

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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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 Gehling's Theatre
other names/site number NeHBS #RH03-76; OHBIN #11-29-04

2. Location

street & number 1592 Stone St. not for publication
city, town Falls City vicinity
state Nebraska code NE county Richardson code 147 zip code 68355

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>1</u>	<u> </u> objects
			<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 G. Hanson May 16, 1988
Signature of certifying official Date
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

7/28/88

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation & Culture: Theatre;
music facility

Social: Meeting hall

Commerce/Trade: Specialty store

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Vacant/Not in use

Commerce/Trade: Department store

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Two-part commercial block

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Unknown

walls Brick

roof Unknown

other Sandstone turrets, raised ledges
above and beside windows

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Gehling's Theatre is located on Stone Street, the main thoroughfare in Falls City, in the heart of the downtown retail district. Constructed in 1892-1893 by the Gehling family, who owned the local brewery, this massive Two-Part Commercial Block brick structure measures approximately 52 feet wide by 110 feet long. The ornamental facade includes windows decorated with brick arches, stone ledges above windows, stone turrets topped with miniature onion domes, an elaborate cornice, and "1892" and "GEHLING" set into the top in stone. Original public access to the second-floor theatre was in the northeast corner of the building, but it has since been closed off due to modifications made to the lower floor retail space. The auditorium is now reached via a staircase at the north end of the building, coming up through the stage floor. The box office (see photo #4) remains outside the auditorium proper, at the top of the original staircase, across from a gracious staircase leading to the balcony. Several rooms, probably used as office space at one time, fill the third level above the staircase, foyer, and box office, a space fully twenty feet from the south wall of the building to the south wall of the auditorium.

The massive auditorium is 78 feet long from the proscenium opening to the back wall, by 50 feet wide. The curved balcony is 28 feet deep from the south wall at its center, 48 feet at the furthest points of the horseshoe. The house left side has been extended through the proscenium wall to allow easier access to the balcony for storage purposes. The balcony edge is delineated by a low wainscoted wall; the balcony is supported by pillars set approximately 10 feet apart. The red molded, white trimmed ceiling, walls, and top of the proscenium arch show water damage and falling plaster. The *Falls City Journal* for 3 March, 1893, described the auditorium as "particularly pleasing, both in the manner in which it is seated, giving the occupant of ever chair an effective view of the stage, and the quality of the wall and ceiling decorations, the frescoing consisting of blending colors in appropriate designs and images."

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The huge proscenium arch measures 25 feet wide by 24 feet high, filling the entire north wall of the auditorium. The stage right wing is only six feet wide because of the staircase from the lower level, but the stage left side is thirteen feet wide. A small storage closet in the backstage side of the stage left proscenium wall has several old posters for silent movies plastered to the walls. The dressing rooms, originally under the stage, were removed at some time in the past. The stage measures about 28 feet from the proscenium opening to the back wall; a five-foot apron curves outward. A center stage trap door remains. Access to the backstage area from the auditorium was originally through a door on the stage right side.

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

The three-story brick building has undergone remodelling on the street level facade, including the addition of a contemporary mansard roof and the addition of wood paneling and plate glass storefronts, providing access to the retail space housed on the first level. The building originally housed a furniture gallery on the first level and currently serves as a hardware store. Although street level access to the theater has been closed the opera house space is still accessible through storage rooms at the back of the theater.

Despite the alterations made to the street level facade, the building still retains sufficient historical and structural integrity. The front facade (second and third stories) remains intact, and displays original window configuration (although windows now boarded up), stone beltcourses, decorative brick work and elaborate cornice. The opera house space, although somewhat deteriorated, remains in near-original condition and is presently used for storage.

