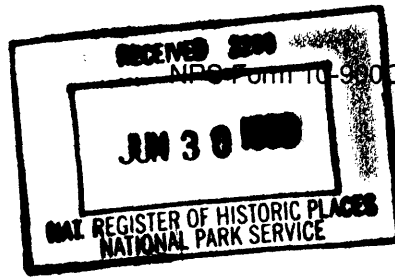


(January 1992)

United States Department of Interior
National Park Service



NPS Form 10-900 OMB No. 10024-0018

921

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 *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900A). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Thrasher's Opera House

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 506 Mill Street N/A not for publication

city or town Green Lake N/A vicinity

state Wisconsin code WI county Green Lake code 047 zip code 54941

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Alvin Z. Cooney 6/15/99
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer-WI

State or Federal agency and bureau

Thrasher's Opera House
Name of Property

Green Lake / Wisconsin
County and State

In my opinion, the property ___meets ___does not meet the National Register criteria.
(___See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

entered in the National Register.

___ See continuation sheet.

___ determined eligible for the
National Register.

___ See continuation sheet.

___ determined not eligible for the
National Register.

___ See continuation sheet.

___ removed from the National
Register.

___ other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Beth Roland

Date of Action

8/10/99

Thrasher's Opera House
Name of Property

Green Lake / Wisconsin
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(check as many boxes as apply)
count)

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 listed resources within the

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
	<u>0</u>	sites
	<u>0</u>	structures
	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

n/a

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: Theater

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: Theater

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE
walls WOOD

roof ASPHALT
other WOOD
METAL

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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Section 7 Page 1

Thrasher's Opera House, Green Lake Co., WI

Introduction:

The Thrasher's Opera House building, located in the central business district of the City of Green Lake, Green Lake County, is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under National Register Criterion A due to its historic significance as the primary center of entertainment, cultural and social events in the Green Lake area during the early twentieth century. Originally constructed as a theater, the building was converted to manufacturing and warehousing immediately following World War II; the building underwent unsympathetic alterations and considerable deferred maintenance during this time. In 1996 renovations were commenced by the current owner, who has returned the building to use as a theater and continues the process of restoring and rehabilitating many of the building's features as of this writing. The building, as a result, has undergone some non-historic alterations; the building retains sufficient integrity, however, to represent and reflect its highly significant role in the social and cultural life of the community during a period of substantial population growth and of rapid change in the activities and technologies pertaining to public entertainment. As a result, the Thrasher's Opera House building may be seen to retain a level of integrity sufficient to support its nomination to the National Register of Historic Places under National Register Criterion A.

Physical Context:

Thrasher's Opera House is located near the center of the Green Lake business district, a relatively small area dominated by two- and three-story commercial buildings of varying ages and levels of integrity. Green Lake is a fourth-class city, having a population of just over one thousand residents;¹ the city center straddles the Puchyan River at its inlet into Dartford Bay of the lake of Green Lake. The nominated building faces commercial buildings such as those described previously to the west across Mill Street; such buildings also predominate to the south and in the block to the north of the block containing Thrasher's Opera House. The building is adjoined to the rear by a large non-historic apartment building which,

¹ Wisconsin Blue Book 1993-94. Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau [Madison: Department of Administration], 1993, p. 734.

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Thrasher's Opera House, Green Lake Co., WI

while not in physical contact with the Thrasher's Opera House, is of sufficient size and proximity to completely obscure the Thrasher's Opera House's east-facing or rear facade from any adjoining public right-of-way. The balance of the block face to the north of the building is occupied by a non-historic structure adjoined to the rear of the building, as described below, as well as another non-historic structure; a house which stood historically in the now-vacant lot immediately south of Thrasher's Opera House was demolished after 1970.²

General Features:

Thrasher's Opera House is a two-and one-half story building constructed in a commercial vernacular form and having generally vernacular features. The building's external appearance is dominated by its numerous double-hung windows, all of which are singly spaced and set into plain wood surrounds. The window glazing is original to the building; most of the window frames and mullions had undergone severe deterioration and were rebuilt to precisely match the originals in 1996. The building originally had pressed-tin siding; the building at present is sided in cedar clapboards, the tin having been replaced in 1996 due to extreme deterioration and damage. The siding is painted in gray with cream and maroon trim to match the building's historic external color scheme as recalled by longtime residents. The building's roof is sloped slightly toward the rear of the building; this slope is more pronounced over the backstage area at the extreme rear of the building. The building rests on a basement foundation of fieldstones in a heavy mortar bed; the basement and foundation are almost completely below grade at the west and north facades; partially exposed at the east facade; and almost completely exposed at the south facade. The exposed portion of the foundation at the west-facing facade has been faced in concrete, which appears to be original to the building. The specific details of the exterior facades are discussed in greater detail below.

