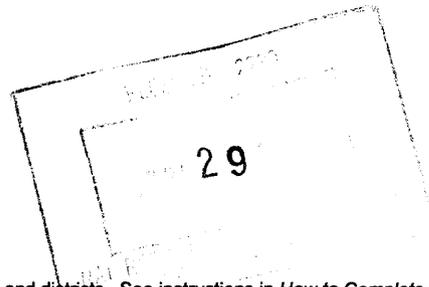


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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Batcher Opera House Block
other names/site number Batcher Block

2. Location

street & number Fifth Street and Second Avenue not for publication N/A
city or town Staples vicinity
state Minnesota code MN county Todd code 153 zip code 56479

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Nina M. Archabal 6/22/04

Signature of certifying official Nina M. Archabal, Date
Director and State Historic Preservation Officer, Minnesota Historical Society
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ Date _____
State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. 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): _____

Signature of the Keeper

Edson H. Beall

Date of Action

5/11/04

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structure
		objects
1		Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: theater

COMMERCE/TRADE: business

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE: business

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

NO STYLE

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE

walls BRICK

roof

other CONCRETE, GLASS, METAL

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or a grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

Period of Significance

1907-1935

Significant Dates

1907

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Architect: Batcher, Charles

Artisan: Calkins, Vinton

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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

Name of repository:

Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul

MN

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property less than one acre

Staples, Minn.
1966

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1.	1 5	3 6 1 9 9 4	5 1 3 5 1 0 5
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2.			
3.			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4.			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	Denis P. Gardner		
organization	N/A	date	May 2004
street and number	5309 Vera Cruz Avenue North		telephone 533-3966
city or town	Crystal	state Minnesota	zip code 55429

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name			
street & number		telephone	
city or town		state	zip code

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503

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Batcher Opera House Block

Name of property

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Description

The Batcher Opera House Block is situated near the intersection of Fifth Street and Second Avenue (U.S. Highway 10) in downtown Staples, a Todd County community roughly seventy-five miles northwest of Saint Cloud. The Batcher Opera House Block occupies the northeast corner of Block 16 of the Original Town of Staples, with Fifth Street bordering the building to the east and Second Avenue edging it to the north. Constructed in 1907, the structure rises above neighboring buildings and is one of the largest edifices in Staples.¹

A particular architectural style is not evident in the Batcher Opera House Block. Modestly adorned, the three-story building appears almost perfectly square, although its east facade and west rear are about ten feet longer than the roughly ninety-foot-long north facade and south side. The building rests upon a stone foundation and is formed of generally reddish-colored, load-bearing, brick walls. Its roof gradually slopes from east to west. The roof, however, features an elevated section at its southwest corner. The large, rectangular component rises several feet above the principal roofline and served as a pocket for the backdrops employed for performances in the opera house, a gathering venue on the second floor in the west section of the building.

The Batcher Opera House Block's north and east first-floor facades were altered in the early 1990s with the current buff-colored concrete veneer mimicking rusticated ashlar. Each first-floor facade is dominated by large display windows set in metal frames, as well as metal-framed, glass doors covering entrance openings. Two entrances are located at the east facade and one is situated at the north facade. While the north facade entrance is shielded with double doors, each entrance at the east facade is covered by a single leaf. Sidelights and modest-sized transom windows border all entrances. Each facade's display windows are periodically interrupted by sections of the decorative concrete veneer. Recessed, concrete panels mark the wall just below the display windows at the north facade, but this architectural feature is absent at the east facade. A metal molding resembling a bandcourse edges the tops of the display windows and entrances at both facades, separating the windows and entrances (including the modest-sized transom windows) from large transom windows that crown them. A similar, although wider, metal molding borders the top edges of the transom windows and visually divides the first floor from the second floor.

The second floor of the north and east facades maintain their original brick face. Each wall is dominated by a row of one-over-one, wood-sash windows set within rectangular openings. Seven window openings mark the north facade, while sixteen window openings punctuate the east facade. Each window opening is accented with stone sills and lintels. The third floor of each facade is virtually identical to the second floor, featuring the same number of one-over-one,

¹ This architectural description is based on a site visit by the author on January 12, 2004.

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wood-sash windows set within rectangular openings. The openings at the third floor, however, feature concrete sills and lintels. A corbelled cornice accents the top of each facade wall, although the cornice does not carry around to the south side and west rear. Since the Batcher Opera House Block's roof slants downward from east to west, the parapet at the north facade progressively deepens as the building's west rear is approached.

The aesthetic of the west rear is somewhat utilitarian and features mostly dark-colored brick that does not precisely match that of the north and east facades. What may be a door opening at the north end of the first floor has been filled with brick that is lighter in color than most of the masonry of the surrounding wall. Immediately south of this former opening the first-floor wall is interrupted by a wood stairway that ascends to a wood landing with a wood railing at the second floor. The landing serves a large, rectangular opening shielded by wood, double doors. The exterior face of each leaf is sheathed in metal. A large, multi-light transom window crowns the opening. Once serving as a fire escape for the building's opera house, the worn stairway and landing are supported by vertical timbers and wood struts. The vertical timbers rest upon the solid foundation of a concrete stairwell. Situated just south of the wood stairway, the stairwell features concrete steps that descend to a basement entrance with wood door. Metal, pipe railings mark the top edges of the stairwell. Immediately south of the stairwell is a ground-level entrance protected by a very small addition formed of concrete blocks and a slightly-inclined, shed-type, wood roof. The addition has several single-light windows divided by wood mullions. Another entrance opening is located near the south end of the wall. The rectangular opening is accessed by concrete steps and landing and is topped with a stone lintel. The opening is filled by a wood-paneled door with window, which is protected by a metal and glass storm door. Adjacent the entrance is a rectangular window opening with stone sill and lintel, although the opening is now covered by signage announcing that the rear parking area is for patrons of the business enterprise housed within the building.

Unlike the north and east facades, the west rear's upper wall holds only one line of rectangular window openings and windows. The window openings are positioned higher than the second-floor window openings at the two facades, yet lower than the third-floor window openings at either facade. The window openings may have been positioned in this manner to more evenly distribute sunlight into the large, high-ceiling opera house. Ten window openings complete the line, although one of the openings holds the multi-light transom window over the double-door emergency exit of the opera house. While one-over-one, wood sashes fill the remaining window openings, some of the sashes are devoid of glass, which has either failed or been destroyed over the last century. The sashes with missing lights are now filled with colored panels. The window openings are embraced by sills and lintels of concrete. The upper wall at the south end holds a large, rectangular opening shielded by wood-paneled, double doors. The exterior of each leaf is covered in metal. The opening likely provided an emergency exit for the backstage area of the

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Batcher Opera House Block

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opera house, although a stairway descending from the exit is no longer extant. A concrete lintel marks the top of the opening.

The upper wall at the south end of the west rear climbs several feet above the roofline and forms the west wall of the opera house's backdrop pocket. More than half of the upper wall at the Batcher Opera House Block's south side ascends beyond the roofline to form the pocket's south wall. Each wall section is painted yellow and displays the words: "Batcher's Dept. Store" in black lettering. The remainder of the upper wall at the building's south side can be divided into west and east sections. The west section, which forms the south wall of the roughly fifty-foot-wide opera house, has five window openings and windows that reflect the same design and are positioned in the same manner as the upper wall window openings at the west rear. The window openings at the east end of the south side's upper wall, however, match the positioning of the north and east facades, clearly demarking the second and third floors in the east part of the Batcher Opera House Block. Like most of the windows marking the upper walls of the building, the second- and third-floor windows at the east end of the south side are one-over-one, wood sash. At the second floor, one window opening and window is adjacent the west side of a rectangular opening and door that serves as a fire escape, while a second window opening and window is located near the opening's east side. The design is repeated at the third floor. Metal stairs lead from the metal landing at the third floor to a metal landing at the second floor.

The lower wall of the south side has no window openings or other adornment, but a small, framed passage links the south side of the Batcher Opera House Block with a single-story, hip-roofed, wood-framed, clapboard-covered building with a false front situated only a few feet to the south. The east facade of the petite structure is marked by display windows and two entrances covered with wood-paneled doors holding glass lights. A row of small, rectangular transom windows span the length of the facade immediately above the entrances and display windows. A small, wood and brick addition with a combination hip/shed roof extends from the building's west rear. The addition's west wall has a large opening covered by a paneled garage door.

The Batcher Opera House Block's basement is divided into four sections, each roughly twenty-five feet in width and ninety feet in length, a plan mirroring the original division of the first floor, which held four separate businesses. Each basement section is divided by a brick wall and large, square, concrete columns. The columns support the wood floor above with aid from vertical timbers positioned near the centerline of each basement section. The vertical timbers brace wood floor beams, which in turn support wood floor joists, carrying the floor.

The four separate spaces at the first floor were eliminated long ago, and now the first floor is mostly a broad space filled with antique merchandise. Steel columns dot the floor in places and support large beams bracing the upper stories. Carpeting covers the flooring and the ceiling

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features acoustic tiles and fluorescent lighting. A modest-sized storage area with low ceiling and occupied with shelving is located in the southeast corner and was once used to stock footwear. A roughly five-foot-wide framed section extends from the building's east wall for several feet along the structure's east-west centerline, encapsulating the stairway rising from the northernmost (centrally-located) entrance at the east facade to the opera house at the second floor. The current business enterprise's cash register counter is situated near the south wall, just west of the former shoe storage area. Stairs behind the counter ascend to an administrative area with low ceiling immediately above the shoe storage space. Walls enclose the administrative area on the north, south, and east sides, but the west features a parapet-type railing, allowing a wide view of the first floor. A framed partition covered in paneling occupies the east rear of the administrative area. Beyond the partition is a narrow storage space filled with shelving. This narrow room is accessed through entrance openings at the north and south ends of the partition. An elevated administrative/display space at the southwest corner of the first floor near the west entrance is linked to the administrative area in the southeast corner above the former shoe storage area by a mezzanine hugging the south wall. The mezzanine is held by vertical, metal rods anchored into the second-floor bracing and features a wood, parapet-type railing. A small bathroom is situated near the southwest corner of the building, beneath the mezzanine and administrative/display area.

