

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received NOV 16 1987  
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Mancos Opera House

and/or common Checkerboard Hall

2. Location

street & number 136 West Grand Avenue n/a not for publication

city, town Mancos n/a vicinity of

state Colorado code CO county Montezuma code 083

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied (part)	n/a agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	n/a in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: (social)

4. Owner of Property

name Veterans of Foreign Wars Post No. 5231

street & number 136 West Grand Avenue

city, town Mancos n/a vicinity of state Colorado 81328

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Montezuma County Court House

street & number n/a

city, town Cortez state Colorado

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Colorado Inventory of Historic Sites has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date Ongoing  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Colorado Historical Society 1300 Broadway

city, town Denver state Colorado 80203

---

## 7. Description

---

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<u>n/a</u> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date <u>n/a</u>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

---

### **Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

The Mancos Opera House/Checkerboard Hall, completed on March 1, 1910, was built and owned by A. J. Ames and George Woods. It is located mid-block on Grand Avenue, the main street of Mancos. The opera house and the Bauer Bank Building are among the largest, intact commercial buildings in Mancos and in Montezuma County. Both retain much of their original integrity in spite of the first floor alterations which are commonly seen in the smaller communities throughout Colorado.

The opera house is a flat-roofed Twentieth Century Commercial style commercial block with a red face brick facade, red common brick sides and rear elevations and cast concrete trim. The building is rectangular in plan and sits on a low stone foundation. On the exterior, the building appears to be a three story structure, but has only two interior floors. The lower part of the east wall of the building is contiguous with the one and half story commercial block located to the east of the opera house. There is a common wall between the two buildings.

The opera house's facade is three bays wide on the first story and four bays on the second and third. The first floor facade originally contained two store fronts with display windows, clerestories and recessed entrances in addition to the theater entrance. In 1958 alterations were made to the first floor which included bricking up the original storefronts and installing new doors and small double hung windows on either side. The west bay consists of the original entrance to the opera house. It features a projecting lintel above a sign panel fabricated from precast concrete with the words "THEATRE ENTRANCE". The pilasters on either side of the entrance are brick and have simple precast concrete capitals. The brick around the entrance has been painted. The original entrance opening has been bricked up and has a single door in the center.

The ground story is divided from the second and third stories by a corbelled intermediate cornice of precast concrete. Eight double-hung, one-over-one windows with flat precast concrete lintels--one window in the west bay, three windows in the two middle bays and one in the east bay--are seen in the two upper stories. Detail of the third story includes dentiled concrete imposts. Across the top of the building, above the third story windows, is a brick panel with a raised brick border which has a precast concrete lozenge shaped date panel in the center encased in a projecting brick surround. The cornice is detailed by a concrete course, in deteriorated condition, supported by brick corbels. The parapet, stepped at the ends is capped by concrete.

The west elevation of the building is of red common brick which is slightly different in color and size from that used on the facade. On the first floor of this elevation is a small wooden, shed-roofed structure which houses an exterior stairway to the basement, and two small windows which are located near the rear of the building. On the upper floors, the windows vary in size, but all have cast concrete sills and flat lintels.

NOV 16 1987

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

Mancos Opera House

---

The rear of the building is constructed the same as the west elevation except for the window treatment which employs segmental arched openings. There is a rectangular stone storage addition projecting from the rear northeast corner of the building. The construction date is unknown. At the northwest corner of the rear is an elevated wood shed-roofed structure faced in large shingles which may have served as an entrance to the rooms located between the first and second floors. The stairway to this structure is now gone. There is also a segmental arched entrance on the ground level leading into the rear of the first floor.

INTERIOR

The interior of the building has two floors. The interior walls are finished with wood lath and plaster and are in good condition except for areas where roof leaks have damaged the plaster. The ceilings are a combination of lath and plaster and acoustical tile. The first floor currently houses the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post. The two commercial store interiors were completely remodeled in 1958 and nothing remains of the original stores. The area is now made up of a poolroom, bar and lounge, meeting room, ladies auxillary meeting room and kitchen.

What appears to be the second and third stories on the exterior is a large two story high auditorium space. A staircase located at the southeast corner leads to a walkway/balcony which runs along the length of the south and west walls at, what on the exterior is, the story division line. On the north end of the auditorium are the proscenium, stage, and orchestra areas. The proscenium is constructed of wood framing as well as lath and plaster and is in good condition. The stage floor is hardwood. The interior of the auditorium and the balance of the upper floor areas have very simple trim with little embellishment. The walls of the auditorium are painted with stencil designs which date from the 1940s. The floor is hardwood and the seating (of an unknown date) is removable. The ceiling is acoustical tile in deteriorating condition. The current owners of the building have preserved the original stage curtain of heavy canvas with painted advertisements for various local businesses.

There is a temporary wood stud partition across the auditorium near the stage which was constructed circa 1980. At that same time a metal cable and turnbuckle system was installed to stabilize the exterior walls and exterior metal trusses were placed on the roof to relieve the stress from snow loads on the roof.

