FHR-8-300 (11-78)

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For HCRS use only
received SEP 17 1981
date entered OCT 14 1981

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

1. Name

historic States Ballroom (SW02-8)

and/or common Bee Community Building

2. Location

street & number ____ not for publication

city, town Bee ____ vicinity of congressional district First

state Nebraska code 031 county Seward code 159

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
____ district	X public	X occupied	____ agriculture	____ museum
X building(s)	____ private	____ unoccupied	____ commercial	____ park
____ structure	____ both	____ work in progress	____ educational	____ private residence
____ site	**Public Acquisition**	**Accessible**	X entertainment	____ religious
____ object	____ in process	X yes: restricted	____ government	____ scientific
	____ being considered	____ yes: unrestricted	____ industrial	____ transportation
		____ no	____ military	X other: Recreation

4. Owner of Property

name Village of Bee

street & number c/o Raymond M. Policky, Chairman

city, town Bee ____ vicinity of state Nebraska

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Seward County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Seward state Nebraska

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey has this property been determined elegible? ____ yes ____ no

date On-going ____ federal X state ____ county ____ local

depository for survey records Nebraska State Historical Society

city, town Lincoln state Nebraska

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
X excellent	___ deteriorated	___ unaltered	X original site
___ good	___ ruins	X altered	___ moved date _____
___ fair	___ unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Bee Ballroom is a dodecagon-shaped, reinforced concrete structure. Walls are poured in place with pilasters expressed on the exterior at the major bearing points of the roof and at third-points of the interstitial bays. Twelve columns, 2.8 meters inside the exterior walls, support the domed wood roof of the main space, and form a circumferential aisle which provides support spaces for the ballroom including kitchen, restrooms, cloakroom and seating area. Two projecting pavilions are expressed on the exterior--the south front pavilion providing entrance, vestibule and cloak-room space while the pavilion on the northeast houses a raised stage area as well as a partial basement. Designed as a boiler room, the basement has always been used as a dressing area.

The open interior area covered by the domed roof measures 21.5 meters in diameter. The floor is hard maple, supported by a wood joist-beam system raised above grade by a series of concrete piers. The dome is a painted, exposed wood, curved beam and purlin system. A vent-fan is located at the apex of the dome (8.5 meters above the floor). In addition to the wood finish of the floor and dome, the remainder of the interior is simply finished with painted concrete walls and columns, and naturally finished plywood walls delineating support spaces around the perimeter. The low ceiling of the circumferential spaces is painted fiberboard as is the spandrel closing the space between the low ceiling and the raised dome. This spandrel receives the modest, incised, Modernistic treatment similar to the exterior, complete with exposed valancelights.

While the interior surfaces of the concrete walls are board finished, the exterior surface is smoothed, and considerably elaborated with simple Modernistic patterns--the result of narrow boards nailed to the inside face of the formwork. This low relief ornament is manifest primarily in the layered relief of the pilasters and the incised-like rectilinear relief of the flat wall surfaces.

As originally constructed the pilasters gave a crenellated effect to the high parapet of the exterior wall. The circumferential aisle of the interior, and the projecting pavilions had a low, flat roof which drained at two locations around the exterior. When the heating system was first installed in the early 1970's, repeated freeze-thaw cycles severely hampered drainage, resulting in repeated water damage to the interior. Because of the construction of the wall, which utilized a large aggregate of locally available Sioux quartzite, it was not possible to provide additional scuppers along the exterior. The low-pitched shed roof from the first purlinof the dome to the top of the parapet was then installed in order to remedy the problem, resulting in the building's present appearance.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below				
___ prehistoric	___ archeology-prehistoric	___ community planning	___ landscape architecture	___ religion	
___ 1400–1499	___ archeology-historic	___ conservation	___ law	___ science	
___ 1500–1599	___ agriculture	___ economics	___ literature	___ sculpture	
___ 1600–1699	X architecture	___ education	___ military	X social/ humanitarian	
___ 1700–1799	___ art	___ engineering	___ music	___ theater	
___ 1800–1899	___ commerce	___ exploration/settlement	___ philosophy	___ transportation	
X 1900–	___ communications	___ industry	___ politics/government	X other (specify) Recreation/Entertainment	
		___ invention			

Specific dates 1938-40 **Builder/Architect** Vladimir Sobotka

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The States Ballroom is significant architecturally as a notable product of local Modernistic design and as a major landmark in the area designed by a renowned, local architect-builder. The building has played a regionally important recreational, entertainment and cultural role in the surrounding Czech and German community. Constructed as a relief project of the Works Progress Administration, the building is a constant reminder of the difficult times associated with the drought and depression of the 1930's and the relief role played by the Federal government during that period.