The Batcher Opera House Block's second floor is gained via the stairway leading to the opera house. Plaster-covered walls with wood baseboards edge the wood stairs of the stairway. The passageway terminates at a stairhead immediately outside the opera house entrance, which is near the center of the second floor. To the east is a carpeted, north-south hallway spanning the length of the Batcher Opera House Block and flanked by several offices/apartments, as well as washroom spaces. Interestingly, the plaster-covered walls of the hallway do not meet the plaster-coated ceiling at right angles. Instead, the tops of the walls arc into the ceiling, producing a seamless appearance. The spaces at either side of the hallway have entrance openings covered with wood-paneled doors, each holding a glass light. The openings are accented with wood molding in a rather modest, classical pilaster/entablature design. Most of these entrances feature movable, wood-framed, transom windows. The offices/apartments are generally small spaces with wood floors and baseboards. Walls and ceilings are coated in plaster and some of the rooms still feature original light fixtures, as well as original radiators. As in the hallway, the walls blend seamlessly into the ceiling. The classical detailing around window openings in each room matches that of the entrances. Each room on the east side of the hallway is linked to the adjacent room by an opening with wood-paneled door, so it is possible to move from one end of the building to the other without entering the hallway. Although these spaces are linked, it appears each was originally intended as a stand-alone unit. While moldings around each opening feature the same classical detailing as the entrances, transom windows are absent.

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One of the more distinctive spaces at the second floor is located on the west side of the hallway at the south end of the building. This is one of the few offices/apartments formed of more than a single room. The main living area is adjacent the building's south wall, but another room abuts it to the north and is accessed through a large, rectangular opening accented with wood-framed, French doors. As at other parts of the second floor, the same classical molding surrounds the opening. Another atypical space is situated at the west side of the hallway at the Batcher Opera House Block's north end. Again, this office/apartment is formed of more than one room. A wood-framed addition has been added to the west side of the main living area and is gained through a large, rectangular opening. This addition protrudes into the northeast corner of the opera house. A walk-in closet is positioned at the south side of the main living space and is surrounded with the same classical molding found at other parts of the second floor. A third distinctive space was once the extreme north end of the hallway. This small room has been separated from the rest of the passageway by a framed partition covered in clapboard siding and holding a wood-paneled door punctuated with a glass light. A transom window tops the opening.

The wood stairway leading to the third floor is located just above the stairway to the second floor and is accessed from the second-floor hallway. The stairway is sheathed in carpeting and features a railing composed of ornate newel posts and balusters. Another decorative railing edges the stairwell opening at the third floor, but several of the fanciful balusters are missing and have been replaced with wood slats in a lattice configuration. A large skylight is positioned immediately over the stairwell. At either side of the stairway's stairhead is an opening covered with a wood-paneled door and exhibiting the same classical molding as the doorways at the second floor. These entrances are quite small and each leads into one of the two theater boxes adorning the opera house at the west side of the building. The remainder of the third floor largely resembles the second floor. Again, a carpeted, north-south hallway is located east of the stairhead and spans the length of the building. Unlike the second floor, however, most of the rooms flanking the hallway appear to have always been employed as apartments. A couple washrooms also edge the hallway. Entrances into these spaces are covered with wood-paneled doors, although no glass lights are fixed within the doors. Wood-framed, movable transom windows mark the tops of the entrances. The same classical molding common to much of the building surrounds each entrance, as well as the window openings inside the various rooms.

In contrast to the second floor, the plaster-coated walls of the hallway and rooms at the third floor do not seamlessly blend with the ceiling but meet at right angles. All of the rooms at the third floor feature wood flooring, although the washroom flooring has been covered in synthetic material. Except for the washrooms, the other spaces have wood baseboards. Original radiators are positioned in most of the spaces. The rooms on the east side of the hallway again feature openings that link adjacent rooms. The openings have the same decorative molding as elsewhere and hold wood-paneled doors. No transom windows crown the openings. The room in the southeast corner of the third floor has been somewhat altered. Paneling covers the walls and a

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dropped ceiling has been installed. The space immediately across the hall to the west is composed of more than one room. The main living space is adjacent the building's south wall, while another room and a walk-in closet are situated just north. At the opposite end of the hallway, the space in the third floor's northeast corner has been slightly altered with an acoustical tile ceiling. The space just across the hallway to the west is formed of multiple rooms. One room is adjacent the building's north wall, while a second room and a walk-in closet are positioned just to the south.

The opera house at the west side of the Batcher Opera House Block is clearly the most unique space in the building. After nearly a century it has undergone little alteration. The wood-paneled, double doors shielding the large, rectangular entrance opening at the stairhead of the second floor open onto a vast space. The venue spans the length of the building and encompasses the Batcher Opera House Block's west fifty feet. Clearance in the auditorium is exceptional, as the distance from floor to ceiling matches the combined height of the second and third floors in the east part of the building. The walls and ceiling are coated in plaster and the wood floor is trimmed with wood baseboards. An original chandelier punctuates a circular recession at the ceiling's center, overlooking the opera house's broad main floor and parquet.² The main floor was stocked with movable chairs when performances were scheduled. Opposite the main entrance is the double-door emergency exit with transom window that is situated within the buildings west rear wall. This transom window, along with the other windows marking the west wall, allow natural light to illuminate the opera house surprisingly well, although the double row of windows in the north wall also facilitates lighting. Light through these windows, however, is somewhat obscured by the sizeable balcony over the main floor at the auditorium's north end.

The opera house's balcony is supported by the building's load-bearing walls and a few cylindrical, metal columns. Access to the seating area is via a wood ladder near the north wall that extends upward into the rear part of the balcony. Originally, the balcony was gained from a stairway situated in the northeast corner of the main floor. The stairway was likely removed when the wood-framed addition now occupying the northeast corner of the main floor was constructed. Tucked beneath a small section of the balcony, the modest-sized addition serves as the second room for the office/apartment on the west side of the north end of the second-floor hallway in the Batcher Opera House Block's east section. The parapet-type railing at the face of the balcony is topped with a low-rising, pipe-metal rail. Original light fixtures mark the ceiling above each end of the seating area, which is still filled by its original, wood seats. The central portion of the balcony, however, is occupied by an antiquated moving picture projector set within a large, rectangular, metal housing.

² A parquet is that section of the main floor nearest the stage often occupied by the orchestra during productions. Today, the parquet is simply called the orchestra.

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Besides the opera house's main floor and balcony, additional, although extremely limited, seating was available in the two theater boxes. The theater boxes, sometimes called side boxes or stage boxes, are positioned at balcony level within the auditorium's east wall and flank the main entrance. The small boxes rest snugly within arched openings, yet the curvilinear lower section of each viewing platform projects from the wall. Both lower sections are topped by a low-rising, pipe metal rail. Curtains adorn either side of each box, while a fanciful, original light fixture ornaments each ceiling. At the main floor, just south of the southernmost theater box, an entrance opening edged with classical, wood molding and covered with a wood-paneled door opens into a small space that may have served as a dressing room.

The opera house's proscenium is located at the south end of the venue, opposite the balcony. It is composed of the proscenium arch, through which presentations were viewed; the proscenium wall, which hid the backstage from the audience; and that portion of the performance area in front of the backdrop, often called the proscenium stage. The entire proscenium arch is accented with colored lights, some of which still function. Beneath the arch, the front of the wood stage arcs slightly into the parquet. Footlights follow the arc and are directed toward the performance area. Again, many of these lights are still functional. An entrance opening to the backstage is located within each end of the proscenium wall. Both openings have wood-paneled doors and feature classical molding matching that found in other parts of the building. Wood steps rise from the opera house's main floor to either opening.

The backstage holds a variety of objects, including a piano, filing cabinet, stanchions and signage, and a few chairs, as well as some miscellaneous items, like an antique-looking telephone and a wall mirror. Some of the items may have been used during performances. A marble switchboard dotted with levers controlling electrical circuits to the theater's light fixtures is mounted against the rear of the proscenium wall, adjacent the entrance opening at the partition's east end. A few backdrops are retracted into the pocket above the backstage, but one remains lowered and depicts a tranquil scene of deciduous trees in full bloom bisected by a dirt road or path. A couple of light fixtures hang just above the lowered backdrop. A wood catwalk braced by wood struts spans the east wall well above the backstage. A fixed, wood ladder rises from the backstage floor to the catwalk. The east wall above the catwalk is marked by numerous ropes draped from the ceiling, although it is difficult to determine precisely how the ropes were employed because horizontal, wood slats obscure the top of the backdrop pocket. Some of these ropes may pass over pulleys or some other device near the ceiling and facilitate raising and lowering of backdrops. The east wall below the catwalk is covered with wood clapboards and is adorned with names of actors or stagehands that passed through Staples. Often month and date of appearance is listed as well.

The aesthetics of the opera house are enhanced by its painted detailing. The walls, ceiling, and balcony face are colored in earthy tones. The lower section of the theater boxes are bluish-white,

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as is a section of ceiling immediately in front of the proscenium arch. Sky blue coloring accentuates ceiling corners, as well as the recession embracing the chandelier over the main floor. Ornate stenciling decorates almost every surface in the opera house, taking the form of floral patterns, cartouches, and other figures. One interesting form appears to be two dragons facing each other. Located at the corners of the ceiling, these figures blend so well into the surrounding pattern that they are almost unnoticeable. Regrettably, a leaking roof has taken a toll on the fanciful walls and ceiling of the gathering hall; water draining into the opera house has damaged coloring on the ceiling and walls, and some of the ornate stenciling has been spoiled. The roof has been repaired, however, and leakage is no longer a problem.

