

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received JAN 27 1987
date entered FEB 26 1987

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

1. Name

historic Coolidge Sylvan Theatre

and/or common Same

2. Location

street & number Medary Avenue (900 Block)

N/A not for publication

city, town Brookings

N/A vicinity of

state South Dakota

code 046

county Brookings

code 011

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name South Dakota State University

street & number University Station

city, town Brookings

N/A vicinity of

state South Dakota 57007

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. South Dakota State University

street & number Physical Plant - Administration Building

city, town Brookings

state South Dakota

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title City of Brookings Survey

has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date Summer, 1986

federal state county local

depository for survey records City of Brookings

city, town Brookings

state South Dakota

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Reminiscent of ancient Greek theatre design, the Coolidge Sylvan Theatre was designed to provide an attractive center for outdoor student activities on the campus of South Dakota State College. It was constructed with field stones, brick and imitation limestone to harmonize with the adjacent Lincoln Memorial Library building.

There is general agreement among scholars that by the second quarter of the fifth Century, B.C., "the normal Greek theatre was a three part wooden structure consisting of a theatron, an orchestra, and a skene."¹ Built on a natural slope, the Sylvan amphitheatre can be linked to these three elements of the early Greek outdoor setting.

The theatron, or viewing area, consists of Sylvan's grassy slopes with a capacity for seating 5,000 people, with accommodations for another 5,000 people on the fringe areas.² The Greek orchestra or "dancing circle"³ generally used as the performing area for the Greek chorus would relate to the semi-circular grass area forming the stage of Sylvan Theatre. The skene, or scene building, had three doors. The low rear wall constructed of red brick trimmed with imitation stone would form the basis of the Greek skene. The centrally placed niche constructed for the statue of Tetonkaha would correlate functionally to the central doorway of the Greek building. The twin arched entrances composed of stone trimmed brick columns covered with tail cut end rafters have similarities to a pergola. In modern architecture, the pergola can be used as an entrance porch covered with vines or other climbing plants.⁴ In the Greek setting, the arched entrances would be called the paradous, the entryway on either side of the central door where the chorus made its entrances and exits.⁵ The brick pillared gateways with lamp-lights would correspond to the paraskenia, the wings that define the "ends of the low platform or playing area. The skene was used both as dressing rooms for the actors and as a scene backing." The upper-level open air pavilion of the skene has been utilized as a dressing area for productions at Sylvan Theatre. Providing a central focus, the pavilion is built of red brick and supported by four large sets of columns. Each classic double column wraps around and is coupled to another double column at the upper level with red brick forming the base. A red clay tile roof is decorated along its roofline with stone dentils. Decorative stone spindles form a central balustrade above an entablature framed with scroll design brackets. Theatre historians have determined that the second level of the skene occurred during the evolution of the Roman theatre. A decorative wrought iron railing extends from the edges and forms the handrail for the stairways that serve as exits from two sides of the structure. The front of the stage is defined by a low wall constructed of mortar and field stone that was gathered in the Brookings area. Fieldstone steps define each end and connect to a wall that projects out to meet the slope of the land. A granite memorial stone, laid by President and Mrs. Coolidge, is centered in the front stage wall and was donated by Dakota Granite Works of Milbank. A cement orchestra pit is set at the base of the front wall. Ornate scroll designs cover the four stone benches located along the rear wall.

Today, original American elm and poplar trees surround the perimeter of the theatre and the twin entrances are framed by recently planted juniper shrubs. Bridal wreath spirea shrubs are planted at both ends of the wing area. Volunteer trees and an original form of spirea exist by the rear wall. Earlier photographs document an abundance of vines and shrubbery on the columned entrances, benches and throughout the stage area, evoking the sylvan effect originally intended by the developers of the Coolidge Sylvan Theatre.

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¹Anthony Caputi, Classical Greece, D.C. Heath and Company, Lexington, Massachusetts, 1968, p. xii.

²"Sylvan Theatre to be center of many student activities," The Industrial Collegian, 21 September, 1927, p. 1.

³Caputi, p. xii.

⁴Herbert Gottfried and Jan Jennings, American Vernacular Design: 1870-1940, Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, New York, 1985, pp. 114-115.

⁵Frank M. Whiting, An Introduction to the Theatre, Chapter 9, "Theatre Architecture", Harper and Brothers Publishers, New York, 1954, p. 178.

