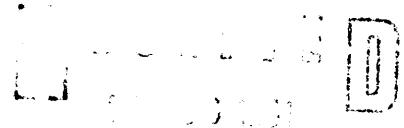


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

NATIONAL
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Stonington Opera House
other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number NW Corner of Main St. & Russ Hill Road not for publication
city, town Stonington vicinity
state Maine code ME county Hancock code 009 zip code 04681

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	_____ buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____	_____ objects
		<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

[Signature] Date 7/3/91
Signature of certifying official
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official Date _____
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:)

[Signature] 10/16/91
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Entered in the National Register

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation & Culture/Theater

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation & Culture/Theater

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

No Style

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone/Granitewalls Wood/ShingleWood/Weatherboardroof Asphaltother

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Standing atop a rock outcropping with a commanding view over Stonington Harbor, the Stonington Opera House is a long rectangular frame building sheathed in wood shingles and weatherboards. It is composed of a tall hipped roof block at the south end and a long low gabled projection to the rear. The taller section contains the stage, fly, wings, and dressing rooms. Theater seating is located in the ell.

The south-facing front elevation, which is actually the back of the stage, is the most conspicuous. Its expansive wall surface is broken only by a single two-over-two window centrally located below a large wooden sign emblazoned with the words OPERA HOUSE. The shingle covering is varied by a sawtooth pattern that extends twelve courses below the window (this is repeated around the entire building). A pair of two-over-two windows on the lower story originally flanked a section of vertical boards used to display playbills (the sign board survives in storage and is scheduled for restoration). At one time, a third window was located near the southwest corner. Weatherboard sheathing further distinguishes this level from the upper part.

The building's long east side elevation features a door and two-over-two window on the lower level of the front block, a similar window just below the center of the upper wall, and an engaged projecting addition at the northeast corner. There are two small windows in this addition which contains lavatories as well as the main entrance and ticket booth. Documentary photographs reveal that this addition at one time extended the full length of the rear block. However, it is not certain when this was in place. It is presumed that the ticket booth, located in the northeast corner, has always been in that spot thereby suggesting that some type of projection was always a part of this section of the building. During the theatre's use as a roller skating rink, the piece which was removed in 1980 was used to store skates. In addition to the main entry, the rear elevation features a second doorway near the northwest corner and a pair of symmetrically placed two-over-two windows below the gable peak. The west side wall is punctuated by a pair of small windows installed c. 1950 in place of five two-over-two units. Restoration of this fenestration pattern is being considered. A door and upper window are located in the tall south block.

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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

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Inside, the Opera House is separated into three distinct sections. At the rear is the ticket booth and vestibule where a pair of doors open into a narrow space beneath the projection booth. This latter feature is supported by four turned posts thought to be original elements. Theatre seating is arranged in three sections on a hardwood floor which slopes upward to the stage. The present color scheme of red with gold trim is based on an analysis of the prior color through paint scrapings. Behind the present movie screen is the third section of the interior containing the stage proper, the wings, and fly space. One painted scene and a variety of hardware survives from the building's period of use for live entertainment. In addition, two sets of stairs lead to the former dressing rooms below the stage where a number of playbills are still posted on those sections of the walls that are sheathed in narrow tongue-and-groove boards.

Of final note on the interior is the projection booth now located at the rear of the auditorium in what was originally an open gallery. This structure, which was installed in the late 1910s, consists of a steel frame supporting an asbestos tile enclosure. Its fireproof construction, including the flooring, was designed with a system to automatically close any openings in the shell. The use of unstable nitrate-based film in this period underlay the use of such a system. Housed within the booth are a pair of c. 1940 Simplex projectors which have recently been modified by the removal of the carbon-burning arc lighting fixtures. These have been retained, however, as have the previous projectors used here.

In 1980 the Opera House underwent a substantial rehabilitation that included repainting of the interior and exterior, replacement of deteriorated sills, and a redesigned roof. This latter operation involved the replacement of the gabled theatre roof which was determined to be structurally deficient. The new trusses were joined to the original walls and rear elevation, but resulted in a slightly greater slope that elevated the ridge about four feet above the original height.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture
Entertainment/Recreation
Performing Arts

Period of Significance

1912 - 1941

Significant Dates

1912
c. 1920

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

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

Constructed in 1912 on the site of a nineteenth century music hall which had burned two years earlier, the Stonington Opera House is one of only a handful of extant buildings of the type in Maine. Its exterior and interior appearance reflect a type of design peculiar to its historic function. Furthermore, the structure embodies a once common pattern of local cultural activity in Maine towns during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For these reasons it is eligible for nomination to the National Register under Criteria A and C.