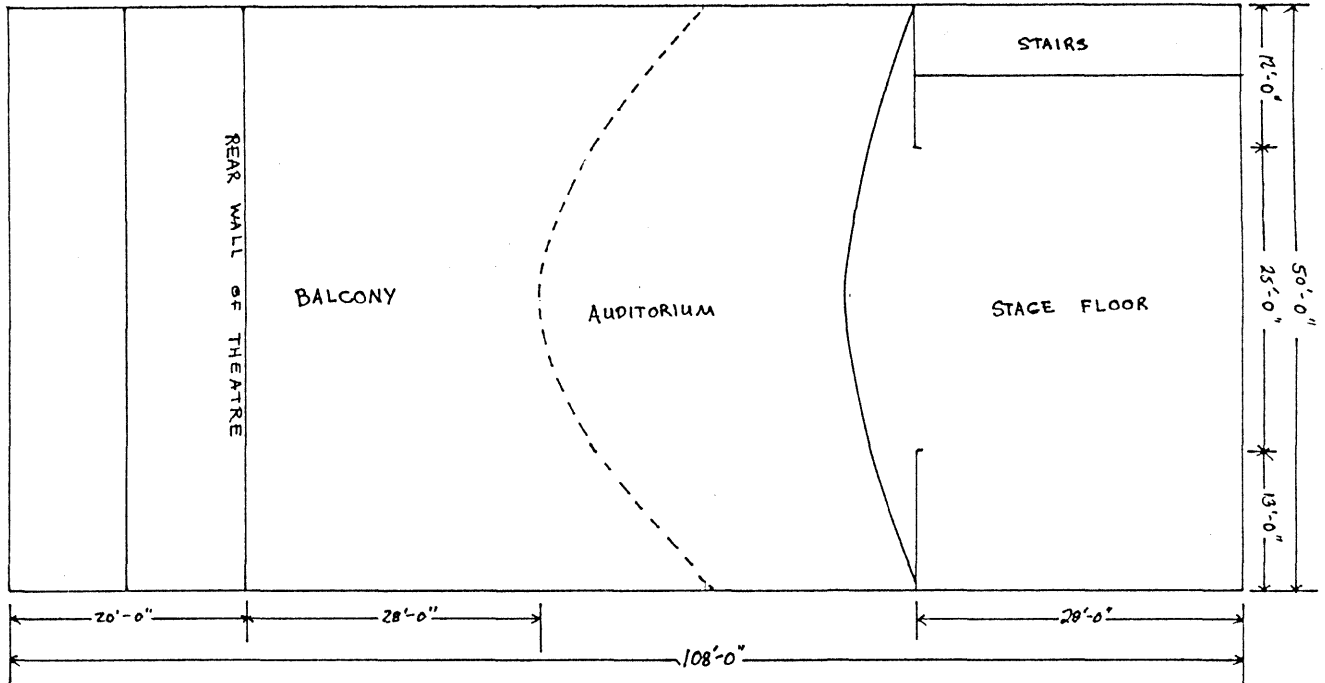
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Floor plan, Gehling's Theatre, Falls City

N →



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

Period of Significance

1892-1917

Significant Dates

1892

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Herman, Charles H. (builder)

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

Gehling's Theatre 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 and entertainment/recreation, 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 Falls City. As a facility for the performing arts, it offered productions such as touring stock companies; stars like Fanny Rice, Robert Downing, and Elsie de Tourney; Shakespeare; classics like *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Two Merry Tramps*, and *Shepherd of the Hills*; minstrel shows; and home talent productions. (See following table of Representative Entertainments 1893-1915.)

This opera house is significant in the area of entertainment/recreation, since it provided a place where the whole community could gather to attend lectures, vaudeville, and moving pictures. (See following table of Representative Entertainments 1893-1915.) 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

Bangert, Edna. Letter to the author. Falls City: 1987.
Edwards, Lewis C. *History of Richardson County Nebraska: Its People, Industries and Institutions*. Indianapolis: B. F. Bowen & Co., Inc., 1917.
Gehling Theatre. Falls City site visit. 29 Nov. 1986.
Kiekhaefer, Denzel. Personal interview. Falls City: 29 Nov. 1986.
Prichard, Harold C. Letters to the author. Falls City: 1986.
Richardson County Register of Deeds. Gehling's Theatre public records. 28 Aug. 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 [] acre

UTM References

A

1	5	2	7	8	0	0	0	4	4	3	7	5	0	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

D

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

This property is described as Lot 2, excluding 4 ft. off the south side; all of Lot 3; and Lot 4, excluding 21 ft. off the north side in Block 90 of the Original Town of Falls City, Richardson County, Nebraska.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire town lots that have been historically associated with this property.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title D. Layne Ehlers, Principal Investigator
organization QHBIN 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, 1892, when it was described as "a playhouse that is everything that could be desired, and that puts Falls City in a rank in this line which has long been her proper place" (*Falls City Journal* 3 Mar 1893). The period of significance 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, although no specific newspaper listings for this opera house were found after 1915. The local opening of the Electric and World movie theatres around 1910 took considerable business away from Gehling Theatre, while limited choices in Gehling's Theatre doomed it to a dwindling number of sporadic events.