The States Ballroom, though not yet fifty years old, is a locally significant historic resource that through both appearance (architectural merit) and association (historical importance) provides the community of Bee with a sense of both its past and its place in the larger southeast Nebraska community. The structure has exceptional importance to the community which in turn has an unusually strong associative attachment to it -- in fact, the structure is synonymous with the community and is the structure responsible for the widespread knowledge of Bee as a place in southeast Nebraska (1980 population, 192). As stated, significance and association derive from both historical and architectural considerations.

The building's significance to the community's entertainment, recreational and cultural development is considerable. The popularity of the structure soon turned it into a multi-purpose community center, serving such diverse functions as dances, concerts, plays and basketball games.

The original construction (1938) only roughly finished the interior space. The formal opening on Sunday, May 28, 1939, was ". . . a mammoth collosal, gigantic hit. . . Over two thousand tickets were sold and the place was a veritable bee hive. Every town within a radius of fifty miles was represented" (Blue Valley Blade, June 1, 1939, p. 1). In less than a month, the success of the venture was established sufficiently to make possible the approval of additional W.P.A. funds to completely finish the interior. (This brought the total cost up to $12,000 from the original $8,800; $3000 of which was the result of local fund-raising).

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

UTMs NOT REQUIRED

Acreage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Dwight, Nebr. **Quadrangle scale** 1:24000

UMT References

	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	14	661330	4541115
B			
C			
D			
E			
F			
G			
H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

Lots 12-16, Block 4, Original Town of Bee, Section 14, T12N, R3E.

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 D. Murphy, Survey Architect; Joni Gilkerson, Survey Associate

organization Nebraska State Historical Society **date** August, 1981

street & number 1500 R Street **telephone** 402/ 471-3270; 471-3850

city or town Lincoln **state** Nebraska

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

___ national ___ state X 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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Marvin O Knott 9/1/81

title Director, Nebraska State Historical Society **date**

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

William H. Brabam **date** 10.14.81

Keeper of the National Register

Attest: **date**

Chief of Registration

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GPO 938 835

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Formal dedication took place in May of 1940. The festivities included an address by Governor Roy L. Cochran and acknowledgements by Seward Mayor Fay Wood, A. C. Tilley, chief of the Nebraska Department of Roads and Irrigation, and D. F. Felton, state W. P. A. Administrator. Other features included concerts by the Seward Fire Department's Pumpernickle band and the Bee band, a baseball game, a water fight, and, of course, a dance to Ray Sedlak's music. The regional popularity of the facility continues to this day.

The Works Progress Administration

As stated, principal significance derives from both historical and architectural considerations. Historical significance relates primarily to the relief role played by the Works Progress Administration (later the Works Projects Administration) as a result of the great depression of the 1930's. A product of the New Deal, the W. P. A. was of great significance to a depressed nation in that it was a major federal work program for the unemployed. The W. P. A. was established on May 6, 1935, "for the purpose of creating jobs, supervising the whole work-relief program of the government and moving men from relief roles into government work projects or private industry as fast as possible" (Bining & Klein: 1951, p. 479). Eighty percent of the W. P. A. projects involved construction for general public use, i.e. post offices, schools, parks, highways, etc. From 1936 to 1941, the W. P. A. employed an average of two million workers per month.

> "W. P. A. had to be the salvation of many families during that period. They did not want to be on welfare. The idea was that they were able to work and do something and have your self-respect. And that meant an awful lot. . . I don't think people understand what the W. P. A. did. They didn't do make-work things. They left their mark. . . in terms of the construction of roads and buildings and parks -- lots of parks. . . If you look back on that now, you realize that it's not only created a capital investment. . . but it salvaged a lot of self-respect for people." (Ethel Schlasinger Overby, 1977).

World War II ended the unemployment problem, and the program was eliminated in 1943. Millions of workers and their families benefitted from the work programs while the nation and individual communities profitted from new or improved public buildings, parks and roads (Bining & Kleim: 1951, pp. 476-480; Graebner, et al: 1970, pp. 671-672).

"The hardest work I've ever done in my life was on the W. P. A., hardest and heaviest work. A lot of what we built is still around." (Walter Ballard, 1979).

While the Depression had an effect on the entire nation, Nebraska and other neighboring states of the Great Plains faced additional social and psychological stress as a result of severe drought and associated dust bowl conditions. Statistically, perhaps, the effects of the drought would not be uniform across the entire region, but none-the-less, the drought of the 1930's is firmly established in the psyche of the people of the Great Plains.