According to historians, in 1886 local entrepreneur Charles Russ erected the Music Hall on the present site of the Opera House. This building quickly became the cultural center of the bustling community whose growth and development were tied to the granite quarry operations on nearby Crotch Island. In 1900 it was substantially enlarged by the addition of a four story block at the south end. Located in the space immediately in front of the present stage block, this addition featured first story commercial space, an apartment, a third story balcony, and portions of the enlarged stage. Renamed the Stonington Opera House, this facility is said to have been able to seat nearly 1,000 people. It burned to the ground in 1910.

In 1912 the present opera house was built by Dr. B. Lake Noyes, Jewett Noyes and others. Although considerably reduced in size from the prior structure, this new facility accommodated an equal range of functions including that of a town hall (until 1951), roller skating rink, high school basketball court (until 1946-47), and a screening hall for silent movies. Its acquisition in 1928 by Dr. Lewis S. Tewksbury (and his partner George H. Noyes) was the beginning of a nearly 30 year period of association with this owner, at the outset of which "talkies" were first introduced to the local screen. By then, live shows were no longer an element in the mix of entertainment housed in the opera house. Although it continued to bear the sign which proclaimed its original function, a designation prominently evident in the works of such celebrated artists as John Marin, its promotion

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Author's interview with Michael Connors. July 9, 1991

Gross, Clayton H. "The Opera House Glory Days." Island Advantages (Stonington). July 17, 1980.

_____. "Memories of The Opera House." Island Advantages. July 24, 1980.

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 # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acres of property Less than 1

UTM References

A

1	9
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5	2	6	6	3	5
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4	8	8	9	0	2	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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D

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The Opera House occupies the Town of Stonington tax map 7B, lot 45.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary embraces the entire village lot historically associated with this property.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kirk F. Mohney, Architectural Historian

organization Maine Historic Preservation Commission date July, 1991

street & number 55 Capitol Street telephone (207) 289-2132

city or town Augusta, state Maine zip code 04333

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of new forms of entertainment mirrored, and in its own small way lent to, the demise of live performances. In the late 1970s the Opera House was acquired by its present owner and two partners. After a major rehabilitation undertaken in 1980, the building resumed its role in the community by showing movies during the summer months.

Independent research, conducted in documentary sources by Northeast Historic Film (Blue Hill, Maine), has led to the development of a list of 66 buildings in the state which were called the "Opera House." Field survey has not been conducted to verify how many survive. In any case, the list includes facilities which were specifically designed to accommodate a variety of uses, especially that of a town hall. Such was the case with the Camden Opera House of 1892 (N.R. 12/29/86), the Waterville Opera House of 1898 (N.R. 1/1/76), and the Skowhegan Municipal Building/Opera House of 1909 (Skowhegan Historic District, N.R. 2/19/82). Unlike the above examples, which were major public buildings incorporating what was principally an auditorium, the Stonington Opera House represents a somewhat different pattern of development. Built by private funds with the goal of commercial viability, this facility survived by adapting to changing tastes in entertainment. Its history, therefore, reflects the rich variety of recreational activities available in Maine towns during the first half of the twentieth century.

Of further significance is the building's very design. Having been originally designed and built for the presentation of dramatic performances, its form is a direct expression of its function. This is especially evident in the composition of the tall hipped roof block which shelters the stage. Constructed in this manner to house moveable backdrops, this feature lends a distinctive form to the overall building which is wholly different from that found in the above-described auditoriums. In fact, the Stonington Opera House is far more closely related to the 1935-36 Deertrees Theatre (N.R. 1/5/89) in Harrison, a wooden structure with an overall configuration that is similar to the Opera House. Like the Opera House, this theatre was designed for live dramatic performances and thus incorporated features such as wings, fly, and dressing rooms. Within this specific class of building types, therefore, the example in Stonington may be the oldest extant one in Maine.