Primary (west-facing) Facade:

The Thrasher's Opera House primary facade is surmounted by a narrow molded

² Gary Thrasher, "Green Lake's 'Theater Man: The Biography of Charles Robert Thrasher." Private Publication, [1996].

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Section 7 Page 3

Thrasher's Opera House, Green Lake Co., WI

wood cornice supported on undersized, singly-spaced sawn wood brackets. The upper reaches of the facade is punctuated by a circular window approximately four feet in diameter, set in a plain wood surround; the window, which has a hub-and-spoke pattern of glazing, replaced a non-historic rectangular window that was installed following the building's period of significance. The window was installed in 1996; it bears some resemblance to but is not identical to the building's original oriel window, as shown in the few extant historic photographs.

The building's balcony level is marked at this facade by four evenly-spaced two-light-over-two-light double-hung windows, which are arrayed symmetrically to either side of the oriel window above and the centered entry below. These are approximately five feet in height and are otherwise identical to the general description given above. The first floor fenestration consists of two windows identical to those described previously at the second floor; these are set symmetrically to either side of the central entry and are staggered from the bays above. The entry consists of a pair of pedestrian double doors in a plain surround opening onto a low concrete step; these doors were also installed in 1996. The entry is surmounted by a gabled entry porch supported by large triangular brackets; this feature is entirely intact and is original to the building.

South-facing Facade:

The south-facing facade has no notable characteristics with the exception of four tall windows, three of which illuminate the auditorium and one of which illuminates the backstage area. The windows are singly-spaced, four-over-four double-hung sash having in all other respects the general features described previously; these are approximately eight feet in height. The two windows at the center of the facade are set slightly closer to each other than they are to the easternmost and westernmost bay. A small utilitarian pedestrian doorway with a plain surround and a non-historic door is set into the extreme eastern corner of the facade, extending slightly above the basement level; a historic double doorway with five-paneled wood doors is set below grade at the western corner of the facade. This doorway, while not original to the building, does date from within the building's period of significance. The doorway is flanked by four windows, with one to the immediate west of the doorway and the balance to the east; all are double-hung

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Thrasher's Opera House, Green Lake Co., WI

windows in wood frames and appear to be original to the building.

North-facing facade:

The north-facing facade of Thrasher's Opera House has no notable features with the exception of three windows identical to those described previously on the south-facing facade. The windows are aligned with the auditorium space within the building in a manner identical to the westernmost of the windows of the south-facing facade. A non-historic utilitarian pedestrian door in a plain surround is set at ground level between the easternmost of the two windows. The facade is adjoined at its rear quarter, at approximately the location of the backstage area inside the Thrasher's Opera House, by a non-historic one-story commercial addition, which dates from 1958.³ This addition faces Mill Street across a parking lot immediately north of the Opera House, is clearly functionally separate from and visually subordinate to the Opera House building, and does not adversely impact the Thrasher's Opera House's integrity.

East-facing facade:

The east-facing facade has no notable historic or non-historic features; three non-historic window openings that were installed following the period of historic significance have been removed and the openings filled in a manner that is not discernable from the exterior. The rear of the building is adjoined by a non-historic apartment building and associated private parking and green space; this facade of the Opera House is not visible or photographable from any public vantage point.

Interior:

Much of the interior of the theater is highly intact; the entire space is in the process of being restored as of this writing. With the exception of a small entry vestibule, ticket booth, and restrooms, the theater's interior is completely occupied by the auditorium, stage and backstage spaces. The auditorium floor is hardwood laid in a pattern of concentric rectangles and is original to the building. Due to its varied uses the theater never had fixed seating and the auditorium floor has no

³ Robert W. and Emma B. Heiple, A Heritage History of Beautiful Green Lake, Wisconsin. [Green Lake: self-published] 1990, p. 277.

