

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

**SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD**

NRIS Reference Number: 88000934

Date Listed: 7/7/88

Steinauer Opera House  
Property Name

Pawnee  
County

NE  
State

Opera House Buildings in Nebraska 1867-1917  
Multiple Name

-----  
This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

Beth Boland  
Signature of the Keeper

7/7/88  
Date of Action

=====  
**Amended Items in Nomination:**

Add to Historic Functions: "Commerce/Trade -- financial institution

Add to Current Functions: "Commerce/Trade -- financial institution

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**DISTRIBUTION:**

National Register property file  
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

934

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

RECEIVED

MAY 24 1988

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Steinauer Opera House

other names/site number NeHBS #PW07-8; OHBIN #02-21-03

**2. Location**

street & number 215 Main N/A not for publication

city, town Steinauer N/A vicinity

state Nebraska code NE county Pawnee code 133 zip code 68441

**3. Classification**

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u>      </u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>      </u>	<u>      </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>      </u>	<u>      </u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>      </u>	<u>      </u> objects
		<u>1</u>	<u>      </u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: Opera House Buildings in Nebraska 1867-1917

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

**4. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  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  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

James A. Hanson May 16, 1988

Signature of certifying official Director, Nebraska State Historical Society  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

**5. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby, certify that this 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.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

Beth Boland 7/1/88

## 6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation & Culture: Theatre;  
music facility  
Social: Meeting hall

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Vacant/Not in use

## 7. Description

Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Two-part commercial block

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Brick

roof Other: Tar

other Decorative brick trim

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Steinauer Opera House is located at the southeast corner of the intersection of Third and Main Streets, on the second floor of what has always been the Bank of Steinauer, built by Joseph A. Steinauer, founder of the town. Constructed in 1888, the Two-Part Commercial Block brick structure has brick arches above the second floor windows, a border of decorative brickwork near the top of the building, stone window ledges, a border of stone extending around the building near the tops of the windows on the second level, two stone borders at the top of the building, and decorative pressed metal pediments atop all the windows on the first floor. Measuring approximately 25 feet wide by 75 feet long, the building has a flat roof protected by a layer of tar coating. Access to the second-floor auditorium is through a door in the extreme northeast corner of the building, on Third Street. No ticket window exists.

The small auditorium is 21 feet wide by 50 feet, 9 inches long from the proscenium opening to the back wall of the house. Windows exist in both side walls and the back wall of the stage, which is the front facade of the building. A well preserved pressed tin ceiling adorns the room. In addition, pressed tin is used as a wall covering down to a level of about three feet above the floor, where wooden wainscoting completes the wall decor (see photo #3). No balcony exists in this small house.

The proscenium arch measures 12 feet wide by 11 feet high. Narrow wings of four feet, six inches on stage right and four feet, three inches on stage left allow no access to the backstage area except through the proscenium opening itself. There were no dressing rooms in this small opera house. This proscenium arch is apparently makeshift, added at an indeterminate time after the room was completed, rather than being built in during construction of the facility, as was usual. The stage is only about two feet above the level of the floor. A three foot, two inch apron extends beyond the proscenium opening. The stage depth is ten feet from the curtain line to the back wall. A piece of painted scenery illustrating a "town" scene hangs partially unrolled behind the proscenium opening.

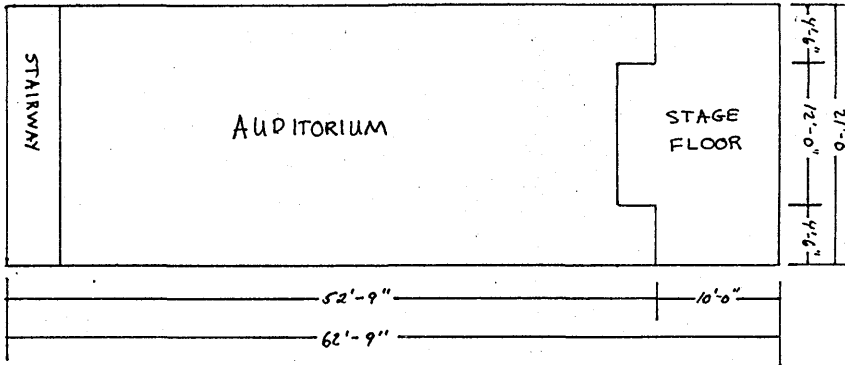
The structural and historical integrity of the building and the theatre has been preserved.