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Statement of Significance

I. Introduction

The Batcher Opera House Block in Staples in Todd County is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its state significance in the area of Entertainment/Recreation.³ Completed in 1907, the Batcher Opera House Block reflects historical patterns identified in the Minnesota statewide context "Railroads and Agricultural Development, 1870-1940," as well as "Northern Minnesota Lumbering, 1870-1930s." The building originally accommodated various businesses, but more significantly it was home to Batcher's Opera House, a finely decorated venue where citizens gathered to view plays, vaudeville acts, and other entertainments. The building's period of significance is 1907-1935.

II. The Opera House in Staples

The Grand Opening! Two girls stood watching as across the street the carriages were pulling up to the new Opera House. "Look, there's Mama!" cried the excited smaller girl. "Ain't she pretty!"

"Isn't she pretty," corrected her sister. "That hat is so beautiful. I told her she would be the prettiest lady here. The big plume on it gives it style she told me. She let me try it on, too. Maybe I'll wear it some day to a big affair at the Opera House."

"You're too young," frowned little Mary.

"I'm almost sixteen! If Papa would just listen, I know I could convince him how mature I am. There's the mayor and his wife. Ooh, she's wearing fur. It must be mink!"

"Well, I like Mama's velvet wrap much better," loyally stated little Mary.

Published in 1989, Margaret Anderson's *Northside-Southside, Stories of Staples* is a wonderful walk through the history of a small town in the heart of Minnesota, a community of less than 3,000 residents situated about seventy-five miles northwest of Saint Cloud. Anderson's roughly 250-page celebration of Staples includes the account above.⁴ Although the characters may be fictional, the historian likely expressed a happening that was oft repeated by residents of the

³ The moniker applied to the building varied somewhat during the months after its construction. A few times it was noted as the "Batcher Business Block." More frequently it was called the "Batcher Block." Toward the end of 1907, however, the local newspaper regularly referred to the structure as the "Batcher Opera House Block." And even though "Batcher Block" continued to appear in the *Staples World* from time to time, it was "Batcher Opera House Block" that remained most common. In fact, at times the newspaper simply called the building the "Opera House Block," because all citizens of Staples understood what building was being referenced.

⁴ Margaret Anderson, *Northside-Southside, Stories of Staples* (Staples, Minn.: *Staples World*, 1989), 50.

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modest railroad community. Indeed, it seems probable that many children in Staples—and doubtless many adults as well—eyed finely-dressed patrons entering Batcher’s Opera House with envy. The opera house, after all, was the height of cultural sophistication in Staples in the early 1900s, an ornately detailed theater providing enriching entertainment to a community that had matured beyond mere subsistence.

III. Founding Staples

Staples was named for King George Staples, but King George was not royalty, although the Staples Family was about as near to nobility as an American family can get. The prestigious Staples Family hailed from Maine and eventually reached across much of the country, some members becoming politicians and major industrialists. As late as the 1980s descendants of the Maine family were regularly publishing a newsletter. With board members spread throughout a broad geographic area, from Florida to Montana to Canada, the Staples Family History Association provided detailed histories of their ancestors in the publication. King Staples was the nephew of Isaac Staples, an ambitious man who immigrated to Minnesota in 1853 and built a timber and sawmilling empire along the Saint Croix River. In fact, Isaac Staples built much of early Stillwater. A host of family members eventually followed Isaac into Minnesota, including his brother Samuel, as well as King Staples, who journeyed to the present-day site of the community of Staples in 1878. One year later King Staples partnered with entrepreneur Howard C. Mealey in a sawmill operation that was established not far from the extant Northern Pacific Depot in Staples. A small community dedicated chiefly to harvesting the vast tracks of white pine forests in the area rose up around the sawmill and was known as “Staples Mill.”⁵

King Staples departed Staples Mill for Iron River, Wisconsin, in 1884, about the time Staples Mill was giving way to another town two miles west, Dower Lake. Dower Lake waned some years later after the prized timber was gone. While Dower Lake eventually vanished, Staples Mill was reborn when it was platted as a village in 1889, although, curiously, the post office called it “Presto.” The Northern Pacific Railway (NP) is credited for the renewal of Staples Mill. Wishing to shorten the distance from Saint Paul to Fargo-Moorhead, the railroad constructed a cutoff from Little Falls through Staples Mill, allowing trains to bypass Brainerd to the east. Moreover, the NP erected several maintenance shops in Staples Mill, including a roundhouse, ensuring that the fledgling town would survive. The moniker “Presto” did not last, nor did “Staples Mill,” as the town was officially renamed “Staples” in 1895.⁶

⁵ Staples Family History Association (SFHA), “Isaac Staples,” *Newsletter 5* (January 1982): 13-15; SFHA, “Staples, Minnesota and King George Staples,” *Newsletter 5* (January 1982): 16-17; Staples Historical Committee (SHC), *Official Souvenir Program and History, Staples, Minnesota* (Staples, Minn.: General Celebration Committee, 1939), 5-6.

⁶ King George Staples eventually left Iron River, Wisconsin. Like many in the timber industry he marched west in search of additional forests as tracks in the Upper Midwest were played out. He eventually settled in Oregon. King

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IV. A Maturing Community

Staples not only survived, it thrived—immediately. In Minnesota in the late 1800s, as elsewhere, railroads were an economic blessing. Many towns either flourished or faltered depending on where a particular railroad decided to lay its line. A good example is Lac qui Parle in Lac qui Parle County. The first county seat in the county, Lac qui Parle's hopes of remaining the principal town were dashed when the Minneapolis and Saint Louis Railway built into Madison instead. Madison subsequently became the county seat of Lac qui Parle County, with all the economic benefits that come with centers of government administration. In Staples, the NP not only built into the community, it made the town a division point, a place where railroad equipment would be maintained, including railroad engines. In fact, servicing locomotives was the reason for building a roundhouse. Anchored by the railroad, with the substantial number of jobs that come with a division point, prosperity in Staples was certain.⁷

Entrepreneurs wasted little time establishing themselves in Staples. In 1889, the same year the NP began erecting its maintenance facilities, numerous businesses sprouted. Since Staples was a few years away from having its own newspaper, the *Motley Register* reported the doings in the growing town:

F. X. Goulet has a neat stock of general merchandise in charge of N. A. Bray. . . . Mr. Goulet will move his family to Staples in a few weeks. . . . Wm. Skelton has the only meat market in town. . . . Another shop will soon be open in the railroad addition. . . . Thompson and McElroy have opened a blacksmith shop. . . . Ben Ledoux runs a boarding house. . . . James Henretty conducts a feed store and a temperance saloon. . . . J. Gillespie of Aldrich is putting up a large store in the railroad addition for general merchandise. . . . A large number of other buildings are being put up in each of the three additions. . . . Five new buildings are going up in the Shellabarger addition. . . . There are eight new buildings in the Bartraw addition, and W. A. Walker is erecting a two-story boarding house on Second Avenue. . . . August Garney, drayman, is putting up a two-story frame building on Fifth Street, one side of which is to be a harness shop.⁸

George Staples died in Portland in 1910. For additional information see SFHA, "Staples, Minnesota and King George Staples," 16-17, as well as Anderson, 62; for other sources see SHC, *Official Souvenir Program and History*, 6, 8-9; Warren Upham, *Minnesota Place Names: A Geographical Encyclopedia* (Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001), 592-593.

⁷ Denis P. Gardner, *Minnesota Treasures: Stories Behind the State's Historic Places* (Saint Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2004), 151; Anderson, 7.

⁸ The *Motley Register* is quoted in Anderson, 9.

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Another sign that Staples was maturing into a lasting community was evident at least by 1893. During that year the *Staples World* references what appears to be the town's first opera house, although it is uncertain exactly when and where the venue was constructed. Known as Compton's Opera House, the gathering place appeared to host, at least at times, somewhat more than mediocre fare. For example, in an 1895 issue of the *Staples World* the newspaper notes that the "Wilson Theatre Co. closed a very successful three-night engagement at Compton's Opera House." The comment seems to imply that Staples was receiving at least a modicum of professional or semi-professional theatrical entertainment while the town was still but an infant. Another gathering hall in Staples around this time was Sovereign's Hall, which was part of the Sovereign Block, a business building erected in 1896. Sovereign's Hall, however, was not designed as a place to view plays and the like, but instead was intended as a formal setting for various lodge meetings.⁹

Any prominence Compton's Opera House may have achieved during the early years of Staples vanished, because by 1902 the *Staples World* was highlighting Palmer's Opera House, which was part of a business block raised by Joe I. Palmer, apparently near the intersection of Sixth Street and First Avenue. By July of that year Palmer's theater was being plastered, and by the end of the year an exhibition basketball game was played there. Like Compton's Opera House, though, Palmer's theater failed to last. Palmer's building was lost to fire around 1905, and although he began rebuilding the structure late that year it seems it did not include an opera house. The plans of Thomas J. Sharkey may have been the reason Palmer passed on the entertainment venue. In 1903, Sharkey erected a fifty- by seventy-foot, two-story business building on First Avenue.¹⁰ While an opera house may not have been part of the building's original plan, it soon became one. Sharkey's Opera House was hosting theatrical performances at least by early 1907. In January 1907, the *Staples World* announced:

The city of Staples is soon to be honored by another local talent production. Some of the members and friends of the Episcopal Church are preparing to produce "The Carpet Bagger" on the 6th and 7th of February in Sharkey's new opera house. Mr. Sharkey has patriotically determined that the new scenery shall be used for the first time by local talent . . .¹¹

Sharkey's building and his opera house were around for several years, but not long after the showing of "The Carpet Bagger" the entrepreneur found himself competing with another

⁹ Anderson, 23-25.