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Section 7 Page 5

Thrasher's Opera House, Green Lake Co., WI

interruptions or impediments. The auditorium ceiling is of pressed tin in a bow-tie pattern; most is original to the building with a few pieces of identical material spliced in where necessary to fill holes left by non-historic alterations. The ceiling is coved at its intersections with the north and south walls; the curved portions are adjoined immediately below by an elaborate stenciled pattern, re-created in 1997 to match the original stenciling as evidenced in the stairway leading from the balcony to the crawl space, as described below. Both north and south walls are also lined with wainscoting and chair rails original to the building.

The east wall of the auditorium is dominated by the stage, proscenium arch area and two pedestrian doors at either side of the stage. The stage's relatively shallow thrust into the auditorium area was removed following the historic period; it has been reconstructed to match historic photographs of the interior of the building. The stage retains a sloped floor, a design feature which is original to the building; the flooring has been replaced with maple matching the original, an alteration made necessary by the non-historic period damage to the stage floor and thrust. The original proscenium arch consisted of a wide wood or plaster molding, as shown in historic photographs; this feature was removed following the period of historic significance and is entirely non-extant. Restoration of this feature is in process as of this writing. The pedestrian doorways to either side of the stage are also original to the building.

The west wall of the auditorium includes the doors leading into the auditorium from the public entry area, as described below; a balcony area overhangs the entry and is described below. The lower portion of the west wall of the auditorium includes a centered public entry doorway; a single door to the immediate north of the public entry leading into the ticket sales area; and two single doors at either corner of the facade leading to a storage room at the south and a staircase accessing the balcony at the north. All of the doorways have five-paneled wood doors which are original to the building. The public entry vestibule and ticket booth have original materials and woodwork but no notable features; the public restrooms to either side are non-historic. The balcony is faced in beaded wood siding identical to that found at the first floor level; like the stage, the balcony has a sloped floor which is original to the building. The balcony also has no fixed seats, as none were installed during the

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Thrasher's Opera House, Green Lake Co., WI

historic period. The balcony is illuminated by the three southernmost second-story windows identified on the west-facing exterior facade, as discussed above; the northernmost window illuminates a small enclosed room at the northwest corner of the balcony, which contains a narrow staircase leading to a crawlspace immediately above the ceiling.

The interior of the Thrasher's Opera House, as a result, may be seen to be highly intact, with the historic character-defining spaces and almost all of the notable historic features being entirely intact, restored or in the process of being restored as of this writing. As discussed in Section 8 below, the building's interior space is essential to its historic significance as a center of entertainment and social events for the community during the historic period; as a result the building's interior features are of primary importance in evaluating the building's integrity.

Conclusion:

The Thrasher's Opera House building retains sufficient integrity to be determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places due to its significance under National Register Criterion A, as discussed in Section 8 below. The building retains substantial integrity, particularly with regard to its exterior form and its interior form and details; those alterations which have occurred have not substantially impacted the building's ability to adequately represent its historic roles in the community. As a result, the Thrasher's Opera House may be considered to have sufficient integrity to warrant nomination to the National Register of Historic Places under National Register Criterion A, as discussed below.

Thrasher's Opera House
Name of Property

Green Lake / Wisconsin
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 the 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.)

A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

B removed from its original location.

C a birthplace or grave.

D a cemetery.

E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

F a commemorative property.

G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

Period of Significance

1909-1945

Significant Dates

1909

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Taylor, D.W.

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Thrasher's Opera House, Green Lake Co., WI.