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Floor plan, Steinauer Opera House, Steinauer



Credit: P. Leitner, Draftsman

## 8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Performing Arts

Entertainment/Recreation

Social History

Period of Significance

1888-1917

Significant Dates

1888

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Steinauer Opera House is significant for its association with and in reference to the historic context "Aesthetic Systems: Itinerant and Local Performing Arts in Nebraska" and the property type of "Opera House Buildings in Nebraska, 1867 to 1917." Under Criterion A, this opera house is significant in the areas of the performing arts; entertainment/recreation; and social history, on a state level, as a well preserved example of an opera house building in Nebraska. The building retains a high degree of historical integrity, possessing the physical and associative characteristics to make it an eligible member of its property type.

This opera house is significant in the area of performing arts for bringing a variety of entertainment to the community of Steinauer. As a facility for the performing arts, it offered productions such as magic lantern exhibitions, musical concerts, magicians, touring stock companies, specialty acts, and home talent productions. (See following table of Representative Entertainments 1896-1917.)

This opera house is significant in the area of entertainment/recreation, since it provided a place where the whole community could gather to attend dances, lectures, and moving pictures. (See following table of Representative Entertainments 1896-1917.)

This opera house is significant in the area of social history, because it gave Steinauer a neutral, nonaffiliated location for political meetings, literary societies, and school activities. (See following table of Representative Entertainments -1917.) In the days before radio, television, and sound movies, activities at the opera house were anticipated for days or weeks ahead of time. It provided a place for people to get together to have a good time and forget their troubles over crops, weather, taxes, the railroads, and the generally hard life of settling the Great Plains.

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Besom, A. *Pawnee County, Nebraska: As It Was, Is, and Is To Be, with a New County Map and Directory.* Atchison, KS: The Immigrant Union, 1878.  
Brand Irons, comp. *Bicentennial Album of Pawnee County.* McPherson, KS: Brand Irons, 1976.  
Bredemeier, Edwin H. Letters to the author. Steinauer: 1986, 22 Aug. and 24 Aug. 1987.  
*Souvenir Book of Pawnee County.* Photostat. N.p.: W.E. Hassler, 1897.  
Steinauer Opera House. Steinauer site visit. 21 Feb. 1987.

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 # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

D. Layne Ehlers (see below)

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property Less than one [1] acre

UTM References

A 14 735420 4454235  
 Zone Easting Northing

C \_\_\_\_\_

B \_\_\_\_\_  
 Zone Easting Northing

D \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

This property is described as the west half of Lot 18 in Block 6 of the Original Town of Steinauer, Pawnee County, Nebraska.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire town lot that has been historically associated with this property.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title D. Layne Ehlers, Principal Investigator

organization OHBIN Study date April, 1988

street & number 2302 South 11th telephone [402] 435-6946

city or town Lincoln state NE zip code 68502

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The period of significance is derived from the original construction date of the building, c. 1894. It continues through 1917, the year considered to signal the end of the opera house era in Nebraska, based on declining numbers of touring companies nationally and rising numbers of movie houses and automobiles. The proximity of Pawnee City (10 miles) and Humboldt (16 miles), which had moving picture theatres and community auditoriums by 1917, meant that as more Steinauer residents bought cars, activities in that nearby city became a more viable option. Limited choices in the Steinauer Opera House doomed it to a dwindling number of sporadic events.

