

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received JUN 25 1987

date entered JUL 28 1987

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Dickens Opera House

and/or common Dickens Opera House

2. Location

street & number 300 Main Street n/a not for publication

city, town Longmont n/a vicinity of

state Colorado code 08 county Boulder code 013

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> n/a in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> n/a museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Longmont Hotel Partnership (Roger L. Pomainville, General Partner)

street & number 655 4th Avenue

city, town Longmont n/a vicinity of state Colorado

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Boulder County Clerk and Recorder's Office

street & number 13th & Spruce

city, town Boulder state Colorado 80306

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Longmont Landmark Inventory has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1984 federal state county local

depository for survey records Longmont Landmark Designation Committee: Longmont Civic Center

city, town Longmont state Colorado 80501

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	n/a	<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 <u> n/a </u>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Dickens Opera House, constructed in 1881, is located on the northeast corner of Third Avenue and Main Street in the commercial district of downtown Longmont, Colorado. Designed in the Nineteenth Century Commercial style, the two-story brick building is one of the more significant historic commercial properties in the community. The 1880 Imperial Hotel is directly across Main Street from the opera house and the historic American Legion Building is to the south across Third Avenue. The old Longmont City Hall (1921) is adjacent to the north of the opera house.

The front elevation, facing Main, is three bays with the Third Avenue side composed of eight bays, all separated by engaged pilasters. Ornamentation is furnished by an elaborate metal cornice with brackets set at intervals corresponding to the pilasters. The cornice breaks at the center of the front facade to form a triangular pediment which contains the name "Dickens" and the date "1881" placed just below on the frieze. On the south (Third Street) side, the cornice terminates just short of the eighth bay, which was added in 1905.

The bay and window treatment is uniform on the second floor. Each bay contains pairs of tall narrow windows, one-over-one, double hung, with large transoms above. There are light color stone sills, segmental arched lintels and connecting stone belt courses which greatly add to the animation of the brick surface.

Along Main Street, the historic first floor storefronts are to a large extent intact with large display windows divided by wood pilasters with paneled wood kickplates below and large clerestory windows above. There are two storefront entrances and an entrance to the second floor added in 1905 in the left bay through an original display window.

The Third Avenue streetfront contains a combination of tall, narrow windows and entrances. (Some of the windows have been made into entrances.) Near the rear of the building, adjacent to the 1905 addition, is the original opera house entrance with an adjoining storefront with a recessed doorway flanked by display windows. The opera house entrance has a recessed double door with brick piers on either side and is topped by a round arched transom with a small pediment above. There is a secondary cornice over the storefront and entrance which continues across the storefront in the 1905 addition. The top of the addition terminates in a simple stepped brick parapet. On the east alley wall there are two entrance doors, six double hung windows and an opening at stage level for unloading scenery.

The historic tenants on the first floor of the building were the Farmer's National Bank in the corner space at 300-302 Main Street and John Ramsey's Pioneer Cash Grocery at 304 Main. The original ceramic tile floor and oak woodwork remain in the bank space as do the original marble treads on the basement stairs and part of the ornamental iron stair railing. The bank vault and door, originally in the basement, are on the first floor. One of the bank rooms still has the original door openings, ornamental pressed metal ceiling and plaster walls.

The remainder of the first floor still has the original wood floors, tongue and groove ceilings and plaster walls. The 1905 entrance from Main Street to the second floor:

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Dickens Opera House

opera house is located at the north side of the building through double doors and up a wide stairway with tongue and groove wainscoting. On the second floor there is a double paneled door entry into the auditorium which is a large open space unbroken by columns. Along the length of the south wall are paired windows divided by pilasters. The plastered surface of the north wall is interrupted only by pilasters placed at regular intervals. There is a tongue and groove wainscot on both walls. The windows and doorway retain their woodwork. The original floors have been resurfaced with wood flooring.

When the addition was built onto the rear of the building in 1905 the stage was moved from its original west front location to the near east rear which made it possible to include a fly gallery for overhead scenery. Since that time the front edge of the stage has been removed and the upper portion of the proscenium arch has been covered. The orchestra pit to the north of the stage has had the railing removed. Two earlier remodelings between 1881 and 1900 included the 1884 construction of two dressing rooms and the addition of water lines into the building. In 1887, an additional fire exit from the opera house was constructed on the north wall. It is believed that electric lights were installed in the building ca. 1890s.¹

At the west end of the second story, there are several rooms that appear to have been added in the early 1900s, possibly when the stage was moved. The wood and plaster partitions still remain, but the ceilings, door and window frames and trim have been removed.