Introduction:

Thrasher's Opera House, located in the city of Green Lake, Green Lake County, is eligible at the local level for the National Register of Historic Places under National Register Criterion A due to the building's significant role in the social, cultural and entertainment experience of residents of and visitors to the Green Lake area between 1909 and 1945. During this period, Thrasher's Opera House functioned as the primary social and entertainment venue for the community, hosting virtually all such events ranging from motion pictures to basketball games to dances. As the only such facility available in the community during the period of historic significance, Thrasher's Opera House accordingly played a central role in the social life of the community during a period of substantial growth in the community and an era of swift evolution in forms of media-based entertainment available to the general populace. Only two buildings in the community may be claimed to have played similar, although significantly different, roles in the community; both Thrasher's Hall, and the Green Lake Community Center hosted some smaller social events during at least a portion of the Thrasher's Opera House period of significance. Neither building, however, hosted the range of activities available at Thrasher's Opera House, and neither hosted motion pictures, a mainstay of Thrasher's Opera House activities and a central aspect of the building's function. As a result of its unique role in the community during its period of historic significance, the Thrasher's Opera House may be determined to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

Historical Background: City of Green Lake.

Until 1907, the community which developed along the northernmost bay of Green Lake was known as Dartford, after the vicinity's first settler. Settlement in the vicinity of Green Lake commenced in the 1840s, with the first plat of the settlement being created in 1847.⁴ The county of Green Lake was created from a portion of Marquette County in 1858; Dartford became the Green Lake county seat in 1862.⁵

⁴ Heiple, *op cit.*, p. 49.

⁵ "Green Lake." Green Lake and Marquette Counties, Wisconsin Trade Review, [n.p.] October 1914, p.1 col 2.

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Thrasher's Opera House, Green Lake Co. WI

Settlement accelerated swiftly; the village of Dartford was incorporated in 1871. Although initially functioning as a retail and service center for surrounding farmers, and offering such basic amenities as a grist mill, hotels and general stores, Green Lake developed in the decades following the Civil War into a prominent summer resort location for wealthy residents of the Midwest cities and the southeastern United States. Although the first Green Lake summer resort hotel was built in 1867, the construction of resorts on northern Green Lake began in earnest following the arrival of the Sheboygan and Fond du Lac Railroad at a station approximately one mile northeast of Dartford in 1871.⁶ Several large summer resort hotels were constructed between 1873 and 1891; during the last quarter of the nineteenth century the Dartford area economy came to rely heavily on the tourism industry.⁷

Such resorts not only employed local residents as drivers, tour guides, cooks and domestic help, but they also consumed significant quantities of the produce and other foodstuffs produced on local farms. By 1914, Green Lake averaged 1500 tourists per season, at a time when the year-round population of the community was approximately 600 people.⁸ By the 1920s, however, Green Lake's summer resort hotels began to decline, a result of the aging of the resort properties; increasing demand for amenities such as private baths, which were uncommon during the period of the Green Lake resorts' construction; declining railroad travel and increasing opportunities for those seeking summer resorts to find a location to which they could drive. By the close of the 1930s all of the Green Lake summer resort hotels had closed, and many had been demolished; however, tourism continued as the area's primary industry throughout the first half of the twentieth century due to the proliferation of cottage resorts, lodges and motels, all of which catered to a more modest and more mobile clientele. As a result, visitors to the Thrasher Opera House's during its period of significance would have consisted of both summer tourists and year-round occupants. Moreover, all of these residents

⁶ Heiple, *op cit.*, p. 248.

⁷ Heiple, *op cit.*, pp. 75-76.

⁸ "Green Lake." *op cit.*

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Section 8 Page 3

Thrasher's Opera House, Green Lake Co. WI

and guests were located in a relatively isolated community, more than ten miles from the nearest community of comparable size and primarily accessed by rail until the introduction of reliable autos in the 1910s and the paving of area roads in the 1920s and 1930s. This combination of relative isolation, a stable year-round population and a large summer tourist population determined to a great extent the function and the community roles played by Thrasher's Opera House during its period of historic significance.

