought in.

No records have been discovered to provide a theatrical history of the Opera House, but scattered references give some idea of varied bill of fare. A history of St. John's Episcopal Church, Dover, for example, mentions that in 1890, the choir from St. Peter's Church, Morristown, performed the Messiah there. The Iron Era reported in 1904, that "The Elite Comedy Company played in Baker Opera House on Saturday evening." A local resident recalls that about 1910 a circus performed in the third floor. Ticket stubs from the Opera House tell of such productions and lecturers as "The Bohemian Girl," "The Mikado," "Clara Louise Kellog," and "Prof. C. R. Crowell."

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Continuation Sheet

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

**ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED**

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1/4 acre

QUADRANGLE NAME Dover

**UTM NOT VERIFIED**

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24,000

UTM REFERENCES

A 18 537100 4525740

B               

C               

D               

E               

F               

G               

H               

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Block 1217, Lot 1. Southeast corner of West Blackwell Street and South Warren Street.

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

Robert Thompson

ORGANIZATION

Town of Dover Redevelopment Agency

DATE

2/9/1981

STREET & NUMBER

37 North Sussex Street

TELEPHONE

(201) 366-2200 ext. 43

CITY OR TOWN

Dover

STATE

New Jersey

## 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.

Deputy

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*Laura Schmitt*

TITLE

DEPT SVP

DATE

5/22/81

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

*Renee McDaniel*

DATE

July 1, 1981

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

DATE

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

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8. SIGNIFICANCE (Continued)

It was not long before the Baker Opera House stood alone as the entertainment center of Dover. Its superior location and talent effectively eliminated whatever competition Moller Opera House and similar institutions could offer. Its physical and cultural prominence is further attested to by a turn of the century photograph which identifies the block upon which the Baker Building is located as the "Opera House Block."

Ironically enough, the demise of the Baker Opera House as an entertainment mecca was largely the result of its success. Baker's involvement in the entertainment business grew to such a degree that his original Opera House became both too small and inadequate for the type of productions often staged there. By 1906, Baker's ambition resulted in the construction of the Baker Theater, 39 West Blackwell Street. The new theater had the largest seating capacity of any auditorium in Morris County, a distinction it still retains, and was more adapted to stage productions and the presentation of motion pictures.

Even after William H. Baker opened his modern Baker Theater, the third floor auditorium of his original building remained the scene of meetings, banquets, community and fraternal functions. It was also the birthplace of the Dover Trust Company, now the United Jersey Bank, located across the street, and was the home of Whites Drug Store, another local institution of longstanding.

In addition to its historical significance, the Baker Opera House serves as a pivotal building on Blackwell Street. It is easily the most imposing commercial building of its era to have survived. Its prominent tower and imposing west facade are familiar sighting points for local shoppers and help to tie into a cohesive streetscape the other architectural elements of Blackwell Street. The community's vested interest in preserving this structure is evidenced by the recent restoration of the exterior and the plans presently underway to renovate the interior spaces, making them viable working spaces in the downtown area.

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### 9. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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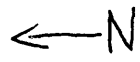
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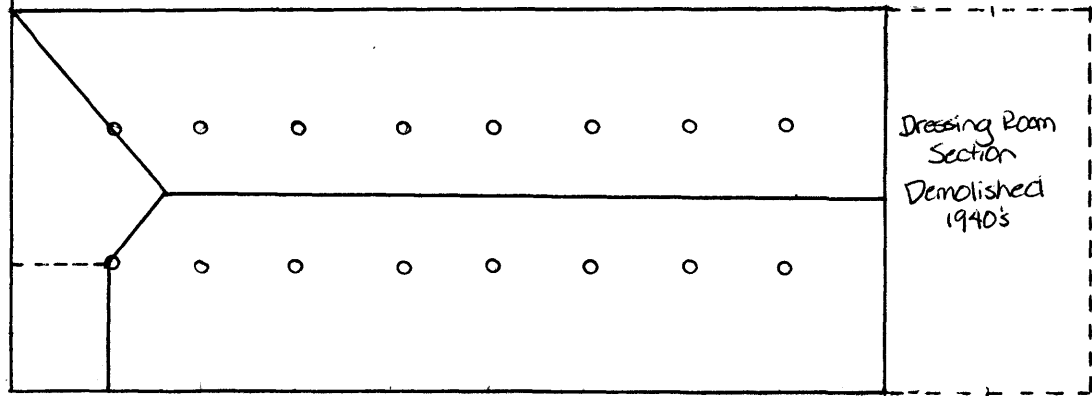
Phil Grassia: Interview, Dover, New Jersey, August, 1980.



BAKER BUILDING  
Town of Dover, Morris County  
New Jersey 1981  
FLOOR PLAN



BLACKWELL ST.



Dressing Room  
Section  
Demolished  
1940's

Parking

WARREN ST.