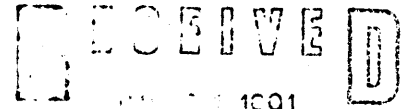


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



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 Willmar Auditorium  
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 311 6th Street SW N/A  not for publication  
city, town Willmar N/A  vicinity  
state Minnesota code MN county Kandiyohi code 067 zip code 56201

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u>0</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>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:  
Federal Relief Construction in Minnesota 1933-1941

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.

Ian R. Stewart Date 6/6/91  
Signature of certifying official Ian R. Stewart  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer  
State or Federal agency and bureau Minnesota Historical Society

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): \_\_\_\_\_

William Byer Date of Action 5/9/91  
Signature of the Keeper

Entered in the National Register

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

SOCIAL/meetinghall/clubhouse  
RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater/  
auditorium/sports facility

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

SOCIAL/meetinghall/clubhouse  
RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater/  
auditorium/sports facility

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Moderne

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Brick

roof Asphalt

other Cast Stone

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

See Continuation Sheets

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Continuation Sheet

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DESCRIPTION

The Willmar Auditorium is located on the east side of 6th Street West, between Litchfield and Becker Avenues, in the west central Minnesota community of Willmar. The Auditorium is a large three story Moderne Style structure built with steel and reinforced concrete and faced with brick and stone. The west facing principal facade is divided into nine symmetrical bays. Both outer bays include paired casement sash on each story. The remaining bays are organized as vertical elements within recessed panels which span all three floors. Each of the three central bays feature double entrance doors on the first floor, single casement sash on the second story, and casement sash arranged in groups of three on the third floor. The entrance bays are flanked by narrow vertical bays with a single casement sash on each floor. A flag is placed above the third story window opening of each narrow bay. The building is capped by a gable roof which is concealed behind a stepped parapet.

The entire facade is organized into a complex yet unified design by contrasting bands of brick and cast stone which define the building both vertically and horizontally. Each door and window opening is framed with stone while closely spaced horizontal bands link all elements of the building together. Cast stone is also used to simulate quoins throughout the facade. A frieze extends across the entire length of the building and includes a series of geometric designs and the words "Willmar Auditorium." Three bas-relief panels, each 9 feet high and 8 feet wide and cast with white sand and cement, are placed above the entrance. The central panel depicts war service and contains a figure representing liberty guarded by a soldier on one side and a sailor on the other. The panel to the north represents agriculture and includes a farmer and his wife at work. The panel to the south represents industry and contains figures of a trainman and a miller. A number of carvings representing various activities and products are placed above each of the major sculptural figures. The official seals of the United States, the State of Minnesota, and Kandiyohi County are placed at the top of each panel.

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The side walls are also divided into regular bays and include large openings on the first floor which provide access to the auditorium and a series of paired casement sash along the third floor. The eaves are defined by a band of modillions. The end wall is not visible because of the proximity of an adjacent building.

The interior of the building is organized into three distinct sections. The western portion includes three stories providing space for a variety of public functions, the central section encompasses the expansive auditorium space, and the eastern section includes the stage and dressing rooms. The western section originally included a ticket booth, coat room, kitchen, and Memorial Room, all located on the first floor, club rooms and balcony space for 550 people on the second, and a scout room, additional club rooms, and a projection room on the third floor. The 92' x 96' auditorium space seats 1,500 people and includes balconies along the north and south walls. The basement contains showers and dressing rooms, mechanical space, a band room, and a rifle range.

The Memorial Room, which is dedicated to the memory of veterans of all wars, is entered through ornate wooden doors with inset panels with carved decorative designs. The 29' x 24' space is lined with Minnesota granite to a height of five feet which contains an inset stone from each of the 48 states. These include a variety of stones such as marble, sandstone, and field stone, and the name of the state of origin is also identified. A mural painting, located above the stone wainscot, encircles the room. A panel on the north wall suggests the defense of country, home, and family, and the desolation and misery of war. A second panel shows the sacrifice by women and the three generations affected by the loss of one man. The mural on the west wall represents the three major wars in which men from Minnesota participated; the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, and World War I. The east wall depicts the ideals for which these men gave their lives: freedom of speech and assemblage, freedom of the press and a voice in the government, freedom of religion and education, the abolition of slavery, the right to work, and the guarantee of personal liberty and security. The south wall depicts the early settlers as well as the U.S. Dakota conflict of 1862. The Memorial Room also contains a

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Section number 7 Page 3 Willmar Auditorium

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fireplace with an inset tablet of cast and wrought iron which states, "In this room as in the hearts of the people they served, the memory of our glorious dead is enshrined forever."