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Gehling Theatre, Falls City
Representative Entertainments, 1893-1915

DATE EVENT AND PERFORMERS

Entertainment/Recreation

Nov 1894 Lecture by Dr. James Hedley on 'The Sunny Side of Life'
Nov 1904 Lecture by Frank McClure Chaffee on 'Goblins of our Grandfathers'
Nov 1905 Kellogg, the Bird Man, the 'Human Bird Warbler'
Nov 1910 Lecture by Edmund Vance Cooke
Nov 1911 Lecture by Rev. Henry B. Tierney
Oct 1915 Moving pictures on Mondays and Wednesdays
Empress Brand Vaudeville on Saturdays

Performing Arts

Feb 1893 *Mr. Potter of Texas* by Horace M'Vicker co.
Nov 1893 Nellie McHenry co. with *A Night at the Circus*
Miss Fannie Rice in *Rice's Jollities*
Charles A. Haswin & Co. in *The Silver King*
Oh, What a Night!
Walker Whiteside in *Richelieu* and *Hamlet*
Nov 1894 Abbey's Original Uncle Tom's Cabin co.
Jane
Dec 1894 *Fast Mail*
Hoyt's *A Bunch of Keys, or, The Hotel*
Miss Jane Coombs in *Romeo and Juliet*
Nov 1895 Van Dyke & Eaton Co.
The Big 10 Cent Show
Dec 1895 *Si Plunkard*
Nov 1897 Gilmore & Leonard's co. in *Hogan's Alley*
W. S. Hart and Constance Williams in *The Man in the Iron Mask*
Dec 1897 *The Dazzler* with Cosgrove & Grant and Boulden & Griffin
Nov 1898 Original Ole Olson co.
Tennessee's Pardner with Harry Mainhall
Robert Downing in *The Gladiator, Ingomar the Barbarian, and*
French Marriage
Dec 1898 *Human Hearts*
Nov 1899 *Two Married Men*
Hoyt's *A Texas Steer*
Under the Dome

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Gehling Theatre, Falls City
Representative Entertainments, 1893-1915

DATE EVENT AND PERFORMERS

Performing Arts, cont'd.

Nov 1900	<i>A Midnight Bell</i> with Alice Roseland <i>Quo Vadis</i> Fern & Forest Jeffrey, the Musical Twins & Baby Elocutionists
Dec 1900	<i>Where Is Cobb?</i>
Nov 1901	Baby Lund in <i>The Gypsy Princess</i> <i>The Village Parson</i>
Dec 1901	Mme. Elsie de Tourney in <i>Mary Stuart</i> and <i>Romeo and Juliet</i>
Nov 1902	<i>The Wrong Mr. Wright</i> with Harry Beresford <i>A Millionaire Tramp</i> Stetson's Uncle Tom's Cabin Co. Thomas J. Smith in <i>The Game Keeper</i>
Dec 1902	<i>Down Mobile</i>
Nov 1903	Alman Barrett Opera Co. <i>Circumstantial Evidence</i> Gus Sun Minstrels
Nov 1904	<i>Shore Acres</i> Midland Concert Co.
Nov 1905	<i>The Last Rose of Summer</i> with W. C. Patton Wood and Ward in <i>Two Merry Tramps</i> <i>A Royal Slave</i>
Nov 1906	<i>Over Niagara Falls</i> <i>My Wife's Family</i> Hi Henry's Greatest Minstrels Lawrence Evart in <i>We Are King</i>
Nov 1907	<i>The Cow Puncher</i> W. B. Patton co. in <i>The Slow Poke</i>
Dec 1907	Dubinsky Brothers' <i>Pickings from Puck</i> <i>Devil's Auction</i>
Nov 1908	Porter J. White's <i>Faust</i> with Olga Verne <i>The Devil</i> <i>The County Chairman</i>
Oct 1910	<i>Just a Woman's Way</i>
Nov 1910	<i>The House of a Thousand Candles</i> <i>Just Out of College</i>
Dec 1910	<i>The Climax</i>

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Gehling Theatre, Falls City
Representative Entertainments, 1893-1915

DATE	EVENT AND PERFORMERS
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Performing Arts, cont'd.

Nov 1911	<i>The Lion and the Mouse</i>
Nov 1913	<i>The Spendthrift</i> with Miss Marion Sherwood Billy 'Single' Clifford in <i>Believe Me</i> <i>Shepherd of the Hills</i>
Dec 1913	<i>The Thief</i> with Janet Allyn
Oct 1914	Sarah Padden in <i>The Little Shepherd of Bargain Row</i>
Nov 1914	<i>The Borrowed Wife</i> , home talent musical comedy <i>The Under Dog</i> <i>Don't Lie to Your Wife</i>
Nov 1915	Polly Primrose and her Merry Minstrel Maids <i>Nine Days on Coney Isle</i> , home talent musical comedy <i>The Trail of the Lonesome Pine</i>