History: Thrasher's Opera House

Thrasher's Opera House was built and managed throughout most of the historic period by Charles Thrasher, a member of one of the pioneer families in the Green Lake area. Born in 1871, Thrasher's adult livelihood and his role in the community centered around two properties on Mill Street, the primary thoroughfare in downtown Green Lake. Thrasher's earlier building was located at 507 Mill Street; this commercial vernacular structure housed a retail shop on the first floor and a meeting space referred to as Thrasher's Hall on the second floor. Although extant historic materials do not indicate the precise date of Thrasher's acquisition of this property, extant records do indicate his ownership of the property as early as 1905.⁹ The property's role in the community was well established as early as 1907, by which time Thrasher's Hall appears to have been hosting a steady stream of small-scale events. Such events included meetings of fraternal organizations, such as the local chapter of the Royal Neighbors of America,¹⁰ and the business and public meetings of the Town of Brooklyn, the unincorporated township in which the city of Green Lake lies.¹¹ Other events held at Thrasher's Hall included amateur plays and entertainments, such as that presented by members of the Methodist Episcopal Church as a fund-raiser in early 1907;¹² and presentations by itinerant lecturers, such as temperance speaker Rev. W.D. Cox, who spoke at Thrasher's Hall

⁹ Tax Rolls, Village of Dartford, Green Lake County for year of 1905.

¹⁰ Heiple, *op cit*, p. 290.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 275.

¹² "Well Played." The Dartford Advance, [Green Lake, Wisc.: M.S. Carpenter] February 25, 1907, p. 1 c. 3.

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Thrasher's Opera House, Green Lake Co. WI

to advocate for the anti-saloon cause.¹³ Thrasher's Hall continued to function throughout the Thrasher's Opera House period of historic significance as a location for meetings and other small-scale events, although most amateur theatricals and other similar events appear to have been conducted in Thrasher's Opera House after that building's construction.

Thrasher's Opera House was constructed in 1909 by D.W. Taylor, a local builder.¹⁴ Although the theater was operated by Charles Thrasher throughout the period of historic significance, Charles Thrasher owned the building in concert with two relatives, one of whom was his brother, Joseph, a successful dairy farmer.¹⁵ In keeping with the anticipated variety of uses that may be expected of a small town theater building, the Opera House included a hardwood floor; movable seating; a narrow balcony; a sloped and projecting stage under a small flyspace area; and small dressing rooms located beneath the stage. Initial theater offerings at Thrasher's Opera House included touring vaudeville troupes, which appear to have been largely supplanted by motion pictures following the introduction of electricity to the community in 1912.¹⁶

For most of the Thrasher's Opera House's period of significance, motion pictures provided the majority of building use and presumably the majority of the property's income. Motion picture equipment was installed in the balcony, and, as discussed below, was updated at least once during the period of significance. During the silent film era, movies at Thrasher's Opera House were accompanied by a single piano. In 1929, by which time films with sound had become an industry standard, Thrasher installed the necessary equipment to show the new films, adding at that

¹³ "Temperance Lecture." The Dartford Advance [Green Lake, Wisc.: M.S. Carpenter] March 04, 1907, p. 1 c. 5.

¹⁴ Dated signature on second floor beam, Thrasher's Opera House.

¹⁵ Tax Rolls, Village of Green Lake, Green Lake County for year of 1910 and 1915.

¹⁶ Heiple, *op cit.*, 276.

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Thrasher's Opera House, Green Lake Co., WI

time a second projector in order to minimize the pause between reels.¹⁷ By the early 1930s, Thrasher's Opera House was showing three movies per week during the summer, with two days allotted to each movie between Tuesday and Sunday.¹⁸ Such a schedule capitalized on the large tourist population located in and near Green Lake at that season; since the nearest movie theater other than Thrasher's Opera House was over ten miles away along roads that were not lit at night, even those individuals having private automobiles were likely to stay close to Green Lake in the evening. Additionally, it appears that Thrasher's Opera House was able to book new movies earlier than counterparts in other communities; one account claims that "[s]ummer visitors often filled the hall because they had not already seen the shows," which were playing Thrasher's Opera House before being shown in larger cities.¹⁹ During the balance of the year, one movie was shown per week over the weekends.

During the early twentieth century, motion pictures occupied a highly significant role in United States social and cultural life. With the exception of popular novels and magazines, motion pictures provided the first truly mass media experience available to the American populace. Unlike novels and magazines, motion pictures were experienced as a group activity, an event shared simultaneously with numerous other people in the same auditorium; unlike theater productions or vaudeville, viewers in different locales and at different times would see precisely the same production. Additionally, since most motion pictures were produced by large, sophisticated corporations, motion pictures usually received sophisticated marketing, including high-quality posters and extensive coverage in popular magazines. Such intense marketing also helped create stars, whose presence in a movie was likely to draw viewers regardless of the quality of the movie itself. As a result, motion pictures became one of the first shared cultural experiences, as people of varying ages, socioeconomic classes and physical locations experienced identical entertainment and followed the lives of a small group of star entertainers.