The Willmar Auditorium was built between 1935-38 under the initial sponsorship of the State Emergency Relief Administration with construction completed by the Works Progress Administration. The architect was William M. Ingemann of St. Paul. The building remains in excellent condition and continues to serve in its original capacity.

**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)

Art  
Architecture  
Social History

Period of Significance

1935-41

Significant Dates

1935

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Ingemann, William M., architect  
State Emergency Relief Administration  
Works Progress Administration

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

See Continuation Sheets

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Willmar Auditorium is historically significant under National Register Criterion A as one of the major work relief projects sponsored by the Minnesota State Emergency Relief Administration. The Auditorium is also significant as the largest work relief project in Kandiyohi County at the time of its construction, and as a particularly successful example of the goal of work relief in which many laborers learned skilled trades during the construction process.

The Willmar Auditorium is architecturally significant under National Register Criterion C as an outstanding adaptation of the Moderne Style featuring unusual patterns of contrasting stone and brick. The Auditorium is artistically significant for its finely executed relief sculpture representing agriculture, industry, and war service, and for the Memorial Room which includes native stone from every state in the nation, and extensive mural paintings by Richard Haines of the WPA Federal Art Project.

According to an article in the Willmar Daily Tribune, a municipal auditorium building was selected for construction because of the "great public demand in Willmar for such a building." Plans for the actual construction, under the sponsorship of the State Emergency Relief Administration, were first announced in the Improvement Bulletin in November 1934. Often eclipsed by the better publicized work programs of the period, the SERA sponsored work projects throughout the state from 1933 until the work program was transferred to the Works Progress Administration in 1935. The agency was created as a result of the Federal Emergency Relief Act of 1933 which provided funding for a Federal Emergency Relief Administration. The purpose of the FERA was to make direct grants to the states in order to assist them with their relief needs. The Minnesota State Board of Control was approved as the State Emergency Relief Administration and not only administered direct relief, but sponsored thousands of work projects from highway work to the construction of public buildings, as well as educational activities and the production of various goods for the unemployed.

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By May 1935 the walls of the auditorium were underway with J.H. Olsen of Willmar in charge of construction. By July, construction had progressed to a point where the structural steel could be erected and bids were let for heating, plumbing, ventilation, and electrical work. However, when the newly established Works Progress Administration was created in 1935, the state's entire work relief program was shifted from the SERA to the WPA. In August 1935 construction ceased on the auditorium until the WPA could be placed in operation. Construction resumed in late 1935 and a major change in building material was also announced at that time. Local stone, in combination with cast stone, had been advertised as the original building material. This is also confirmed by William Ingemann's early renderings of the building. However, it was decided to substitute brick for the local stone, in spite of an additional cost to the city, because labor was not available on the relief rolls to trim and shape the rock. Because a large quantity of field stone had already been collected, it was used in the building's back wall and foundation. This rock had been brought to the site by a number of farmers in exchange for credit for feed which they had received from the government during the recent drought.

The Willmar Daily Tribune reported on July 14, 1936 that the city council made the first civic use of the auditorium by meeting in the basement in order to escape the summer heat. The building was eventually finished in 1937 at a cost to the federal government of \$107,000., while the city's share of approximately \$45,000. was financed with earnings from the municipal power and light plant without any local taxation.

Formal dedication of the building took place on May 23, 1937, although the murals in the War Memorial Room were not completed until 1938. The building provided complete and up-to-date facilities for conventions, meetings, performances, public dinners, and athletic events.

The Auditorium was considered an excellent example of work relief not only because a substantial number of workers were employed, but all classes of labor were utilized. This was based on a policy to select projects which employed individuals from as many fields of labor as possible. In addition, labor intensive



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construction methods were also devised, such as the use of ramps to convey building materials in order to employ common laborers, rather than using a hoist and derrick. It was also documented that many workers learned skilled trades during the construction process. This helped satisfy an important goal of the work relief programs by facilitating a worker's return to private employment as soon as a position became available. State WPA Administrator Victor Christgau commented that, "This contribution to the improvement of workers in the Willmar area is a benefit accruing to the community that is as real as the structure itself."

The Auditorium also illustrates a certain confusion which persists concerning which specific federal work programs were responsible for Depression Era construction. Because the Auditorium was completed by the Works Progress Administration, and because a WPA publication, entitled Works Progress Administration Accomplishments Minnesota 1935-1939, includes a picture of the Willmar Auditorium as the first photograph displayed, the initial sponsorship by the State Emergency Relief Administration remains largely unknown.

Architect William M. Ingemann was born in St. Paul in 1897 and studied at the University of Minnesota and the American Academy in Rome. In 1915 he was employed as an apprentice in the Minneapolis offices of Frederick Mann. From 1921-22 he was worked as a Junior Draftsman for Cass Gilbert in New York and he also served as an architect from 1922-26 in the offices of Electus D. Litchfield.