¹⁰ Thomas J. Sharkey was a new resident of Staples when he constructed his building. He relocated his family from Anoka, Minnesota, to Staples in 1904. See "Mrs. T. J. Starkey Passed Tuesday; Was Ill a Month," *Staples World*, September 31, 1931; for other sources see Anderson, 41-43, and "Local News," *Staples World*, September 7, 1905.

¹¹ "The Carpet Bagger," *Staples World*, January 17, 1907.

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prominent local personality for the culture hearts of the citizens of Staples. The challenge came from Charles Edward Batcher.

V. Charles Edward Batcher

Charles Edward Batcher was born near Rochester, Minnesota, in 1866. As a young man he studied architectural drawing in Minneapolis schools and later attended the Curtis Business College in Minneapolis. Batcher's obituary observes that he came to Staples in 1899, but the date is incorrect, since Batcher was in Staples, or at least in the town's vicinity, by about 1895. He married Jennie Root of Staples in 1896. Jennie was an accomplished musician and eventually became the organist at the local Methodist Church. Something of a renaissance man, Batcher was involved in several commercial endeavors, although, initially, he made his name in Staples as a contractor. Indeed, the *Staples World* ties Batcher to many early construction projects. In 1895, Batcher was contracted to lower the floor in a local grocery. Two years later he constructed three five room cottages on Seventh Street. He built an addition to the local schoolhouse in 1900. He also completed two houses adjacent to Second Avenue in 1904. These works, however, were but a fraction of the construction projects Batcher undertook over his lifetime in Staples. The contractor is credited with erecting roughly 200 residences in the community.¹²

Batcher is lauded as a personality "possessed with the ability of making many and lasting friendships," as well as being "sympathetic, inostentatious [*sic*] and quick to heed the cry of distress of any of his unfortunate fellow men." In 1899, he constructed a two-story business building on First Avenue. About this time he established a sawmill on Blocks 3, 4, 9, and 10 of Lot 24 of the Town of Staples. It was around 1898 or 1899 that he manufactured all the window and door frames for the Catholic Church that was then under construction in Staples. Batcher purchased the town's creamery building in 1902, although it is uncertain if he employed it as a creamery or put it to other uses. He later constructed and operated two oil stations in town. He is also tied to Batcher's Store, which was founded in 1906. But Batcher is probably best remembered for the large business block he completed in 1907. A huge building in the modest-sized town, it became one of the community's principal commercial edifices, but more significantly it held Batcher's Opera House. And while acknowledging the efforts Thomas J. Sharkey put into his theater, in truth, Sharkey's Opera House just could not consistently match the professional ensembles appearing at the opera house Charles Edward Batcher built.¹³

¹² Anderson, 23, 28, 36, 44; "Charles Batcher, Pioneer Resident Laid to Rest," *Staples World*, July 14, 1932; "Local News," *Staples World*, October 5, and October 26, 1905; "Robert Batcher Dies at 72," *Staples World*, December 22, 1983.

¹³ "Charles Batcher, Pioneer Resident"; *Insurance Map of Staples, Minnesota* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1899); "Changing Times Challenge Home Town Business," *Todd County Country Courier*, January 4, 1993; Anderson, 31, 33, 41.

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VI. Opera Houses

Although Minnesota does not have a statewide context covering opera houses, at least two Midwestern states, Iowa and Nebraska, have detailed opera house studies. James E. Jacobsen's "Iowa Opera Halls and Opera Houses: The Evolution of Stage-Focused Structures in Iowa, 1850-1925," as well as "Opera House Buildings in Nebraska, 1867-1917," penned by D. Layne Ehlers, provide historical frameworks that can generally be applied to Minnesota. Using the scholarship of these two historians as guide, the opera house raised by Charles Batcher in Staples is probably more accurately described as an "opera hall," which is a more modest version of an opera house. Interestingly, though, many, maybe even most, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century auditoriums for viewing theatrical performances were commonly known as opera houses.¹⁴

Even though many gathering places were labeled opera house, it is nevertheless helpful to briefly explain the tiered system described by Jacobsen. Opera halls and opera houses differed from utility halls, which also occasionally hosted theatrical performances, because each was a stage-focused venue. That is, the auditorium was designed to make the stage the chief point of attraction. Utility halls, however, were mostly gathering places for all manner of activities, from dances to family reunions to wedding receptions to funeral dinners; stage performances were mostly secondary. Of course, opera halls and opera houses sometimes held events like those in utility halls. Still, their original plan centered on the stage. Moreover, utility halls were usually smaller than opera halls and opera houses and did not feature a balcony or gallery. Opera halls held balconies, but rarely galleries, while opera houses frequently included both.¹⁵ Distinction between opera halls and opera houses is also evident in size and ornamentation. Opera houses were almost always larger. They were usually more decorative as well, both inside and out. In fact, opera houses were often erected as stand-alone structures. Certainly, a commercial enterprise may be discreetly tucked into a corner of the building, but the structure's fancifully dressed exterior all but shouted opera house. In contrast, many opera halls were part of a building dedicated chiefly to commercial use, like The Big Store (NRHP 1982) in Minnesota in southwestern Minnesota, a business building featuring an opera hall (locally known as the opera house) on its second floor. Additionally, opera houses featured a sunken parquet, often called the

¹⁴ Discussion of opera halls and opera houses in this section of the nomination is drawn from the detailed scholarship of the evolution of opera halls and opera houses found in James E. Jacobsen, "Iowa Opera Halls and Opera Houses: The Evolution of Stage-Focused Structures in Iowa, 1850-1925," June 1988, and D. Layne Ehlers, "Opera House Buildings in Nebraska, 1867-1917," April 1988, both National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Forms available at State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Minnesota Historical Society (MHS), Saint Paul.

¹⁵ Jacobsen makes a distinction between balconies and galleries: "The balcony is the first tier of seating above the main floor of the auditorium; the gallery is the tier of seating above the balcony. The balcony could have been called the gallery, the first balcony, or the family circle. The gallery was often termed the second gallery, the second balcony, or the family circle." For additional information on balconies and galleries see Jacobsen, FII-5, 6.

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orchestra pit, whereas opera halls had parquets on the same level as the main floor. Finally, opera houses rarely were erected in towns of less than several thousand people, ensuring there was a large clientele to fill the auditorium on any given night. While opera houses often attracted 1,000 to 2,000 patrons, opera halls usually drew numbers in the hundreds.

Even with the obvious distinctions between opera halls and opera houses, communities usually embraced the opera house moniker. And the label was important, because it symbolized how citizens and visitors viewed the town's sophistication, with opera house implying a venue more upscale than opera hall. Moreover, almost never did a newly-founded community call its opera hall or opera house a theater (often written as "theatre" in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), which was a kind of dirty word playing on the moral conscience of the town. Jacobsen observes: "For most people in small towns, the word 'theatre' had a sinful connotation." Many Midwestern communities were settled by those with strong moral convictions who believed hard labor economically benefiting the family was ethically superior to leisure trades. Jacobsen continues: "Actors were perceived to be idlers and drunkards who traveled from town to town, never settling down to make a 'descent' living." It appears, then, that "theatre" implied, at least for some, a showplace where less desirable individuals performed, but, apparently, opera house did not have the same negative connotation. Additionally, audience members in the early settlement period were often men, who were thought somewhat rambunctious, and for some, few women except the promiscuous dared visit such a rowdy showplace as a theater.¹⁶

Opera houses became popular mainly after the arrival of the railroad. The railroad provided transportation for theatrical troupes moving between major urban centers. These traveling ensembles frequently stopped for showings in small communities adjacent the railroad line. For example, a theater troupe completing a run in Minneapolis or Saint Paul often climbed aboard an NP train journeying west, stopping along the way at rural towns with opera houses, like Staples. After a showing in Staples, the troupe re-boarded a train (often the next day) and traveled northwest, soon reaching other opera house communities, such as Detroit Lakes, which had an auditorium in the Holmes Block (NRHP 2001), a commercial and cultural building erected by Elon Galusha Holmes. Back aboard the train, it was off to points further northwest, like Fargo-Moorhead, before moving through North Dakota.

VII. The Batcher Opera House Block

Charles Batcher began work on his building in 1905, although, at the time, he was uncertain if it would incorporate an opera house. The local Odd Fellows were completing a building near

¹⁶ Towns eventually got passed negative preconceptions of the word "theatre." In fact, by the time the Batcher Opera House Block was erected the *Staples World* was regularly employing the term.

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Fourth Street and Third Avenue around the same time Batcher began work on his building and apparently the contractor did not want to duplicate the lodge's gathering venue.¹⁷

By September 1905, with basement dug, several men were finishing the stone foundation for Batcher's building. The foreman was a gentleman named S. Odden, who was from nearby Aldrich. After the foundation was completed work on the structure stalled, Batcher apparently waiting to learn what the Odd Fellows were making of their new building. Batcher delayed for some time, for work on his building did not begin again until around March or April 1907, by which time he had decided to include an opera house. It appears, then, that the building the Odd Fellows erected near the corner of Fourth Street and Third Avenue did not include a similar cultural entertainment hub. Sharkey, however, did include an opera house in his building, sometime before Batcher restarted work on his structure. The historical record does not indicate that the two were rivals, and maybe it was believed that the community of Staples was large enough to support two similar entertainment venues. Or maybe one opera house was always intended to be more upscale than the other, hosting a higher order of productions. Still, it is curious that two opera houses were completed about the same time.¹⁸

Work on Batcher's building commenced around spring 1907. By this time Batcher had opted for a structure larger than originally conceived. The *Staples World* briefly described the plan:

The plans for the Batcher business block at the corner of Fifth Street and Second Avenue have been changed materially. Originally the building was to be but two stories, but a change has been made and an opera house will be provided for, making the building three stories. The opera house is to be on the second floor, extending across the rear of the building. It will be 50 x 100 feet in size with a balcony 24 x 50, and a stage 24 x 50. The ceiling over the main floor will be 20 feet in height, but higher over the stage, the roof over the stage being raised six feet. The opera house will have exits front and rear, have steam heat, electric lights and other modern accessories. It will be completed about the first of October.¹⁹

The completion date offered by the newspaper was overly optimistic, and the opera house was not finished until November.²⁰ Staples was erecting a new school building at the same time the

¹⁷ Anderson, 46.

