

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PH0674338

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED MAY 7 1979  
DATE ENTERED JUN 18 1979

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Ossian Opera House

AND/OR COMMON

K.C. Hall

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Main Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Ossian

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

VICINITY OF

Second

STATE

Iowa

CODE

COUNTY

Winneshiek

CODE

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

\_\_DISTRICT

\_\_PUBLIC

XOCCUPIED

\_\_AGRICULTURE

\_\_MUSEUM

XBUILDING(S)

XPRIVATE

\_\_UNOCCUPIED

\_\_COMMERCIAL

\_\_PARK

\_\_STRUCTURE

\_\_BOTH

\_\_WORK IN PROGRESS

\_\_EDUCATIONAL

\_\_PRIVATE RESIDENCE

\_\_SITE

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

ACCESSIBLE

\_\_ENTERTAINMENT

\_\_RELIGIOUS

\_\_OBJECT

\_\_IN PROCESS

XYES: RESTRICTED

\_\_GOVERNMENT

\_\_SCIENTIFIC

\_\_BEING CONSIDERED

\_\_YES: UNRESTRICTED

\_\_INDUSTRIAL

\_\_TRANSPORTATION

\_\_NO

\_\_MILITARY

XOTHER: meeting

hall

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Knights of Columbus

STREET & NUMBER

Main Street

CITY, TOWN

Ossian

STATE

VICINITY OF

Iowa 52161

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Winneshiek County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Decorah

STATE

Iowa

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Survey of Iowa Opera Houses

DATE

in process

\_\_FEDERAL XSTATE \_\_COUNTY \_\_LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Div. Historic Preservation, Iowa City, IA

CITY, TOWN

STATE

# 7 DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

EXCELLENT                       DETERIORATED  
 GOOD                                 RUINS  
 FAIR                                   UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED      DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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

The Ossian Opera House was built in 1893. It is of frame construction, with front gable orientation on the community's main street. The exterior is sheathed with narrow coapboards, with scalloped shingling in the front gable end. The principal feature is a slightly projecting two-story center frontispiece, which has its own pedimented gable end, complete with a denticular cornice with end brackets, and a small lunette window in the tympanum of the pediment. The main entrance is recessed within a wide round arch, which is flanked by smaller, round-arched doorways. Across the frontispiece is a one-story, flat roofed porch, which is supported on simple chamfered posts with slender, curved brackets. The second story of the frontispiece features a bank of four tall, narrow windows, the two in the center paired, which are framed with flat surrounds. Windows elsewhere (paired on either side of the frontispiece, and in many cases boarded over on the side walls) are double hung sash in flat surrounds with narrow cornices. There is a single tall brick chimney near the roof edge on the east side. The only exterior alterations are the covered windows and uniform use of white paint (the shingled gable end was once a dark color).

The entrance opens into a short center hallway, flanked by small rooms. The bulk of the first floor interior is taken up by an auditorium, with a restroom and a kitchen wrapped around the rear of the stage area. There are meeting rooms on the second floor. Following the purchase of the building by the Knights of Columbus in 1956, the original balcony was extended to form the second floor meeting rooms, and the stage was removed, making this section level with the rest of the ground floor. The kitchen was installed at this time.

According to a local informant, the building has seen continuous use since its construction, because it is the only building in the community that can accommodate a crowd.

# 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 type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input 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

1893

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Ossian Opera House is a well preserved example of a small town opera house from the late 19th century. The building is well-conceived and pleasing as a work of architecture, and successfully expressive of its purpose as a place of public gathering.

The opera house "movement" of c. 1870-1930 brought auditoria and halls to numerous small cities and towns throughout Iowa. The results of a preliminary survey of Iowa opera houses conducted by the Division of Historic Preservation in 1978 indicate that this once ubiquitous building type (roughly estimated, there may have been some 350 opera houses and theaters in Iowa at the turn of the century) is fast becoming a rarity. Opera houses were particularly vulnerable to fires and became obsolete quickly when the cinema and television emerged in the mid 20th century as the staple form of entertainment for the American public. The second floor auditoria of many of the earlier houses are seen as offenses by modern building codes, and this has often precluded their continued use as theaters or meeting halls. With this in mind, the Division has decided to proceed with nominations of obvious candidates to the Register, while awaiting the final results of the survey.

The smaller opera houses were generally a mixed-use type of building, with commercial space on the ground floor and the auditorium above on the second floor (and possibly a balcony or mezzanine expressed on the exterior as a third story). In the absence of an inscription, such a building would often be unrecognizable as an opera house, the only indication being perhaps its decorative elaboration or its street-corner location. For a town the size of Ossian (with a population of 638 in 1895 and 850 today) a single-use type of building, such as this opera house, may be seen as somewhat unusual. More often, single-use opera houses were built in the larger cities, where support for their services was clearly guaranteed.

The building is unmistakable as an opera house, an aspect which contributes to its significance. The three-part (near Palladian) facade, with its central frontispiece and flanking side wings, is a traditional indication of a basilican interior and may be read in a general way as suggestive of a large, monumental interior space. The repetition of windows on the second story of the frontispiece and the triple entrance below may be seen as a reflection of the loggia-type opera house, which emerged in the 19th century as the standard type (represented, for example, by the Paris and Vienna Operas).