⁶Caputi, p. xii.

⁷Industrial Collegian, 21 September, 1927, p. 1.

⁸General Campus Building Photograph File, Sylvan Theatre Neg. No. 3489 (August 1936) and Neg. No. 52-682 (July 15, 1952), Photo Lab, South Dakota State University, Pugsley Center, Brookings, South Dakota

8. Significance

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

Specific dates 1928 **Builder/Architect** Perkins and McWayne Architects

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Coolidge Sylvan Theater on the South Dakota State University campus in Brookings is significant in the areas of theater. This outdoor theater relates to the South Dakota State Plan, Historic Context V. Depression and Rebuilding (1893-1929), C. Civic Improvements and F. Recreation.

Although it was not named in her honor, the theater was built as a tribute to Ada B. Caldwell who was a professor and head of the Art Department at State College from 1899 to 1927. A plaque on the west wall reads that "hers was the vision which brought this theatre to us." Influential in the lives of art students, she instructed the noteworthy South Dakota painter Harvey Dunn and the American sculptor Gilbert Riswold.

For many years, the outdoor theater served the university and community of Brookings. Professor G.W. McCarty first presented the morality play "Experience" in the summer of 1929.(1) In subsequent years, Professor Lawrence Stine presented "A Midsummer Night's Dream" in 1956 and Professor Clarence Denton used the outdoor setting extensively in the late fifties and early sixties for light summer comedies. The setting also illustrates the use of the three part structure of the early Greek amphitheatre.

Although it hasn't been used for plays in recent years, the Sylvan Coolidge theater has provided a setting for countless other activities including college and high school commencements, the Spring frolic, and other student events. It was constructed at a time when there were no state appropriations for new construction as exemplified in the 1928 Collegian headline "Enrollment at State College Outstrips Building Program."(2) Sylvan Theatre was built because of a united student effort. The college newspaper reports that "the natural background will provide an attractive setting for band concerts, outdoor plays, summer school lectures, and Farm and Home Day."(3) Graduating members of the Classes of 1926 and 1927 provided funding for the north and west walls. The college newspaper reports that six dollars was to be assessed to each member of the class of 1928 "to provide the funds necessary for the completion of the theatre."(4) With this building fund, Sylvan Theatre was completed in June, 1928. The Class of 1929 bestowed the balcony and participated in the first outdoor evening commencement exercises held on June 10, 1929 in the theatre. The local newspaper described the event as "the most beautiful and impressive commencement ever held at State College, probably in the state."(5) The classes of 1930, 1931, and 1932 provided special features including the ornately carved seats, the Tetonkaha statue and the lighting. The total cost of the theatre was approximately \$5,000.

Perkins and McWayne donated the plans for the theater in April of 1928.(6) This noted Sioux Falls architectural firm was also responsible for the designs of the adjacent Lincoln Library, the Coughlin Campanile and numerous courthouses and

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property Less than one acre

Quadrangle name Brookings

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A	<u>1</u> <u>4</u>	<u>6</u> <u>7</u> <u>6</u> <u>5</u> <u>0</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>9</u> <u>0</u> <u>9</u> <u>1</u> <u>7</u> <u>0</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing

B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

C			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

D			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

E			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

F			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

G			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

H			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Sheet

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

state	<u>N/A</u>	code	<u>N/A</u>	county	<u>N/A</u>	code	<u>N/A</u>
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state	<u>N/A</u>	code	<u>N/A</u>	county	<u>N/A</u>	code	<u>N/A</u>
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Sherry DeBoer (Technical Assistance: Melanie A. Betz, State Historical Preservation Center, Vermillion, SD 57069)

organization City of Brookings Historic Pres Commission date November 7, 1986

street & number City Hall - Box 270 telephone 605/692-6629

city or town Brookings state South Dakota

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature *PA Fisher*

title Director Office of History date 1/22/87

For NPS use only

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

entered in the
National Register

date 2/26/87

Meloree Byers
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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churches in South Dakota.(7) Appearing almost exactly as it did when it was built, the Theater displays its original brickwork and architectural detailing including its red tiled balcony and central niche.

The Coolidge Sylvan Theatre is an impressive memorial to the educators, artists, architects and students involved with the construction of this outdoor theatre.

¹"Large cast to present play at College Summer Term," Brookings Register, 13 June, 1929.