¹⁸ "Local News," *Staples World*, September 7, 1905; "Business Block Going Up," *Staples World*, April 4, 1907; "Plans Enlarged," *Staples World*, May 23, 1907.

¹⁹ "Plans Enlarged."

²⁰ Although the opera house was not completed until late November, the facility was used earlier, although not for a theatrical performance. On September 21, 1907, the local Women's Relief Corps sponsored a supper in the

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Batcher Opera House Block was under construction and city and school officials intended to use the opera house for dedicatory ceremonies on November 18, 1907. The celebration of the opening of Lincoln School did take place, but not until November 22, with the school superintendent, as well as the school's architect and contractor, orating to a full house from the opera house's stage. A month earlier Paul Fichtenau and Joseph Wolf, formerly a mayor of Staples, committed to opening a grocery in one of the ground floor spaces in Batcher's building. The store was called "The New Grocery" in an advertisement in the October 24, 1907, issue of the *Staples World*. Although the name may not have been original, it was certainly accurate. The store opened near the end of October, while work continued on the opera house. By June 1908, the grocery had been renamed "Staples Cash Grocery Company."²¹

On October 31, 1907, the *Staples World* anticipated the opening of Batcher's Opera House, bragging:

It can be safely said that when Batcher's new opera house is opened to the public they will behold a house that any town of twenty-five thousand can be proud of. Many strangers as well as the citizens of Staples have viewed the opera house with surprise and amazement and were entranced with its artistic beauty. . . . Batcher's Opera House will be utilized for dances as well as for shows, and is equipped with one of the best hardwood floors in the state. It will also be used for conventions, etc. Staples then will have a hall that can hold any crowd that comes to town, and strangers will leave our city with the knowledge that they have seen a house excelled by none west of the Twin Cities.²²

The last work on the auditorium was finished during the third week of November 1907, when the marble switchboard was installed and electricians completed wiring. Manufactured in Chicago, the switchboard was addressed to the contractor rather than Charles Batcher, which accounted for its delayed arrival—and the four-day postponement of the Lincoln School dedication.²³ Regrettably, the *Staples World* never mentions the contractor's name. Whether the contractor noted by the newspaper completed most of the building or only the opera house is uncertain. With Charles Batcher's background as a prolific builder it seems likely that he, or at least some working for him, were involved with the construction of the Batcher Opera House Block.

auditorium for all citizens of Staples. Cost for the meal was 25 cents. See "Supper Sept. 21," *Staples World*, September 19, 1907.

²¹ "New Store," *Staples World*, October 17, 1907; "School Dedication," and "The New Grocery," *Staples World*, October 24, 1907; "Temple of Learning," *Staples World*, November 28, 1907; untitled advertisement in *Staples World*, June 18, 1908.

²² "Nears Completion," *Staples World*, October 31, 1907.

²³ "Delayed," *Staples World*, November 14, 1907.

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Further, Batcher studied architectural drawing, so it is reasonable to assume that he had a principal role in the building's design.

The exterior of Batcher's completed brick building was only modestly adorned, featuring pronounced sills and lintels and a corbelled cornice. The ground floor at the east facade had large display windows and five recessed entrance openings. Crowned by transom windows, each opening was shielded by a wood-paneled door holding a glass light. The centermost entrance provided access to the wood stairway leading to the second floor and the main entry to the opera house. All other entrances opened into various commercial enterprises, including the grocery founded by Fichtenau and Wolf, as well as Batcher's Hardware. Apparently, a second hardware store and a dry goods store completed the businesses. The building's north wall at ground level did not look as it does at present. The wall held a single display window at its east end, and a solitary entrance opening marked the west end. While this part of the building can only be described as a facade today, it was clearly a side when the structure was erected in 1907.²⁴

Although Batcher's building was somewhat reserved, his opera house was quite striking, especially for a small, rural community. The walls and ceiling were covered in earthy colors; the walls featured a ruddy-pink hue, while the ceiling was a very light beige color. Dashes of sky and dark blue marked various sections, sharply contrasting, yet delightfully accenting, the subtler shades, which also included a kind of cloudy white decorating theater boxes and the ceiling immediately in front of the proscenium arch. Ornate floral stenciling divided the upper walls from the ceiling, while also crisscrossing the ceiling. Stenciling also embraced the ceiling's circular recession, which was punctuated with a fanciful chandelier. Stenciling edged the top of the double-door entrance as well. Decorative patterns were painted onto the two theater boxes, as well as the face of the balcony at the auditoriums north end. The proscenium arch, opposite the balcony adjacent to the north wall, was traced by colored lights.

The opera house may have been decorated by a few individuals. About the middle of September 1907, Charles Batcher journeyed to Saint Paul seeking an artisan for the auditorium. The *Staples World* announced a week later that "H. G. Turner is now working on the opera house block." Unfortunately, no other information could be located on Turner and it is uncertain if he was an artisan that completed work on Batcher's entertainment venue or a contractor laboring on a different part of the building. Vinton H. Calkins, however, decorated at least part of the opera house. Calkins was born in Michigan in 1869. In 1897, he married Laura Ganke (or Gantka) in Monroe County, Wisconsin. By 1900, the pair was living with their firstborn child in the Town of Leon in Monroe County, but by 1905 the family was residing in Onalaska in La Crosse County, Wisconsin. Onalaska was still home to the artisan when he was hired by Charles Batcher

²⁴ A circa 1908 image of the Batcher Opera House Block is available in the photographic collection of the Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul; "Changing Times."

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in 1907, which implies that Calkins had references in Saint Paul. Various census records indicate he was a painter and a wallpaperer. The occupational terms are understated, especially after viewing Batcher's Opera House, but simplicity is a hallmark of census data. By 1920, both Vinton and Laura had disappeared from the census, but their children (apparently a boy and two girls) had been adopted by Joseph and Eva Neumann in Vernon County, just south of La Crosse County. Clearly, something substantial transpired with Vinton and Laura.²⁵

VIII. Batcher's Opera House Offerings

Batcher's Opera House was officially unveiled the day before the school dedication, on November 21, 1907. The auditorium was christened with Richard Mansfield's "Prince Karl," performed by the Mack-Leone Company, which featured actors Willard Mack and Maude Leone. The Mack-Leone Company was very active in Minnesota in 1907, appearing for six weeks in Minneapolis and Saint Paul and then moving north to Duluth for another six weeks, before E. J. Moore, manager of Batcher's Opera House, enticed the troupe to open the new facility in Staples. Proudly, the *Staples World* informed locals attending opening night they were in for a treat since the professional company was presenting one of Mansfield's best offerings. Even more, the public would finally get a view of the opera house. The newspaper noted that, essentially, the unpretentious exterior of the Batcher Opera House Block masked a gem housed within: "A visit to the opera house tonight will show you more beauty than possibly you ever expected to see in Staples, architecturally speaking."²⁶

Judging by the front-page story in the *Staples World* on November 28, the opera house's grand opening was a resounding success. The newspaper described the event: "Batcher's new opera house was formally dedicated and the public beheld a sight that bewildered them. The entire house was a blaze of lights, and the artistic beauty . . . was displayed to advantage." The *Staples World* continued: "At 8:30 o'clock the curtain was rung up and the manager, Mr. E. J. Moore, came to the footlights amid a tremendous round of applause and made the dedicatory address, after which he introduced Mr. Willard Mack, manager of the Mack-Leone Company." Mack complimented the audience on its fine opera house, "elucidat[ing] himself with such ease that he won them at once, but they were to be surprised by Mr. Mack's rendition of the German Prince in 'Prince Karl.' It was superb. . . . [Mack] demonstrated that he was an actor of great ability." Accolades were not reserved only for Mack, however. The newspaper observed: "Miss Leone's work was simply marvelous and her gown was gorgeous. In fact, the entire company was far

²⁵ "Local News," *Staples World*, September 19, 1907; "Local News," *Staples World*, September 26, 1907; "Local News," *Staples World*, November 7, 1907; letter from archivist Anita Taylor Doering of the La Crosse Public Library, to Susan Roth, Minnesota National Register Historian, March 4, 2004, available at SHPO, MHS, Saint Paul.

²⁶ "Opens Tonight," *Staples World*, November 21, 1907.

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ahead of any company that has ever played this part of the country." The journalist's comments were a bit gushy, maybe, but understandable given the excitement surrounding the impressive cultural center presented the city by Charles Batcher.²⁷

"Prince Karl" was the beginning of what would be a substantial run of theatrical performances at Batcher's Opera House. About two weeks after the showing, "We are King" played at the auditorium. The setting was the principality of Kahnburg in northern Germany, and the story involved a plot to dethrone the king and replace him with an imposter with an uncanny resemblance to the monarch, kind of like "The Man in the Iron Mask." "Zeke, the Country Boy" was featured at the opera house at the end of December. It was a comedy set in rural New England. This production was soon followed by the melodrama "Lost in London," the first play at the auditorium in 1908. In mid-March, Emily Erickson performed in "Tillie Olson," a comedy-drama about a Minnesota farm girl who discovers she is an heiress. Spring began with "The Burgomaster," a lavish comic opera featuring over fifty actors. Charles Batcher took out a handsome half-page advertisement in the *Staples World* promoting the production. He went even farther a few months later, filling the full page for the drama "The Rivals," which starred the brothers Joseph and William Jefferson, a duo tracing their acting ancestry to the mid-eighteenth century. Wedged between "The Burgomaster" and "The Rivals" were "The Little Prospector," a comic western, and "Rocky Mountain Express," an "ingeniously written melodrama of railroad life amidst the Rockies."²⁸

As time passed Batcher's Opera House continued to host impressive productions, including "Two Merry Tramps," as well as "His Highness, the Bey," which was noted in the local newspaper as featuring "the best singing chorus in America."²⁹ The football comedy "Billy" and the farce "Billy's Tombstones" (the tombstones being Billy's false teeth), were presented in 1911 and 1912, respectively. "Brewster's Millions," a drama written by George Barr McCutcheon, played in late 1912, and H. S. Sheldon's "The Havoc," starring actor Paul Gilmore, was shown a couple months later. "Polly of the Circus" opened in early 1913, and was made memorable by the horses, ponies, dogs, and other animals prancing across the stage. There were many more professional productions, but Batcher's Opera House did not highlight only seasoned actors and plays. No, the theater hosted local features as well, including "Arizona," a home talent presentation in early 1908 that benefited the local Women's Relief Corps. The "Home Talent Minstrels," a Staples acting group, performed at the auditorium in October 1908. Young student

²⁷ "Grand Opening," *Staples World*, November 28, 1907.