After remaining vacant since 1978, rehabilitation of the Dickens Opera House began in the fall of 1985. The building reopened in July 1986 with a restaurant on the ground floor and a refurbished auditorium space on the second floor. The work, which met the Secretary of Interior Guidelines, retained the original building features including the metal ceilings, wainscoting, tile floor and the bank vault and vault door on the first floor. On the second floor, the top of the original proscenium arch in the Opera House was uncovered and repaired. The original window and door trim, wainscoting and baseboards were refinished and new ceiling fixtures installed.

On the exterior, the red brick and light color stone trim were returned to their original colors by the chemical removal of the exterior paint. All of the second floor windows are original glass and frames and were duplicated for the first floor replacements. The store fronts remain and the glass was replaced with clear insulating glass and new awnings were installed over the first floor windows and doors, to resemble the originals.

¹Daily Times-Call, 3/27-28/1971, n.p.

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Dickens Opera House

A photo guide to the 1905 addition to the Dickens Opera House and the 1905 relocation of the entrance to the second floor opera house:

A one bay, two-story, brick addition was constructed in 1905 on the Third Street elevation at the rear of the Dickens Opera House. This addition had little impact in the original appearance of the building since it was not visible from the Main Street front elevation and its detailing matched the original building. The secondary cornice at the rear of the original building was carried across the addition. The two-story floor windows of the addition are the same height and width and are aligned with those in the original building. They are finished with the same stone sills and segmental arched lintels. For some unknown reason, the original cornice was not carried over to the new addition and a plain brick parapet with a stone belt course was added instead.

The historic photo #1 of 1, shows the Dickens Opera House prior to the construction of the 1905 addition. The 1905 addition is seen at the far right of photos 3 of 11 and 7 of 8 which show the entire Third Street elevation. The addition is the one bay section at the rear of the building and is further identified by its plain brick parapet without the elaborate cornice which is on the original 1881 building. The east rear elevation of the 1905 addition is seen in photo 4 of 11.

In photos 3 of 11 and 7 of 8, the original Third Street entrance to the second floor opera house is at the right side of the building next to the 1905 addition. It is set apart from the other openings on this elevation by its round arched top with a triangular pediment above in the secondary cornice.

The 1905 addition created more opera house space, but when the stage was moved from the west front of the building to the east rear, the original Third Street entrance to the second floor opera house was no longer convenient. In order to enter the opera house at the back of the seats and away from the performance on the stage, the entrance was relocated to the north bay of the Main Street front elevation of the building.

Photos #8 of 8 and 1 of 11 show the location of the Main Street entrance in the far left bay of the front elevation. The entrance replaced a storefront window and since the doorway is the width of that window, its construction did little to change the appearance of the front elevation. On the interior a new stairway to the second floor opera house was also constructed in 1905. Photos 10 of 11 and 5 of 8 show this stairway from the Main Street entrance, before and after the 1986 rehabilitation.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> n/a community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> n/a 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/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1881, 1905 **Builder/Architect** Not known

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Dickens Opera House meets criteria A and C. It is significant as the most widely used community center in Longmont's early days from 1882 through the 1920s. The building served as the primary social and cultural center and as a meeting hall for the town and the surrounding agricultural community. Local and traveling theatrical productions and musicals were held in the second floor auditorium as were socials, dinners, dances and political rallies. The opera house building is one of the oldest and most historically and architecturally significant commercial buildings on Main Street. Its Nineteenth Century Commercial Style retains a great deal of original integrity and reinforces the historic character of this section of Main Street.

