

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICEPH0668991  
FOR NPS USE ONLYNATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

RECEIVED

MADATA SHEET

DATE ENTERED

NOV 2 1978

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Ray Opera House (Preferred)

AND/OR COMMON

Charlson's Store

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

111 Main Street

CITY, TOWN

Ray

VICINITY OF

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

1

STATE

North Dakota

CODE

38

COUNTY

Williams

CODE

105

**3 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:**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

City of Ray

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Post Office Box 67

CITY, TOWN

Ray

VICINITY OF

STATE

North Dakota 58849

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE.

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Williams County Courthouse

STREET &amp; NUMBER

205 East Broadway

CITY, TOWN

Williston

STATE

North Dakota 58801

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

North Dakota Historic Sites Survey

DATE

1976

 FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDSState Historical Society of North Dakota  
Liberty Memorial Building

CITY, TOWN

Bismarck

STATE  
North Dakota 58505

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 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 _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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

The Ray Opera House is a 2-story frame structure with basement, fieldstone and mortar foundation, and a curved roof concealed by a stamped metal false front. There is an adjoining building on the north, presumably scheduled for removal, while the one on the south was demolished two years ago and the south elevation of the opera house completely sheathed in steel siding. The opera house was originally free-standing, and the windows formerly on the side elevations will be re-cut in the course of restoration.

The first-floor shop facade of the building features plate glass windows set in wood and metal framing. These flank a center doorway which has an outer 1-light, cross-panel door, behind which are double doors beneath a barred transom. Opaque panels installed at the tops of the windows and across the recessed entry in 1966 will be removed, thus returning the store front to its original form. The second floor of the facade is sheathed in metal stamped to simulate rusticated stone blocks, with two variations in the pattern at the top and bottom of the story. Four symmetrically placed 1 over 1, double-hung windows carry head casings in the form of semicircular pediments with rosettes and Corinthian brackets. A cornice enriched with such classical elements as consoles, egg-and-dart molding, modillions, and dentils terminates the roofline and is surmounted by a Ray Opera House name block between fluted supports.

On the north end of the facade is an entrance with square transom and presumably original door, the latter featuring a cross panel and space for two lights, but now sealed. Behind the doorway, giving access to the second floor, or opera house proper, is an enclosed, straight-flight stairway which will be returned to its original form of quarter-turn with landing. A lobby, ticket window, and cloak room will also be restored from the space beneath the cantilevered balcony, which is given additional support by uprights. The door to the balcony stairs has a molded casing with circularly carved corner blocks, and the solid railing at the foot of the balcony consists of vertical boarding. The auditorium, formerly partitioned into a hallway and two apartments, features a curved board ceiling and walls sheathed in stamped metal above a wainscoting of vertical matched boarding. The stage at the west end of the auditorium has center steps, a proscenium arch, a trapdoor, and plastered walls painted with views, as well as a backdrop curtain, sound baffling, and an overhead track to shift scenery.

A door behind the stage leads to a wooden fire escape on the metal-sheathed rear (west) elevation. Restoration plans for the latter call for replacement of missing stamped metal panels; removal of the fire escape (one of fire rating will be installed on the north elevation); demolition of a 1-story addition at the rear entrance; and construction of a sidewalk ramp to provide wheelchair access.

The first floor of the building, scheduled to become a senior citizens' center, currently is divided into two major spaces: an office in the front (east portion) and a maintenance shop in the rear, with a restroom between. The original finish in the front has been obscured by vinyl floor tiles, wallboard, and acoustical ceiling tiles, but an impression of the former appearance of the interior can still be gained from the shop, with its exposed wooden floor and beaded board walls and ceiling.

# 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" 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 ca. 1904

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Once a symbol of the artistic and commercial aspirations of the prairie town in which it is located, the Ray Opera House is now significant as a building type formerly common in North Dakota but becoming increasingly rare.

The site of the opera house (lot 7 and 8 feet of lot 8, block 3, original town-site) was purchased for \$300 by Bertha Herman in June, 1904, and presumably built upon shortly afterward. The second floor of the 2-story structure comprised the opera house proper, while the first-floor commercial area was occupied by merchant S. Charlson's grocery and general store. Sigbjorn (Sam) Charlson, born in Norway in 1850, came to America at age six months with his family and lived in Wisconsin and Iowa, moving to Ray in 1904. There he established his store in the opera house building and in 1908 purchased the property for \$5,000 from Bertha Herman. Following Charlson's death, the store was operated by his son Carl, who at age 18 had accompanied his parents to Ray in 1904. Carl Charlson spent 42 consecutive years in the mercantile business his father started, first as clerk, then partner (1908), and eventually co-owner with his sister, Ella Charlson. In 1946 the Charlsons sold the property to Adam Stevahn, who also ran a store on the premises.

In the years immediately following the construction of the Ray Opera House, its auditorium was the setting for performances by visiting entertainers such as musicians on the Chatauqua circuit and the "Irish prima donna," Madame Rosa d'Erina, vocalist and organist to Britain's Princess of Wales. Local talent was represented by the Ray Concert Company and the Ray Orchestra, with the latter sponsoring seasonal dances to celebrate such holidays as Halloween, Christmas, Valentine's Day, and Easter. The opera house was also home stage for a popular traveling theatrical troupe known as The Crows, who were members of the Kilshaw family which homesteaded south of town. In October, 1905, The Crows appeared at the opera house in Struggle for Gold, a 4-act comedy, and a military drama, Under Two Flags. Wrestling matches, masses celebrated by visiting Catholic priests, and public school graduation exercises were other events held at the opera house during its first decade.

Following the construction of the Ray City Auditorium ca. 1915 and subsequent changes in taste in public entertainment, the opera house auditorium fell into disuse except as a storage area. During the early 1950s, however, it was remodeled into separate rental units as a result of an oil boom in the region. A beauty shop was also installed on the second floor, and when shop and rooms were later vacated, the space was again used for storage. The first floor of the building was empty for a time after it ceased to house the store of Adam Stevahn, but in 1961 it was occupied as the area

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Eide, Marlene, coordinator. The Wonder of Williams: A History of Williams County, North Dakota. 2 vols. Compiled and published by the Williams County Historical Society / Williston, North Dakota; 1975/. Vol. I, p. 1051.  
 Fuoter, Donald R. Ray, North Dakota. Personal interview, April 27, 1977.  
 Maddox, Dawn. Personal inspection, April 27, 1977.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1 acre.

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,3	6,3,5,8,4,0	5,3,5,6,0,2,0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Dawn Maddox, Architectural Historian

May, 1977

ORGANIZATION

State Historical Society of North Dakota

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

Liberty Memorial Building

TELEPHONE

701-224-2666

CITY OR TOWN

Bismarck

STATE

North Dakota 58505

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

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

*James E. Sherry*

TITLE N.D. State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE May 1, 1978

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

ATTEST *William Lebovich*  
 KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE *11/2/78*  
 KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER  
 DATE *10/23/78*

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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DATE ENTERED	1978

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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headquarters of Montana-Dakota Utilities. When the latter moves to new quarters in the near future, the opera house building will be renovated according to plans being drawn up by the Prairie Community Design Center, Fargo, a non-profit organization providing free or low-cost design services in historic preservation to rural communities. The second floor will be restored to its original form and the first floor will serve the needs of the Senior Citizens League of Ray, Inc., which in February, 1977, leased the property from the city of Ray. It was given to the city in December, 1975, by W.S. Raymond, a local banker who wished to see the opera house building preserved and its role in community history perpetuated.