"Back on the Colorado plains it was terrible. We survived there as long as we could. But we had dust storms and droughts -- the wind would come and pick up our crops and just absolutely destroy them. . . It just came to the point where we couldn't live any more back there." (Lois Adolf Houle, 1979).

"As a Kansan boy I had seen so much of those dust storms in my lifetime. In our part of the country, they would come down from the North. And they would roll in, just like a cloud of smoke. Clear across the whole horizon. They'd just overcome us. Just roll, tumble in. During the period of 1934-35, the source of that black dust blowing in Nebraska and Kansas was Todd County, South Dakota. . . I knew where it was coming from because I saw it afterwards, and saw where the dust had settled." (J. S. Russell, former F.S.A. official and soil analyst, 1976).

"My dad used to walk the floor when those dust storms were blowing and say, 'There's a lot of real estate exchanging hands today.' The year before we left, my dad had a corn crop going pretty good. The grasshoppers hit, and dad went to town and bought corn knives for all us kids. He figured if we'd get that corn chopped down and piled up, the grasshoppers would leave it alone. (Crying:) Well they didn't. We worked but we couldn't keep ahead of them. They ate it right in the shock. They ate every bit of it. I don't even like to think about those days. We had friends who had come out to Oregon the year before, and they'd write back what a great country it was. There was grass up to the cow's belly, and there was fruit free for the picking . . . We had nothing. . . We go back to South Dakota every once in a while to visit, but I wouldn't want to live there. No way! No way! I just get that feeling every time I go back, like it used to be." (Marie Johnson, 1979).

W. P. A. projects, wherever they are, serving as they do a community much larger than that within which the project was built, are the great landmarks of this period.

Architecture

The architectural merit of the ballroom may be stated in three respects -- one involving the concept of landmark, another concerned with formal and stylistic aspects, the other resulting from associations with its architect-builder.

The landmark status of the structure is essential. Its geometry and overall form make it a singular, unique and memorable structure, both inside and out, relative to the context of this small village. The activities, meanings and associations attached to it enhance its value as landmark inside and outside the community.

While concrete construction and Modernistic tendencies characterize several of the W. P. A. projects in Nebraska, the States Ballroom represents a unique product, both in terms of stylistic interpretation, and in formal and functional conception. The Ballroom represents a local or vernacular interpretation of the Moderne style; it is not significant as an example of the formal, codified, academic version of the style. The architect, however, was able to provide a design with an adequate sense of the style, in terms of interior and exterior decorative detail, particularly within the local non-academic context of the village (photos #2, 4, 8). The Ballroom's formal qualities respond very directly to straightforward functional concerns. As its name implies, the structure was initially built to be just a dance hall. Knowledge of the nature of ballroom dancing led the architect to conceive of a twelve-sided building with a six-sided dance floor -- one that would allow for dancing always with the grain of the wood (see photo #6 ; Sobotka, 1981). In addition, the geometry and spatial arrangement have proved to be suitable for a wide variety of recreational and entertainment activities.

The final architecturally significant aspect of the Ballroom is its associations with architect-builder Vladimir Sobotka. Vlad was born in Dwight, just northeast of Bee, in 1895 and spent thirty-two of his years as a resident of Bee. He secured his first job in 1912 and during the next twenty years designed and built several residences and small commercial building's in the Bee-Dwight area. During the Depression, Sobotka secured work with the W. P. A., primarily as a construction superintendent. In addition to the

subject property he supervised work at the Seward County Fairgrounds, the York and Falls City Auditoriums, and designed and built the David City Park. Following his W. P. A. work he supervised work at the Hastings Military Depot and the Lincoln Air Base prior to joining the firm of Schaumberg & Freeman in Lincoln. In 1968 he joined the firm of Hoskins-Western-Sonderegger as construction superintendent. He retired from full-time work with Hoskins on July 27, 1981, at 86 years of age.

While the majority of Sobotka's work since the 1930's has been in construction, and construction supervision, his role prior to the 1930's was as architect-builder. Sobotka is a registered professional architect who obtained his license in 1941 after passage of Nebraska's registration law in 1938. His most significant design work includes two large projects -- the Bee School (1927) and the States Ballroom. The Ballroom is the only Sobotka building with Modernistic influences. The States Ballroom is architect Sobotka's "pride and joy" (Sobotka, 1981). Indeed, the structure has been the pride and joy of the community since its completion in 1940.

Conclusion

Now that the dust has settled, the rains have returned, and the grasses once again grow, W. P. A. projects stand as the primary physical evidence of the devastating conditions of the 1930's, and remind, too, of the ever-present possibility of future drought.