William Henry Dickens, the original owner of the building, was born at sea on May 26, 1843, while his parents were enroute from England to America. He came to Colorado in 1860 at the age of seventeen. After a year of working on a local ranch, Dickens homesteaded 160 acres of land adjoining the town of Longmont where he started farming and raising stock. By 1900, Dickens had become one of the most prosperous men in Boulder County with some eight farms that covered 680 acres in Boulder and Weld counties. Dickens' early enterprises included raising horses and hay for the stage line between Denver and Cheyenne. He served for a time as the town marshal in Longmont and was one of the founders and president of the Longmont Farmer's Mill and Elevator Company. Dickens was also an incorporator and vice president of the Farmers National Bank, which was located in his opera house building. He initiated the construction of a number of Longmont's commercial and residential buildings. Dickens was active in affairs of the Longmont community until his death in November of 1915 when he was shot while at home by an unknown assailant.¹

Dickens bought the opera house site on October 15, 1873, but did not begin construction until February of 1881 with Dickens himself hauling the brick.² When the building was completed early in 1882, the first floor contained commercial space and the second floor auditorium was furnished with scenery and a stage curtain from a Denver theater. The formal opening on February 2, 1882, was celebrated with a performance of the play, "The Greek Twins", written by local author, Will Holland.

The opera house was Longmont's social and cultural center and meeting hall for other community events. Plays and concerts featuring local talent were presented in the theater as well as entertainments by professional traveling troupes, which usually came to town from late autumn through early spring beginning in the 1880s up to the 1900s.³

"Uncle Tom's Cabin" was one of the popular plays performed in the opera house during the 1880s. In 1891, the famous melodrama, "Ten Nights in a Bar-Room", was given in the opera house by the Florence Hayden Dramatic Company.⁴ The auditorium was the scene of political rallies, meetings of the Longmont Christian Temperance Union, local grange gatherings and the 1886 meeting of the Colorado State Grange.⁵

9. Major Bibliographical References

(See footnotes)

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property under one

Quadrangle name Longmont

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A	1 3	4 9 1 3 4 0	4 4 4 5 7 9 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 and justification

Lots 21 and 22, Block 64, Town of Longmont, County of Boulder, plat of which is recorded in Book 2 at page 37. No other buildings stand on the lot.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	n/a	code	n/a	county	n/a	code	n/a
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state		code		county		code	
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Roger L. Pomainville, General Partner (Edited by Barbara Norgren)

organization Longmont Hotel Partnership date 11/20/85 (1/3/1987) (Rev. 6/17/87)

street & number 655 4th Avenue telephone (303) 776-5812

city or town Longmont state Colorado 80501

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 Barbara Sudler

title State Historic Preservation Officer date 6-17-87

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

William D. Bushong date 7/28/87
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

Chief of Registration

date

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Included among the important social events that took place in the opera house was the first Grand Masquerade Ball held Christmas Eve 1882 to celebrate the founding of Longmont's first fire company, the Walter A. Buckingham Hook and Ladder Company.⁶

The Grand Army of the Republic, McPherson Post Number 14, Department of the Mountains, made its headquarters in the Dickens Opera House building in 1882 and held their many functions in the auditorium.⁷ Other presentations for the community's entertainment included vaudeville and minstrel shows, spelling bees and boxing and wrestling matches. Important early motion pictures were shown here. In 1916, D. W. Griffith's film classic, "The Birth of a Nation" was presented.

In 1905, the building survived the fire which destroyed the adjacent 1883 Masonic Temple Building. When the Masons rebuilt on the same site, the addition was constructed onto the rear of the opera house building and the Main Street entrance put into the front of the building. The Dickens Opera House, a designated Longmont Landmark, still retains much of its 1881 appearance with the street level storefronts, the paired second story windows, elaborate metal cornice and the original opera house entrance on Third Avenue, still visible although no longer used.

¹Eloise Bruer, "Biographical Sketch of William Henry Dickens", ms, Colorado File, Longmont Public Library.

O. L. Baskin, History of Clear Creek and Boulder Valleys, Colorado, (Chicago: O. L. Baskin and Company, Historical Publishers, 1880) p. 635.

Glen V. Sherwood, Historic Landmark Nomination Form - Dickens Opera House, Longmont Landmark Designation Commission, August 1, 1983.

²Boulder Clerk and Recorder's Office, book 27, p. 190.

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³Longmont Ledger, 12/30/1883, n.p.; 1/13/1882, p.3; 1/27/1882, p.3.

⁴David L. Larson, "Early History of the Dickens Opera House" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Colorado, 1983), n.p.

⁵Longmont Ledger, 1/13/1893, n.p.

⁶B. L. Boyles, The St. Vrain Valley - Its Early History, (Longmont: Times Call Publishing Co., 1967), n.p.

⁷Larson, Early History of the Dickens Opera House, n.p.

Dickens Opera House, Longmont, Colorado, built before 1905, location of photo is just west of
(Photo taken before the building addition, the building was built at the intersection of the street)