²⁸ "Coming Tuesday," *Staples World*, December 5, 1907; "Zeke, the Country Boy," and "Lost in London," *Staples World*, December 26, 1907; "Tillie Olson," *Staples World*, March 19, 1908; "The Burgomaster," *Staples World*, May 14, 1908; "A High Class Attraction," *Staples World*, July 23, 1908; "At the Opera House," *Staples World*, August 20, 1908; "Like Father, Like Son," *Staples World*, August 27, 1908.

²⁹ *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* defines "bey" as a "provincial governor in the Ottoman Empire" or "the former native ruler of Tunis or Tunisia."

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actors in Staples also demonstrated their skill at Batcher's Opera House. In May 1909, the high school inaugurated what would become tradition. The *Staples World* explained: "For the first time in the history of Staples High School the senior class will present a class play to the public, 'The Sweet Girl Graduate' at Batcher's Opera House, May 14." "For One Night Only" was presented by another graduating class on May 22, 1911. The junior class would not be left out, imparting "The Elopement of Ellen" in late 1912, a play depicting the elopement of a house servant, which forced the maid's employer to cope with a house filled with party guests.³⁰

Batcher's Opera House was not reserved only for theatrical offerings. On May 22, 1908, the Order of Railway Conductors of Brainerd Division No. 197 held their annual ball in the auditorium, and in June of that year the Staples Baseball Association had a fundraiser in the theater. A supper was laid out in the opera house on November 3, 1908, the day of the presidential election (William Howard Taft won). On September 23, 1910, many gathered for a concert and dance benefiting the local Conservatory of Music. The local lodge of the Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen presented an Easter dance in April 1911, and a "grand concert" offered by the Staples Music Club was held on May 10, 1912.³¹

Use of the venue as a gathering hall for varied events continued throughout the years. During the First World War, for instance, the Staples Chapter of the Red Cross organized several dances at Batcher's Opera House, raising money to purchase food and clothing for soldiers. Another benefit for military personnel was put together by the Order of Railway Conductors in early 1918. As late as 1932, the Fraternal Order of Eagles celebrated their silver anniversary by holding a dance at the opera house, which provided money for the local relief fund during a period of profound economic depression. Maybe one of the more exciting events happened about a year after the auditorium was completed. In October 1908, running for reelection, Minnesota's Governor Johnson spoke to a large crowd in the opera house, voicing: "We are in the midst of a momentous campaign. There never was a time in the history of the country when the exact status of the two political parties was so complex or so misunderstood. The time has come when party

³⁰ "Good Attractions," *Staples World*, February 20, 1908; "Two Merry Tramps," *Staples World*, September 17, 1908; "His Highness, the Bey," *Staples World*, October 1, 1908; "Minstrels Good," *Staples World*, October 29, 1908; "Side-splitting Comedy," *Staples World*, March 2, 1911; "Billy's Tombstones," *Staples World*, March 21, 1912; "Brewster's Millions," *Staples World*, September 12, 1912; "A Favorite Returns," *Staples World*, November 7, 1912; "The Elopement of Ellen," *Staples World*, November 14, 1912; "Polly of the Circus," *Staples World*, January 16, 1913; Anderson, 58, 65.

³¹ "Conductors to Have Big Doings," *Staples World*, April 30, 1908; "Local News," *Staples World*, October 29, 1908; "Local News," *Staples World*, September 15, 1910; "Easter Dance," *Staples World*, February 16, 1911; "Grand Concert," *Staples World*, May 9, 1912.

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loyalty is being made to yield to the principals of good government." The governor won his bid for reelection.³²

Sharkey's Opera House was not dormant as Batcher's Opera House thrived, but promotion of its entertainment was largely pushed into the background; while showings at Batcher's venue dominated large sections of the *Staples World*, discussion of presentations at Sharkey's auditorium became less conspicuous in the newspaper. It is difficult to fault the publication, though, since Batcher's Opera House was such an eye-catching theater. Maybe more importantly, the productions at Batcher's Opera House very often were more upscale than those presented at Sharkey's Opera House. "The Meistersingers," a male quartet that sang at Sharkey's auditorium in February 1908, likely provided the audience considerable pleasure, but many entertainments just could not equal the offerings at Charles Batcher's theater. In early 1911, for instance, about a month before Sharkey's venue hosted a wrestling match, Batcher's Opera House featured "Barriers Burned Away," a drama based on the novel by E. P. Rowe. Traveling troupes may also have found Batcher's auditorium more enticing than Sharkey's. In late November 1907, "We are King" played at Sharkey's Opera House, but when the production returned the following year it appeared at Batcher's Opera House. But even though Sharkey's auditorium was not as influential as Batcher's, it was nonetheless sad when it was lost to fire in late September 1918. Actually, Sharkey lost his entire building, and although he quickly rebuilt the structure, it seems doubtful it included an opera house. And that would have been sensible, because the heyday of theatrical entertainment in the rural opera house was fading.³³

IX. Decline and Change

When Charles Batcher set up his office in one of the second-floor rooms in the Batcher Opera House Block in mid-December 1907, he may not have realized just how near extinction was the traveling theatrical company.³⁴ Still, he was a smart man, and likely surmised that moving

³² "Johnson Spoke to Large Crowd," *Staples World*, October 22, 1908; "Local News," *Staples World*, March 3, 1918; "Come Dance," *Staples World*, January 7, 1932; Anderson, 76.

³³ "Local News," *Staples World*, November 28, 1907; "The Meistersingers," *Staples World*, February 13, 1908; "Batcher's Opera House, Tuesday, February 14," *Staples World*, February 9, 1911; "Big Wrestling Match," *Staples World*, March 16, 1911; "Sharkey Building Goes Up In Smoke," *Staples World*, September 26, 1918.

³⁴ A physician, Doctor Knickerbocker, established an office on the second floor of the Batcher Opera House Block in 1907 as well, as did a physician formerly of Motley, Minnesota, Doctor Crosette. A professional named Doctor Fowler also set up an office on the second floor during 1907. In the circa 1908 image of the Batcher Opera House Block available in the photographic collection of the MHS, the names of Knickerbocker and Crosette are clearly printed on the second-floor windows of the offices near the northeast corner of the building. Crosette departed Staples within a couple of years, but what became of Fowler is uncertain. Knickerbocker remained, although he eventually moved his office from the Batcher Opera House Block to another building in Staples. See "Local News," *Staples World*, November 7, 1907; "Local News," *Staples World*, November 14, 1907; "Local News," *Staples*

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pictures soon would pilfer clientele from theatrical productions. In summer 1909, he demonstrated foresight when he allowed a gentleman named C. L. Asher to establish "The Ideal Theatre," a motion picture theater located in the fifty-foot-wide space immediately south of the hardware enterprise occupying the area adjacent the north wall of his building. It is uncertain why The Ideal failed, but it was replaced in late 1912 by "The Grand Theatre," another moving picture theater situated in the space formerly occupied by the hardware store adjacent the building's north wall. The Grand, at least initially, was managed by an employee of the Princess Theatre Circuit Company of Saint Cloud, an enterprise that also employed a woman named Noella Duclos to play piano for the silent films. Felix Robinson was a gentleman hired to sing the illustrated songs.³⁵

The Grand survived for many years, but not without competition. Maybe the earliest movie house in Staples was "The Doric Theatre," which was operating at least by 1907. Thomas Sharkey leased space in his business block for a movie theater the same year. The Doric folded around February 1909, and the owner left Staples for Chisholm, Minnesota. While The Doric's run was short, "The Bijou Theatre" in Sharkey's building was considerably shorter, lasting about two weeks. With the closing of The Doric, Staples was left with The Ideal and "The Unique Theatre," a moving picture auditorium that appears to have opened a short time after The Doric and The Bijou. But The Grand arrived in 1912, replacing The Ideal, and it seems that for a time The Grand and The Unique were the only movie houses in Staples, each offering films as well as vaudeville acts. By about the mid-1910s, The Unique appears to have closed, although The Grand was now in competition with "The Strand Theatre." The Strand burned down in January 1916, but was rebuilt as "The Palace Theatre" by DesMarais Brothers, a local construction firm that also managed the theater. DesMarais Brothers sold their interest in the theater after some years. In 1928, then owner of the entertainment center, Al Ashenbrenner, sold out to R. C. Wilson, who was then managing The Grand. Wilson renamed the movie house "The New Staples Theatre," yet Ashenbrenner continued to manage the facility. In 1937, Ashenbrenner purchased the entire DesMarais building, which included the theater, a doctor's office, a coffee shop, a variety store, and the Northwestern Bell Telephone Exchange. While The Grand lasted for a long time, it did not outlast The New Staples Theatre, which eventually was simply called "The Staples Theatre." The Grand was still going in the early 1930s, but it appears that the space

World, November 21, 1907; "Dr. Crosette Married," *Staples World*, July 14, 1910; "Dr. Knickerbocker Called Saturday," *Staples World*, November 22, 1923.