¹⁷ Peg Power, "Charlie Ran Green Lake Opera House." Commonwealth Reporter, 1970.

¹⁸ Green Lake County Reporter, various dates June-August 1930.

¹⁹ "Thrasher's Opera House Again Has Purpose in Green Lake." Undated newspaper clipping; collection of Ronald Hagstrom.

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Section 8 Page 6

Thrasher's Opera House, Green Lake Co., WI

Many of these aspects of the motion picture experience had existed on a small scale prior to the introduction of movies; for example, theater and classical music had produced stars, such as the Barrymore family of actors and singer Jenny Lind, as early as the mid-1800s. However, the motion picture industry expanded upon these traits, using new photographic technologies to create a truly national experience, one in which the residents of and visitors to Green Lake participated in via their avid attendance of movies at Thrasher's Opera House.

Movies, however, were not the only aspect of the Thrasher Opera House's pivotal role in the community. As one childhood resident of the community recounted, the Opera House "was the entertainment center of the village. Besides the silent movies there always was a high school senior class play, a junior prom, various drills on the stage at Decoration Day and other social functions."²⁰ Between the Opera House's construction and the construction of the Green Lake Community Building in 1938, Thrasher's Opera House functioned as the only available indoor space for large public events in the vicinity of Green Lake. As a result, Thrasher's Opera House hosted virtually every large public or quasi-public event held in the village of Green Lake between 1909 and 1938. During that time period, the building hosted all of the high school and county school graduations held by schools in the Green Lake vicinity.²¹ Since the Green Lake High School had no gymnasium or auditorium during this period, the Opera House also hosted several high school proms and an annual senior class play, which was a tradition from at least 1929 through the building's period of significance.²² Other school events held at Thrasher's Opera House included band concerts, dances, and games and practices for the school basketball team.

For basketball games, spectators were seated on the stage area and baskets were placed against the north and south interior walls; the non-regulation dimensions of

²⁰ Erwin Klatt to Ronald Hagstrom, July 1997. MSS letter, in collection of Ronald Hagstrom.

²¹ "Thrasher Opera House Remembered and Restored." The Dartford News [Green Lake: Dartford Historical Society], December 1995, p. 3.; Power, *op cit*.

²² "Stage is Set for '29 Play Tonight." Green Lake County Reporter [Green Lake: I.G. Lytle], [no date]; Gwen Young, "Thrasher Opera House history revealed." Green Lake County Reporter, p. 10 col 1 and 2.

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Thrasher's Opera House, Green Lake Co., WI

the playing area made it possible for players to score easily from the north free throw line into the south basket. A city team also played at Thrasher's Opera House from 1910 to 1916.²³ Community events were also held regularly at Thrasher's Opera House, including social dances featuring area or regional orchestras and minstrel shows performed by local business people.²⁴ Community civic organizations such as the Twentieth Century Club, a women's organization responsible for improvements to city parks, would also conduct plays and dances at Thrasher's Opera House in order to raise money for their activities.²⁵ Such activities, of course, were essential to the social life and self-identity of the community, particularly for the year-round residents, as they provided a significant amount of the entertainment, ritual experience and social contact that cemented and gave form to the social experience.

The Works Progress Administration-sponsored construction of the Green Lake Community Building provided schools and civic groups with a less expensive venue for social events, with the result that many of the smaller-scale activities appear to have been relocated to the new building shortly after its construction. Additionally, improvements in area roads and Depression-era evolutions in tourism both decreased the total numbers of summer visitors and made it possible for those who did visit Green Lake, as well as the local residents, to seek entertainment in other locations. Charles Thrasher showed his last motion picture in November 1939; shortly thereafter Thrasher rented the property to a proprietor known only by the surname Pishner, who continued to show movies on a limited basis and to host the annual senior class play through the close of World War II.²⁶ This marks the end of the building's period of significance. In 1946 a manufacturing concern purchased the Opera House, building a small addition to the north side of the property in 1958;²⁷ between 1946 and 1996 the former theater

²³ Heiple, *op cit.*, 276.