After Ingemann returned to St. Paul to begin his own practice, one of the first buildings which he designed was the Sawyer Hotel in Stillwater, now known as the Lowell Inn. During his prolific career, which spanned from 1925-61, Ingemann designed public schools, college buildings, hospitals, churches, community centers, other types of public buildings, and private residences. He published several articles relating to college dormitories and also designed dormitories at the University of Minnesota, Concordia, Hamline, Augsburg, and Gustavus Adolphus Colleges.

Ingemann's Depression Era projects, which were typically associated with federal work programs, included the following:

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Alden Municipal Building - 1938  
Benson Hospital - 1941  
Blomkest School - 1936  
Bovey Village Hall - 1934-35  
Ely Community Building - 1936-37  
Minnesota Department of Health Building - 1937-38  
School Building, District 128, Morrison County - 1936  
Pioneer Hall, University of Minnesota - 1936  
Rice Memorial Hospital, Willmar - 1935-36  
Staples Band Shell - 1936  
Staples Municipal Hospital - 1935-36  
Starbuck Community Hall - 1935-36  
Tower Municipal Building - 1939  
Willmar Auditorium - 1935-37

The Willmar Auditorium is a distinctive example of Ingemann's use of the Moderne Style when compared with other examples from the period such as the Ely and Tower Community Buildings, where smooth wall surfaces were employed. In contrast, the Willmar Auditorium represents one of Ingemann's more complex adaptations of the style.

In addition, the building's extensive artwork, including both sculpture and mural paintings, represents one of the state's most important artistic expressions from the Depression Era. The molds for the exterior sculpture were designed and produced by the WPA Federal Art Project in St. Paul. They were transported to the site and poured with concrete made with white sand and cement. The murals within the War Memorial Room were executed by Richard Haines, also of the WPA Federal Art Project. Haines was born in Iowa and studied at the Minneapolis Institute of Art and in Europe after winning the Van Derlip scholarship. Considered an important Depression Era artist, Haines also painted murals for the Sebeka High School in Sebeka, Minnesota, South High School in Minneapolis, the post office in Hastings, Minnesota, West High School in Denver, Colorado, and post offices in Wichita, Kansas and Cresco, Iowa. He also executed a mural in the Round Tower at Fort Snelling in Minneapolis, however, the painting is no longer extant.

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Another notable decorative element within the War Memorial Room is the series of 48 stones inset within the granite walls, one from each state in the nation. This feature was suggested by the members of the local Austin F. Hanscom Post of the American Legion, who contacted officers of the American Legion in each state. Many of the stones include historical associations, such as the stones from Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia which all came from battlefields from the Civil War. The stone from Pennsylvania was taken from a blockhouse which was used as George Washington's headquarters at Valley Forge. The stone from Delaware was taken from a quarry on the site of the Battle of Brandywine which was fought during the Revolutionary War. Other stones are of local interest such as the stone from California which was taken from the excavation for the Golden Gate Bridge, or the stone from Montana which surfaced during an earthquake in Helena in 1935.

The Willmar Auditorium meets the registration requirements for listing Social and Recreational Facilities on the National Register of Historic Places as set forth in the Multiple Property Documentation Form entitled, "Minnesota Federal Relief Construction, 1933-41." The auditorium was constructed between 1935-38 with assistance from the State Emergency Relief Administration and the Works Progress Administration. The building is historically significant as a major work relief project from the period. The Willmar Auditorium is also architecturally significant as a distinctive example of the Moderne Style and artistically significant for its sculpture and extensive mural paintings.

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Improvement Bulletin. January 11, 1935-August 23, 1935. Minneapolis, Minnesota.  
Northwest Architectural Archives. Working Drawings and Specifications for the Willmar Auditorium. University of Minnesota. Minneapolis, Minnesota.  
Willmar Tribune. 16 October 1935, p.2; 16 November 1935, p. 5; 12 March 1936, p.2; 27 March 1936, p. 2; 25 April 1936, p. 4; 9 May 1936, p. 2; 14 July 1936, p. 2; 25 July 1936, p. 2; 29 August 1936, p. 2; 7 December 1938; 28 January 1941.

See continuation sheet

**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

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property Less than one acre

**UTM References**

A 

1	5	3	3	8	7	6	5	4	9	9	8	1	8	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

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

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D 

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

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The nominated property occupies city lots 11 and 12 of block 42. Original Town Plat.

See continuation sheet

**Boundary Justification**

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

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Rolf T. Anderson  
organization N/A date October 9, 1990  
street & number 212 West 36th Street telephone 612-824-7807  
city or town Minneapolis state Minnesota zip code 55408