See continuation sheet

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Ossian Bee: Feb. 23, July 6, July 27, Aug. 24, Oct. 19, Dec. 14, 1893.  
 Decorah Republican: March 29, 1894; Jan. 13, 1910, June 16, 1910.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one

QUADRANGLE NAME La Crosse, Wisc.; Iowa

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:250,000

UTM REFERENCES

A 

1	5	6	0	0	4	5	0	4	7	7	7	4	0	0
ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING						

B 

ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING					

C 

ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING					

D 

ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING					

E 

ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING					

F 

ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING					

G 

ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING					

H 

ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING					

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lots 9 and 10, Block 7, Brooks Second Addition to Ossian

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

S.J. Klingensmith, Architectural Historian; M.H. Bowers, Historian

ORGANIZATION

Division of Historic Preservation

DATE

April 1979

STREET & NUMBER

26 East Market St.

TELEPHONE

319/353-6949

CITY OR TOWN

Iowa City

STATE

Iowa 52240

# 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

*Adrian D. Anderson*

TITLE Director, Division of Historic Preservation

DATE

5/1/79

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

*Charles A. Henry*

DATE

6.18.79

ATTEST: *William H. Brashers*  
 CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE

6.18.79

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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Ossian Opera House, Ossian, Winneshiek County, Iowa

CONTINUATION SHEET

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The Ossian Opera House was erected in 1893 by the Ossian Hall Company, organized locally and incorporated the same year. No architect has been identified; the building was certainly built by a local contractor. The hall could accommodate 350 people (the seats were not fixed), and over the years has seen a great variety of events -- traveling professional productions, local plays and concerts, dances, athletic events, political meetings and school functions.

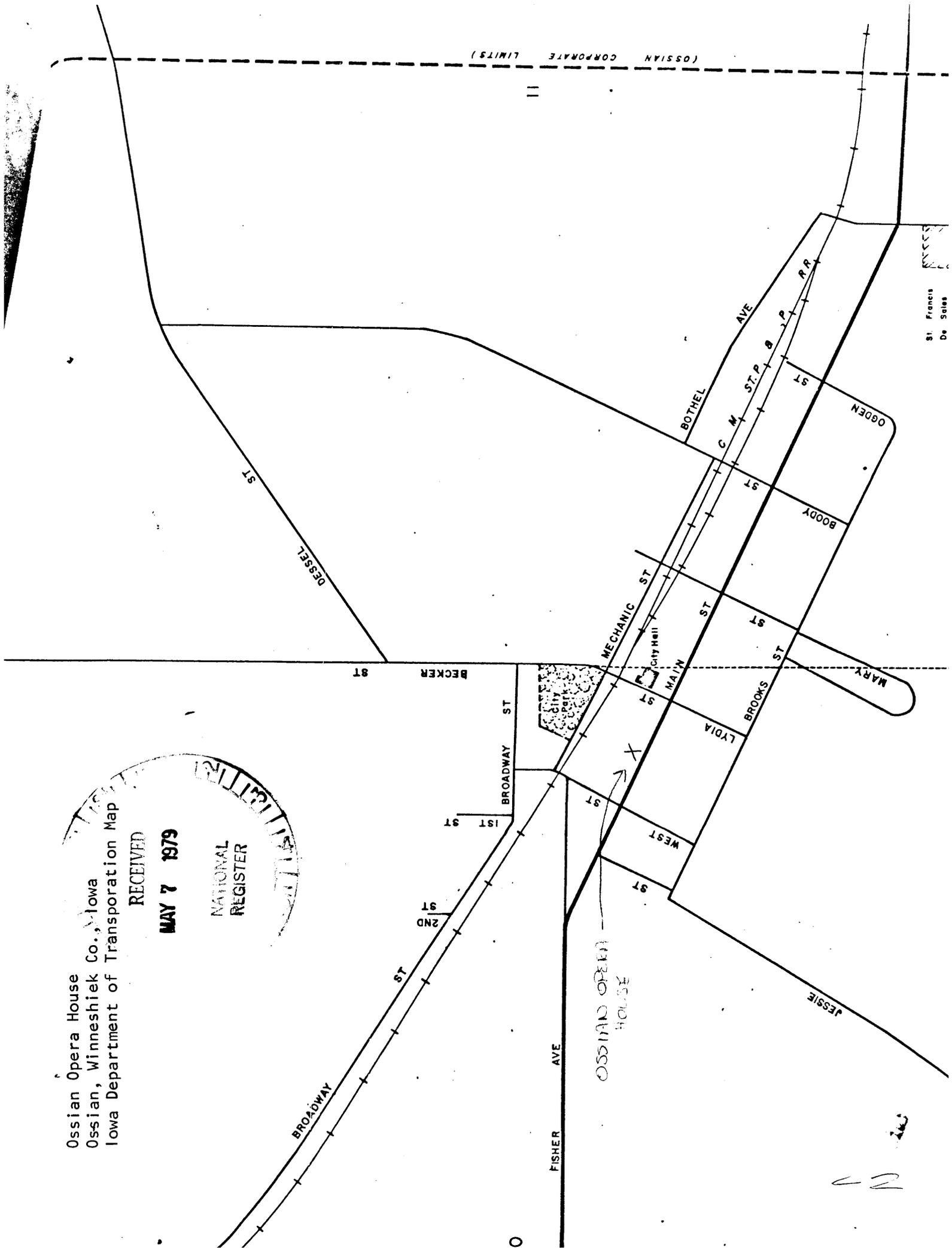
The Knights of Columbus remodelled the interior extensively (see description). The exterior, however, remains untouched and the building still possesses in large measure its historic integrity and architectural charm.

Ossian Opera House  
Ossian, Winneshiek Co., Iowa  
Iowa Department of Transportation Map

RECEIVED

MAY 7 1979

NATIONAL  
REGISTER



(OSSIAN CORPORATE LIMITS)

St. Francis  
De Sales

OSSIAN OPERA  
HOUSE

2