²⁴ "Thrasher Opera House Remembered and Restored," *op cit.*

²⁵ Heiple, *op cit.*, p. 303

²⁶ Gary Thrasher, *op cit.*, p. 3.

²⁷ Heiple, *op cit.*, 277.

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Thrasher's Opera House, Green Lake Co., WI

housed a variety of manufacturing and warehousing concerns. The property underwent a partial restoration in 1996 which allowed the building to host an annual concert series; restoration and renovation of this property continues as of this writing.

Thrasher's Opera House is highly significant in the early twentieth century history of Green Lake as the center of social and cultural events for the community and outlying areas. For most of the period of significance, Thrasher's Opera House provided the only such facility available to Green Lake's schools, residents and tourists. As such, the building supported the community's important tourism industry by providing a prime source of entertainment to the numerous summer guests; it also supported the community life of year-round village residents via its movies and by hosting almost all of the major social events associated with life in a small community in the early twentieth century. For these reasons the Thrasher's Opera House building is determined to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under National Register Criterion A due to its significance in the cultural and social life of the Green Lake community during the period of historic significance.

Context:

As cited in the discussion above, Thrasher's Opera House was the primary facility of its type available during the period of historic significance. A smaller, simpler and older venue, also discussed above, was available and used for lodge meetings, town meetings and other small-scale events during the Thrasher Opera House's period of significance; this facility was known as Thrasher's Hall and was located in the second floor of the extant building at 507 Mill St. This building, however, has been altered on the exterior and, more significantly, the hall space no longer exists, having been subdivided into apartments after the close of the Thrasher's Opera House period of significance.²⁸ As a result, the Thrasher's Hall building may be seen to represent a significantly different aspect of the history of the community than does the Thrasher's Opera House; the Thrasher's Hall building also fails to adequately represent its own context due to a lack of integrity. A second building

²⁸ Power, *op cit.*

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Thrasher's Opera House, Green Lake Co., WI

which may be considered as providing a similar indirect context is the Green Lake Community Building, current functioning as the City Hall and located at 534 Mill St. As discussed above, this building was constructed in 1938 and hosted some of the smaller events held prior to that date at Thrasher's Opera House. Although the interior and exterior of this building is more intact than that of the Thrasher's Hall building, the Green Lake Community Center played a significantly different role in the public life of the community, as it was publically-owned facility and thus could not host many of the events that made the Thrasher's Opera House building locally well-known, most prominent of these being the motion pictures. Accordingly, the Thrasher's Hall building and the Green Lake Community Building are determined to provided only indirect context for the purpose of evaluating the significance of the Thrasher's Opera House building; Thrasher's Opera House represents a significantly different public space and a significantly different element of the social and cultural life of the Green Lake community than do either of the previously-mentioned buildings.

Archeological Potential:

Although there have been at least 147 Native American earthworks documented in the vicinity of Green Lake,²⁹ none are known to have existed on the Thrasher's Opera House parcel, and no known evidence of prehistoric or early historic-era occupation on the parcel has been found to date. The parcel has been used for commercial purposes since the late nineteenth century; as the present building rests upon a full basement extensive disturbance of any below-ground resources predating the Thrasher's Opera House construction is highly likely.

²⁹ Heiple, *op cit.*, 10.

Thrasher's Opera House
Name of Property

Green Lake / Wisconsin
County and State

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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
- # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository:
Dartford Historical Society

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

- | | | | | |
|---|------|---------|----------|--|
| 1. <u>11/6/</u> <u>13/4/2/4/8/0/</u> <u>14/8/5/6/2/6/0/</u> | 3. | | | |
| Zone Easting Northing | Zone | Easting | Northing | |
| 2. | 4. | | | |
| Zone Easting Northing | Zone | Easting | Northing | |
- see continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Della G. Rucker

organization Rucker Historical Research date April 28, 1998

street & number P.O. Box 204 telephone 920/432-7044

city or town Green Bay state WI zip code 54305-0204

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Thrasher's Opera House, Green Lake Co., WI

Major Bibliographical References:

"Green Lake." Green Lake and Marquette Counties, Wisconsin Trade Review.
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Green Lake County Reporter, various dates June-August 1930.