While offices occupied the east side of the second floor of the Batcher Opera House Block, just above, at the third level, were apartments. Tom Crawford, currently a journalist for the *Staples World*, explained that railroad personnel coming through town on the Northern Pacific Railway often stayed in these apartments.

³⁵ *Insurance Map of Staples, Minnesota* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1909); *Insurance Map of Staples, Minnesota* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1916); "Local News," *Staples World*, December 19, 1907; "Local News," *Staples World*, July 21, 1909; "New Moving Picture Show," *Staples World*, December 19, 1912; Anderson, 58.

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it occupied adjacent the north wall of the Batcher Opera House Block was filled with a hardware store by 1934.³⁶

The proliferation of movie houses in Staples helps explain the decline of Batcher's Opera House, as films steadily siphoned business from live performances. More significantly, though, the cost of traveling productions had become prohibitive near the end of the 1910s, especially after the First World War. Producers asked managers of local opera houses for higher percentages of the receipts, but eventually the local managers could no longer make money. While large theaters continued to book theatrical showings, stops at smaller towns between major urban centers ceased.³⁷

The opera house created by Charles Batcher hosted theatrical performances into the late 1910s, and possibly into the early 1920s as well. It appears, however, that mostly other entertainments were held in the opera house during the 1920s. Also, by the late 1910s, local school productions were usually performed in the high school auditorium rather than the opera house.³⁸ Events at the opera house during the 1920s often included dances, concerts, dinners, and the like. In September 1920, for instance, the Minneapolis Jazz Band played at the auditorium, and in November of the following year the Staples Volunteer Fire Department put together a masquerade dance for Thanksgiving. In late 1925, the Trainmen held a ball in the theater, and the Order of Railway Conductors featured a New Year's Dance at the end of 1926.³⁹

While dances and dinners were popular in Batcher's venue in the 1920s, so were movies—at least at the beginning of the decade. Film offerings for local theaters dominated the pages of the *Staples World* throughout the 1920s. Actually, substantial movie advertisement was evident by the late 1910s. It was about this time when Charles Batcher installed a movie projector in the balcony of the opera house. While The Grand continued films downstairs, Batcher's Opera House seemed to become the venue for movies drawing larger crowds. In part, audiences were attracted by the large, and sometimes lavish and laudatory, movie advertisements in the local newspaper. "The Crisis," which showed in the opera house in mid-April 1918, was described as

³⁶ "Change at the Doric," *Staples World*, August 8, 1907; "Bijou Theatre," *Staples World*, September 12, 1907; "Local News," *Staples World*, September 26, 1907; untitled article in *Staples World*, July 21, 1910; "The Best in Photoplays: Palace Theatre," *Staples World*, April 26, 1923; "Now Open," *Staples World*, May 3, 1934; Anderson, 58, 71-72, 76, 105-107, 126.

³⁷ Jacobsen, E-9, 10.

³⁸ In May 1930, the senior class production at the high school auditorium was "Smilin' Through," which featured a young actor named Robert Batcher, son to Charles Batcher. Another actor in the show was Ellen Dickson, who soon would become Robert's wife. Anderson has a photograph of the cast members in her *Northside-Southside*. Robert is standing near Ellen toward the right side of the stage. See "Smilin' Through is Senior Class Play . . .," *Staples World*, May 1, 1930. Also see Anderson, 134.

³⁹ Anderson, 86, 90, 99, 101.

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“America’s Greatest American Story by Winston Churchill.” “Cleopatra: The Siren of the Nile,” was a film with a visually impressive advertisement appearing in the newspaper the same month. The promotion partly read: “See how Egypt’s vampire queen overturned the world and conquered the two greatest men of her time” (the two men noted in the ad probably were Julius Caesar and Mark Antony). In November 1923, the opera house featured “Wild Oats.” The movie must have been somewhat risqué, for management would not show it to gender-mixed audiences. While women watched the film in the opera house, men viewed it in The Grand.⁴⁰

Movies eventually halted at Batcher’s Opera House, probably some time before The Grand closed in the early 1930s, leaving The Staples Theatre to dominate film showings. The opera house was still used however, although sparingly. In February 1934, for example, a large crowd assembled in the gathering place in celebration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s birthday. But it was in the 1930s that the theater became a roller skating rink, which Jacobsen notes was not uncommon for rural opera houses. Roller skating ended during the 1940s, possibly when a gentleman named Monty Manning erected a roller skating rink on Wisconsin Avenue late in the decade. Regular use of the opera house stopped and it has since been used chiefly as storage.⁴¹

Charles Batcher did not witness the roller skating period, having died in July 1932. His son, Robert Batcher, had assumed much of his father’s endeavors the year before, including oversight of the Batcher Opera House Block. It may have been during Robert’s tenure that the offices on the second floor at the east side of the building became apartments, matching the use of the similar spaces on the third floor. A framed addition extending a short distance into the opera house beneath the balcony may also have been built during Robert’s ownership of the building. This small addition increased useable space in the apartment at the west side of the hallway in the north end of the Batcher Opera House Block’s east section. Another alteration to the building came about in 1939, when the building’s ground-floor east facade was modified. It is unclear, however, precisely what the alteration entailed. Since, historically, the east facade’s ground floor has been dominated by large display windows—and still is—it is likely that the alteration was not substantial. The most significant modification to the building happened in 1958. That year Batcher’s Federated Store, which was formally located on Fourth Street, moved into the Batcher Opera House Block. Batcher’s Federated Store appears to have started simply as Batcher’s Store in 1906, although it was at a site other than the Fourth Street address. The business evolved into one of the principal commercial enterprises in Staples, providing a wide selection of clothing to the public. By 1958, the business needed more space, and the ground floor of the Batcher Opera House Block seemed ideal, especially since Read and Carlson, a grocery that replaced Paul Fichtenau and Joseph Wolf’s grocery in Batcher’s building in 1910, had recently moved. Read

⁴⁰ “The Crisis,” *Staples World*, April 11, 1918; “Batcher’s Opera House, Mon.-Tues., April 22 and 23,” *Staples World*, April 18, 1918; “Attractions at The Grand Theatre,” *Staples World*, November 1, 1923.

⁴¹ Anderson, 118, 156; Jacobsen, E-11.

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and Carlson occupied a double-wide space in the Batcher Opera House Block, and with their departure, as well as the exodus of Podliska Hardware about the same time, plenty of room was available in Batcher's building for Batcher's Federated Store. Batcher's Hardware Store remained within the building, however, filling one-quarter of the ground floor.⁴²

The 1958 alteration included removing much of the building's ground-floor north wall and replacing it with large display windows. An entrance opening was cut into the north wall as well. Since the wall was load bearing, steel beams resting on steel columns were installed inside the building to support the upper floors. The steel beams were likely also necessary because the ceiling above the first floor was sagging, probably from years of roller skating in the opera house. Batcher's Federated Store, which was changed to Batcher's "V" Department Store after the move, and subsequently was known simply as Batcher's Department Store, eventually occupied the entire ground floor after Batcher's Hardware closed. In 1967, the department store expanded into a framed structure near the south wall of the Batcher Opera House Block. The small building was erected as a dwelling and was on the site at least by 1894. By the turn of the twentieth century a small addition had been made to its west rear. After years as a dwelling, it served various commercial enterprises before management at Batcher's Department Store acquired it and built a small, framed passageway linking it with the south side of the Batcher Opera House Block. The petite building served as a factory outlet store for men's and boy's sportswear manufactured by the Ringer-Staples Company, a local concern. In 1991, Charles Batcher's large building underwent another modification. The north and east first-floor facades were altered with concrete facing resembling rough-faced ashlar, which actually made the exterior of the building more decorative than its original construction. The large display windows remained, however.⁴³

When the Batcher Opera House Block was altered in 1991 it was under management of Joan Batcher, the daughter of Robert Batcher, who had died in December 1983. Batcher's Department Store ultimately suffered the same fate so many other small town retailers experienced; business waned as corporate goliaths moved into the region and siphoned customers. Joan Batcher eventually remade the department store into an antique enterprise. The business, as well as the entire Batcher Opera House Block, was recently purchased by Colleen Donley, a preservation-minded individual currently attempting to rally local citizens to preserve much of their structural

⁴² "Charles Batcher, Pioneer Resident"; "Robert Batcher Dies"; "Federated Store Will Move into Batcher Building," *Staples World*, August 14, 1958; Anderson, 132.

⁴³ "Federated Store Will Move into Batcher Building"; "Batcher 'V' Store Holding Grand Opening Today," *Staples World*, November 13, 1958; untitled article noting Batcher's expansion in *Staples World*, February, 1967; "Exterior Face Change for Batcher's Department Store," *Staples World*, 1991; *Insurance Map of Staples, Minnesota* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1894); *Insurance Map of Staples, Minnesota* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1899); *Insurance Map of Staples, Minnesota* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1904); Anderson, 198.

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heritage. One of her first efforts was commissioning this National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Batcher Opera House Block.⁴⁴

X. Conclusion

The Batcher Opera House Block proved a welcome addition to early twentieth-century Staples, housing a cultural enclave offering not only vaudevillian fare, but also comprehensive performances of sophisticated and dramatic subjects that have historically characterized “legitimate” theater. Indeed, from the moment it was completed Batcher’s Opera House was the community’s cultural and intellectual heart. Moreover, it was venue for the bulk of major gatherings in Staples—from ballroom dances to fundraisers to political orations. For these reasons the Batcher Opera House Block is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A.

⁴⁴ “Changing Times”; “Robert Batcher Dies.”

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Letter from archivist Anita Taylor Doering, La Crosse Public Library. To Susan Roth, Minnesota National Register Historian. March 4, 2004. Available at State Historic Preservation Office, Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.