²Charles L. Sewrey, A History of South Dakota State College: 1884-1959, South Dakota State University, Brookings, South Dakota, 1959, p. 64.

³"Sylvan Theatre to be center of many student activities," The Industrial Collegian, 21 September, 1927.

⁴"Senior Class to complete new theatre," The Industrial Collegian, 20 March, 1928.

⁵"Conditions were ideal for first outdoor graduation: more than 3,000 people witness 1929 Commencement exercises at Coolidge Sylvan Theatre; New Campanile dedicated," Brookings Register, 13 June, 1929.

⁶"Sylvan Theatre to be first used for Graduation Events," The Industrial Collegian, 10 April, 1928.

⁷David Erpestad and David Wood, Manuscript, South Dakota Architecture, project 1986.

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"Big crowd hears Coolidge at new Library Dedication: Attendance 12,000 to 15,000," Brookings Register, 13 September, 1927.

Caputi, Anthony, Classical Greece, D.C. Heath & Company, Lexington, Massachusetts, 1968.

"Conditions were ideal for first outdoor graduation: More than 3,000 people witness 1929 Commencement exercises at Coolidge Sylvan Theatre; New Campanile Dedicated," Brookings Register, 13 June, 1929.

General Campus Building Photograph File, Sylvan Theatre, Neg. No. 3489 (August, 1936) and Neg. No. 52-682 (July 15, 1952) Photo Lab, South Dakota State University, Pugsley Center, Brookings, South Dakota.

Janson, H.W., History of Art, Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1966.
Junior Class, Jackrabbit, South Dakota State University, Brookings, South Dakota, 1929, 1930.

Kramer, J. Howard, South Dakota State University: A History 1884 to 1975 (from Dr. Headly's inventory of buildings, 1884-1955, Biannual report to the Board of Regents), South Dakota State University, Brookings, South Dakota, 1975, pp. 130-131.

"Large Cast to Present Play at College Summer Term," Brookings Register, 13 June, 1929.

"New Library to contain statue," The Industrial Collegian, 21 September, 1927.

Perkins and McWayne: Architectural Drawing, The Industrial Collegian, 21 September, 1927.

Personal Interview, Dr. Clarence Denton, Professor, Department of Speech, South Dakota State University, Brookings, South Dakota, October, 1986.

Personal Interview, Dr. Norman Gambill, Professor and Head, Department of Visual Arts, South Dakota State University, Brookings, South Dakota, October, 1986.

Personal Interview, Bruce Grulke, R.A., Assist. Professor, Department of General Engineering, South Dakota State University, Brookings, South Dakota, October, 1986.

Personal Interview, Dr. Larry Stine, Retired, Department of Speech and Theatre, South Dakota State University, Brookings, South Dakota, October, 1986.

Personal Interview, Dick Waldner, Physical Plant, South Dakota State University, Brookings, South Dakota, October, 1986.

Personal Interview, Allyn Frerichs, Head of the Park and Recreation Department, City of Brookings, South Dakota, October, 1986.

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Powers, William H., Editor, A History of South Dakota State College, South Dakota State College, Brookings, South Dakota, 21 February, 1931, pp. 100-107.

"Senior Class to Complete New Theatre," The Industrial Collegian, 20 March, 1928.

Sewrey, Charles L., A History of South Dakota State College: 1884-1959, South Dakota State University, Brookings, South Dakota, 1959, pp. 64-66.

"Sylvan Theatre to be center of many student activities," The Industrial Collegian, 21 September, 1927.

"Sylvan Theatre to be first used for Graduation Events," The Industrial Collegian, 10 April, 1928.

"Sylvan Theatre to be ready by June for Commencement," The Industrial Collegian, 22 May, 1928.

Whiting, Frank M., "An Introduction to the Theatre," Chapter 9, "Theatre Architecture," Harper and Brothers Publishers, New York, 1954, p. 178.

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The boundaries of this site are imaginary lines that form a rectangle. The north line lies 10 feet from the skene (or scene building) and is 200 feet in length. The west line lies 10 feet from the skene and is 200 feet in length. The site is located within the legal description as recorded in the Register of Deeds Office, Brookings County Courthouse: North one half of the Southwest one quarter of Section 24, Township 110 North, Range 50 West, in Brookings County (October 10, 1881).