Heiple, Robert W. and Emma B. A Heritage History of Beautiful Green Lake,
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Hagstrom.

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Tax Rolls, Village of Dartford, Green Lake County for year of 1905.

Tax Rolls, Village of Green Lake, Green Lake County for year of 1910 and 1915.

"Temperance Lecture." The Dartford Advance. March 04, 1907, p. 1 c. 5.

Thrasher, Gary. "Green Lake's 'Theater Man:' The Biography of Charles Robert
Thrasher." Private Publication, [1996].

"Thrasher Opera House Remembered and Restored." The Dartford News. Dartford
Historical Society, Green Lake. December 1995, p. 3.

"Thrasher's Opera House Again Has Purpose in Green Lake." Undated newspaper
clipping; collection of Ronald Hagstrom.

"Stage is Set for '29 Play Tonight." Green Lake County Reporter. [no date], clipping
in collection of Ronald Hagstrom.

"Well Played." The Dartford Advance. February 25, 1907, p. 1 c. 3.

Young, Gwen. "Thrasher Opera House history revealed." Green Lake County
Reporter, p. 10 col 1 and 2..

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Section 10

Page 1

Thrasher's Opera House, Green Lake County, Wisconsin.

Boundary Description:

The nominated property is defined as follows:

Lot 5, Block 2, Plat of Dartford, Green Lake County.

Boundary Justification:

The above boundary incorporates the entire parcel legally associated with the nominated property and incorporates the lands historically associated with the building's industrial functions. The boundaries as cited exclude properties on all sides that have no historic or present association with the property's historic function.

Thrasher's Opera House
Name of Property

Green Lake / Wisconsin
County and State

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional Items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Ronald Hagstrom
street & number P.O. Box 428
telephone 800-782-2740-
city or town Green Lake state WI zip code 54941

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. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork

Reductions Projects, (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Section Photos Page 1 Thrasher's Opera House, Green Lake County, Wisconsin.

Photo #1 of 9

THRASHER'S OPERA HOUSE
Green Lake, Green Lake County
Photo by D.G. Rucker, October 25, 1997
Negative at State Historical Society of Wisconsin
View looking east.

Photo #2 of 9

THRASHER'S OPERA HOUSE
Green Lake, Green Lake County
Photo by D.G. Rucker, October 25, 1997
Negative at State Historical Society of Wisconsin
View looking south.

Photo #3 of 9

THRASHER'S OPERA HOUSE
Green Lake, Green Lake County
Photo by D.G. Rucker, October 25, 1997
Negative at State Historical Society of Wisconsin
View looking north.

Photo #4 of 9

THRASHER'S OPERA HOUSE
Green Lake, Green Lake County
Photo by D.G. Rucker, October 25, 1997
Negative at State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Detail, north-facing facade.

Photo #5 of 9

THRASHER'S OPERA HOUSE
Green Lake, Green Lake County
Photo by D.G. Rucker, October 25, 1997
Negative at State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Interior; stage area.

Photo #6 of 9

THRASHER'S OPERA HOUSE
Green Lake, Green Lake County
Photo by D.G. Rucker, October 25, 1997
Negative at State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Interior, balcony and west wall.

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Section Photos Page 2 Thrasher's Opera House, Green Lake County, Wisconsin

Photo #7 of 9

THRASHER'S OPERA HOUSE
Green Lake, Green Lake County
Photo by D.G. Rucker, October 25, 1997
Negative at State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Interior, north wall looking northwest.

Photo #8 of 9

THRASHER'S OPERA HOUSE
Green Lake, Green Lake County
Photo by D.G. Rucker, October 25, 1997
Negative at State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Interior, south wall looking southeast.

Photo #9 of 9

THRASHER'S OPERA HOUSE
Green Lake, Green Lake County
Photo by D.G. Rucker, October 25, 1997
Negative at State Historical Society of Wisconsin
Interior, balcony looking north.