The overall condition of the building is fair. Plans are underway for interior and exterior renovation and reuse of the auditorium for theatrical productions by the local theater group.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> n/a community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> n/a 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/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1910 **Builder/Architect** A. J. Ames and George Woods.

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Mancos Opera House meets Criterion A for its social significance as the center of widespread community activity beginning in 1910. The opera house not only provided a hall for entertainment and social gathering for the townsfolk in Mancos, but also drew people from the neighboring towns of Bayfield, Rico, Dolores, Cortez and Durango. This building, designed in the early Twentieth Century Commercial style, is one of the largest commercial buildings in Mancos and Montezuma County. The opera house meets Criterion C for the unique multi-purpose design of the auditorium. This large second floor hall was designed to accommodate every type of community activity from dances and sporting events to stage productions with theater seating.

The town of Mancos was established in 1881 with a log school house, three cabins, George Bauer's store and a post office. By 1885, a number of business establishments were situated in Mancos. In 1894, the town was incorporated with a population of 350 and grew as a trading, livestock and agricultural center. In 1896, with the arrival of the railroad, other businesses were established such as a stamp mill and lumber mills. By the late 1890s, Mancos grew rapidly with as many as 10 to 12 buildings under construction at one time.

In addition to being a trade center Mancos also became a tourist mecca for trips to Mesa Verde, 25 miles distant. Guiding tourists to view the Indian ruins was a profitable business for the Wetherill family and later for C. B. Kelly. Tourists came to Mancos by train, spent the night in one of the hotels and the next day traveled by horse with the outfitters to the ruins and returned to Mancos the following day. The town became known as the "Gateway to Mesa Verde National Park."

The commercial buildings in Mancos were one and two stories high prior to the 1910 construction of the three story Mancos Opera House. It was owned and constructed by A. S. Ames and George Woods, residents of Mancos. Woods opened a drugstore in the first floor store adjacent to the theater entrance. The other store space was occupied by a dry goods for a number of years. This unique building, which has the appearance of a three story building on the exterior, has instead a large hall with a high ceiling on the second floor designed to accommodate all types of community activities in addition to the usual theater stage and seating arrangement. There is a large stage at one end and balconies along two walls. The theater space, which holds some 300 people, has removable seats so the entire seating area can be opened up for dances, basketball games and other community functions.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Jean Kelly Bader, paper entitled "A Synopsis of the Chronology of the Mancos Valley and Town of Mancos".

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property .17

Quadrangle name Mancos

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UTM References

A 

1	2	7	4	0	1	2	0	4	1	3	6	4	4	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

D 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

E 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

F 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

G 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H 

Zone			Easting				Northing							

### Verbal boundary description and justification

Tracks L and M and East  $\frac{1}{4}$  track K, Block 4, Bauer second subdivision in Mancos

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state n/a code n/a county n/a code n/a

state            code            county            code           

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Gregory Cavanaugh, Vice President

organization The APCM Group, Architects

date June 15, 1987

street & number 1020 1/2 Main Avenue, S 202

telephone (303) 247-8073

city or town Durango

state Colorado 81301

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

           national            state   X   local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Barbara Sudler

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 11-12-87

### For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

[Signature]  
Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the  
National Register

date 1-7-88

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NOV 16 1987

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 2

Mancos Opera House

For many years high school graduations were held in the hall as well as traveling road shows and square dances. The first moving picture show in Montezuma County was shown in the opera house and in the 1920s, silent movies were held on Saturday nights. After the movie, the ushers removed the seats and a public dance was held. The hall became known as the "Checkerboard Ballroom" because of the checkerboard pattern painted on the floor with numbers in the center of the squares. At the public dances, when the band stopped playing, a number was called and the couple standing on that number won a prize. The music for the dances was usually furnished by local musicians such as the six member Goff family orchestra or the band called the Slumber Wreckers.

The opera house had several celebrities perform on the stage. In 1942, singer J. P. Morgan, whose parents were onetime residents of Mancos, gave a performance. In 1965, Diane Hall, later known as Diane Keaton, played the lead in Little Mary Sunshine on the opera house stage. Diane was one of fourteen southern California college students who came to Mancos to revive the "mellerdramer" during the summer in the opera house. This was the last performance held in the opera house.

in 1953, the first floor became the headquarters for the local post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. In 1958, the first floor stores were remodeled. The large display windows were bricked up leaving entry doors in each bay flanked by small rectangular windows. The interior was completely remodeled on the first floor and nothing of the original stores remain.

In 1985, plans were made by the townspeople and the VFW for the restoration of the opera house. A Theater Renovation Committee was established to seek and apply for funds and grants and preliminary plans and estimates have been prepared. Improvement or restoration of the storefronts on the first floor may be part of these plans and will include restoration of the theater entrance.



MANCOS OPERA HOUSE Mancos. Montezuma County, Colorado Historic Photo ca. 1926 Colorado Historical Society