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Steinauer Opera House  
Representative Entertainments, 1896-1917

DATE EVENT AND PERFORMERS

Social History

Oct 1896 Political speech by the Hon. Charles H. Sloan of Geneva  
Oct 1896 Political speech by the Hon. J. B. Strode  
Nov 1896 Literary Society organizational meeting (reg. Friday meetings)  
Nov 1901 Mass meeting for community protection  
Oct 1903 Political speech by the Hon. C. F. Reavis of Falls City  
Oct 1904 Political meeting, music by Edmund's Band  
Oct 1906 Political Speech by Congressman E. M. Pollard  
Oct 1910 Music recital by Miss Dunton's music class  
Oct 1912 Political meeting with ex-Governor A. H. Shennenberg and the Hon.  
John H. Morehead, candidate

Entertainment/Recreation

Nov 1897 Dancing party  
Nov 1899 Lecture by L. S. Burnham for benefit of the Fire Dept.  
Nov 1900 Thanksgiving ball  
Oct 1901 Dance  
Nov 1901 Thanksgiving ball  
Nov 1902 Thanksgiving ball, music by Edmund's Band  
Nov 1903 Dance  
Hard times dance  
Thanksgiving ball  
Oct 1905 Dance  
Nov 1905 Dance, music by The Edmund's Band  
Nov 1906 Social dance by Peter R. Wenner  
Thanksgiving dance, music by Edmund's Band  
Dec 1907 Bill Bone, humorous lecture on "Sunny Smiles"  
Oct 1908 Lecture by Ralph Parlette on "The University of Hard Knocks"  
Nov 1912 Grand ball, music by Prof. Watzek's brass band of Humboldt  
Grand Thanksgiving ball, music by the Orchestra of Auburn  
Oct 1913 Jones Photo Picture co., moving pictures  
Nov 1913 Dance, music by the Tecumseh Orchestra  
Thanksgiving grand ball  
Oct 1915 Free picture show  
Nov 1915 Ladies Aid Society, social dance  
Oct 1916 Dance



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Steinauer Opera House  
Representative Entertainments, 1896-1917

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DATE            EVENT AND PERFORMERS

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**Performing Arts**

Nov 1897    Professor Klondike's Magic Lantern exhibition  
Nov 1899    Court of Fame, home talent cantata  
Oct 1903    Band concert  
Nov 1904    Entertainment, unspecified, by traveling company, unspecified  
Nov 1907    Old Plantation Quartett  
Oct 1908    Bear and Dog Show  
Nov 1909    Beulah Buck Concert Co.  
              Blind Robert entertainment  
Oct 1910    Alvah Green entertainment  
Nov 1910    Totten, the Magician  
Dec 1910    Trier Concert Co.  
Oct 1912    Pianist Bell in concert  
              Yare Duo Co.  
Nov 1912    Imperial Stock Co.  
Dec 1912    Giddings Family Concert Co.  
Oct 1913    *The Girl and the Shepherd*, Wesselman Wood Stock. Co.  
              Wessleman Wood Stock Co.  
              *McFadden's Flats*  
Dec 1913    *Diamonds and Hearts*, home talent play by Young Ladies Society  
Oct 1914    The Panama Singers  
Nov 1914    Julius Caesar Nagphe, Grecian entertainer  
Nov 1916    Marie Parry, violin concert

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The following information is the same for both Steinauer photographs:

NAME OF PROPERTY: Steinauer Opera House  
CITY, COUNTY, STATE: Steinauer, Pawnee, Nebraska  
NeHBS SITE No.: PW07-8  
OHBIN SITE No.: 02-21-03  
NAME OF PHOTOGRAPHER: Christian H. Ehlers

PHOTO NUMBER: Steinauer #1  
DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH (and NEGATIVE NUMBER): 02-21-87 (8611/8:36)  
LOCATION OF ORIGINAL NEGATIVE: Nebraska State Historical Society  
DESCRIPTION OF VIEW INDICATING DIRECTION OF CAMERA: Exterior view, looking southeast at the west (front) and north facades.

PHOTO NUMBER: Steinauer #2  
DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH (and NEGATIVE NUMBER): 02-21-87 (8611/8:30)  
LOCATION OF ORIGINAL NEGATIVE: Nebraska State Historical Society  
DESCRIPTION OF VIEW INDICATING DIRECTION OF CAMERA: Interior view, looking west at the stage.

PHOTO NUMBER: Steinauer #3  
DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH (and NEGATIVE NUMBER): 02-21-87 (8611/8:32)  
LOCATION OF ORIGINAL NEGATIVE: Nebraska State Historical Society  
DESCRIPTION OF VIEW INDICATING DIRECTION OF CAMERA: Interior view, looking south at the wall and the ceiling.