Photograph of Batcher Opera House Block. Circa 1908. Available in photographic collection of Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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Batcher Opera House Block

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Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property occupies the east 113 feet of Lot 7 and all of Lots 8 and 9, Block 16, Town of Staples.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the city lots historically associated with the property.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic
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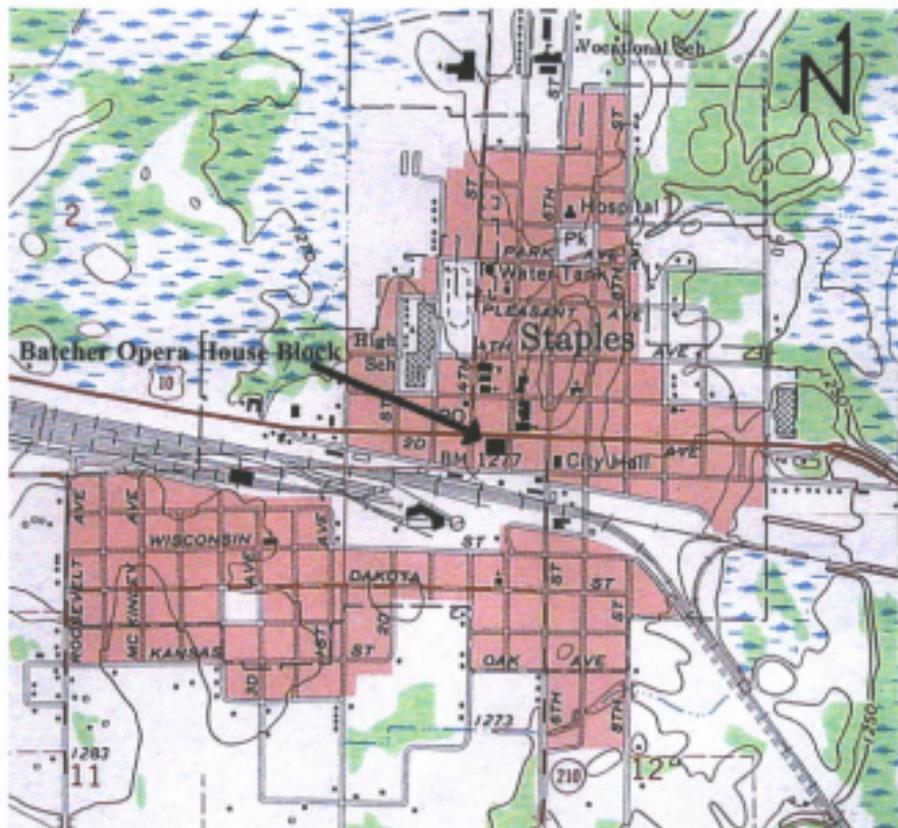
Batcher Opera House Block

Name of property

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Site map showing location of Batcher Opera House Block (adapted from USGS map "Staples, Minnesota, Quadrangle," 1966).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic
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Batcher Opera House Block

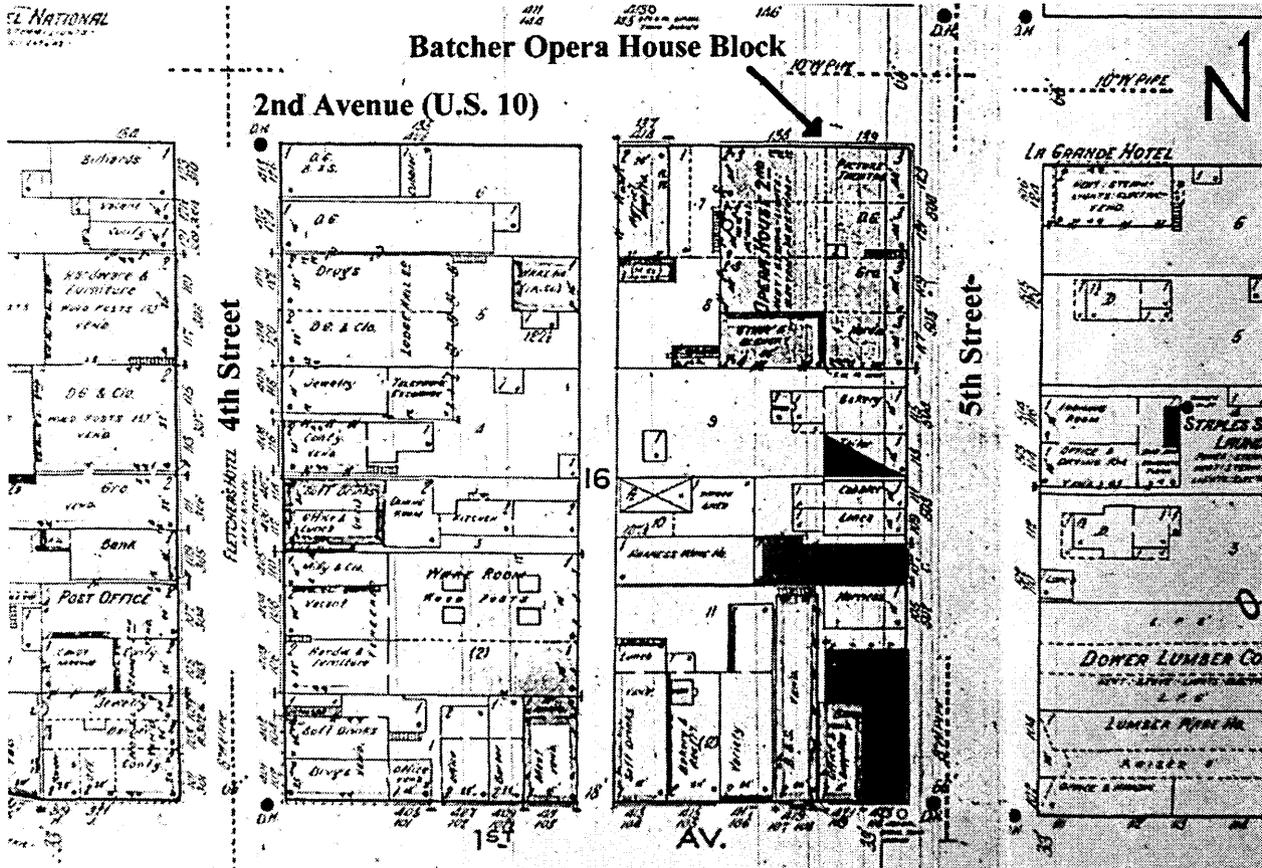
Name of property

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Detailed site map showing the Batcher Opera House Block, which is situated on Lots 7 and 8 of Block 16 of the Original Town of Staples (adapted from Sanborn Map Company's "Staples, Minnesota," 1916).

United States Department of the Interior
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Circa 1910 image of Staples. The large Batcher Opera House Block rises above surrounding buildings in background at right. The opera house's stage backdrops retracted into the elevated roof section at the building's southwest corner. View to southeast. (Postcard available in the photographic collection of the Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul).

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Batcher Opera House Block

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Close up view of the Batcher Opera House Block. The stanchions at the northeast corner of the building in this circa 1925 image may hold promotions for the movies playing in The Grand. View to southwest. (Image available in photographic collection of the Minnesota Historical Society, Saint Paul).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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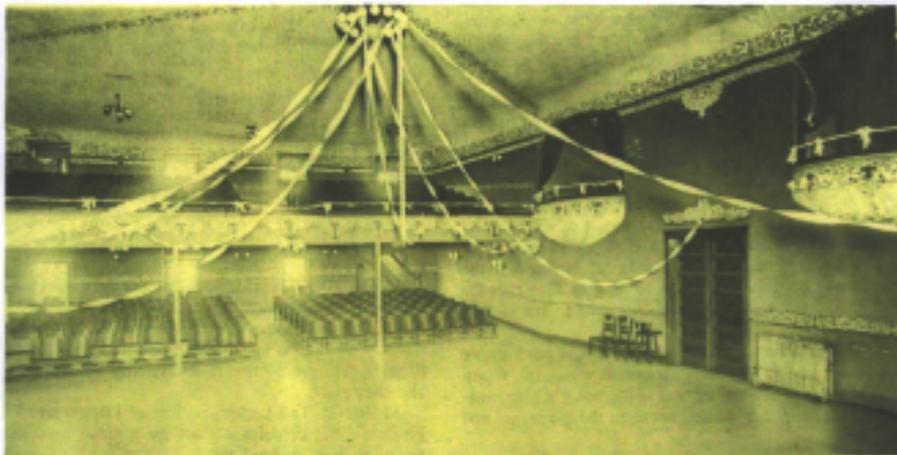
Batcher Opera House Block

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Interior of Batcher's Opera House during its glory days. This image may have been taken on November 21, 1907, the day the elegant venue opened (adapted from Margaret Anderson's *Northside-Southside, Stories of Staples*, 1989).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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Batcher Opera House Block

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Batcher's Opera House

Saturday Night, October 3.

THE ONE ATTRACTION THAT THE MANAGEMENT GUARANTEES.



SHEELEY & HUNTINGTON PRESENT

The NATIONAL OPERA COMPANY

FUNNY COMEDIANS, PRETTY MAIDENS, GIFTED SINGERS, GRACEFUL DANCERS.

HIS HIGHNESS, THE BEY

POSITIVELY THE SAME CAST THAT APPEARS IN THE LARGER CITIES, INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING PRINCIPALS:

MILLE PALME,	JESSIE MAYHEW,	ADAH HEYMAN	SHELAH SHEELEY
CHAS. E. HUNTINGTON,	CHAS. VAUGHAN,	CHAS. J. NELSON,	WM. ORMSBY.

AND THE

BEST SINGING CHORUS IN AMERICA

RESERVE YOUR SEATS WELL IN ADVANCE. PRICES: 25, 50, 75.

Promotional advertisement for a touring troupe appearing at Batcher's Opera House. The advertisement ran in the October 1, 1908, edition of the *Staples World*.