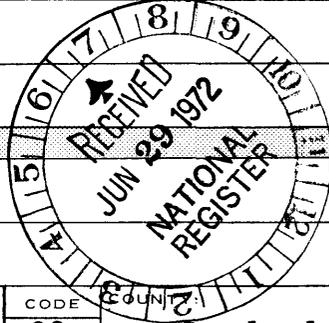


**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Mississippi  
 COUNTY: Lauderdale  
 FOR NPS USE ONLY  
 ENTRY NUMBER: **DEC 27 1972**      DATE: \_\_\_\_\_



**1. NAME**  
 COMMON: Grand Opera House  
 AND/OR HISTORIC: \_\_\_\_\_

**2. LOCATION**  
 STREET AND NUMBER: 2208 5th Street  
 CITY OR TOWN: Meridian  
 STATE: Mississippi      CODE: 28      COUNTY: Lauderdale      CODE: 075

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) <u>Storage</u>

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**  
 OWNER'S NAME: Marks-Rothenberg, Inc.  
 STREET AND NUMBER: 2200 5th Street  
 CITY OR TOWN: Meridian      STATE: Mississippi      CODE: 28

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**  
 COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: Office of the Chancery Clerk, Lauderdale County Courthouse  
 STREET AND NUMBER: 500 21st Avenue  
 CITY OR TOWN: Meridian      STATE: Mississippi      CODE: 28

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**  
 TITLE OF SURVEY: \_\_\_\_\_  
 DATE OF SURVEY: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Federal       State       County       Local  
 DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: \_\_\_\_\_  
 STREET AND NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
 CITY OR TOWN: \_\_\_\_\_      STATE: \_\_\_\_\_      CODE: \_\_\_\_\_

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: Mississippi  
 COUNTY: Lauderdale  
 ENTRY NUMBER: **DEC 27 1972**  
 DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
 FOR NPS USE ONLY

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The original appearance of the Grand Opera House was recorded on opening night, December 19, 1890, by a visiting journalist, Erwin Craighead, for the Mobile Daily Register:

The opera house...is an oblong building, divided into two nearly equal parts by a proscenium arch. In front of this arch is the auditorium and the entrance lobby, and behind it is the stage. The stage has a thirty-foot opening facing the auditorium and is fifty feet deep.

*see other sheets*

...The auditorium has three divisions: the parquet, the dress circle and the gallery. The parquet is, as in the Mobile Theatre, the fashionable portion of the house, although the dress circle is perhaps the most desirable from which to view the stage performances. The auditorium is illuminated by a sun light in the centre of the ceiling, and by bracket lights under the several galleries.



The interior is decorated throughout in cream, blue, gold and red, but the prevailing tint is gold. The proscenium arch is a heavy frame of gilded work, pierced on either side by the openings for private boxes. The walls of the auditorium are paneled in many beautiful colors and topped with a heavy moulding, painted wine color. The ceiling springs in an arch from this moulding. The corners also of the auditorium are rounded, so that there are no angles in the interior of the hall, and the best acoustic effect is obtained. The main walls are wainscotted in cherry wood, and the gallery facings are in white and gold. The total effect is very good.

The theatre is undoubtedly one of the prettiest in the South, and one in which any city would take pride. The decorations are by the Robert Graves Company, of New York.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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7.

The lobby is spacious, and is approached from the street by a wide staircase. There are two doors opening from the lobby into the parquet, and a stairway leading upward into the dress circle. The gallery is entered by a stairway from a side street. The dress circle approach seems narrow and tortuous; but otherwise the interior arrangements are all excellent, everything having been especially arranged to conduce to the comfort and convenience of the patrons.

The furniture is of the latest style, all upholstered in wine-colored velvet, and with all the patented contrivances for storing of hats and overcoats. The house will be heated by steam.



At present the opera house interior is a shell of its former splendor, having been stripped of many of its accoutrements and cluttered with a miscellany of stored items - Christmas decorations, mannequins, merchandise, furnishings, lumber, etc. The seats in the orchestra were removed during World War II and given to the Little Theatre at Key Field, a military airport in Meridian. Also gone is the ornate metal balustrade which enclosed the balcony. The stage backdrops and curtains were taken down, exposing the scaffolding along the side walls where stage hands worked the curtains. At the rear of the stage are dressing rooms with painted numbers still visible on the doors. A star rated the room which boasted a coal-burning fireplace in addition to a small radiator heater, while the rooms of the lesser-knowns had small radiators only. At an undetermined date, the ceiling of the auditorium was ripped out when plans for remodeling were being considered, leaving torn plaster and naked beams, but still in place is a gilded and starred medallion centered with a pendant-adorned base for the chandelier which hung there. At the front and rear of the ceiling are light-blue friezes featuring a series of classical figures draped in white. Of the entire interior, the 2-tiered boxes flanking the orchestra pit are most evocative of the original appearance. Still intact are carved and gilded columns, balustrades, panels, grilles, and the bombé aprons of the boxes, along with remnants of fringed curtains and tapestry-like wallpaper.

The floor of the opera house, supported by 16" square wooden columns and wood framing, slopes to the stage, which itself is elevated 4' and 1 3/4". The two levels of balconies are framed

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INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

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COUNTY Lauderdale	
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(Number all entries)

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in wood (with wood and iron columns) bearing on the east, west, and south walls. The east and west walls are party walls with no openings into the adjacent buildings, with the exception of one fire door into the present Marks-Rothenberg Department Store at its third-floor level. The spread footings which support the exterior 24" masonry walls are thought to be brick because of the date of construction, although they might possibly be concrete. The roof is framed with wood trusses clear-spanning from east to west walls, and there is a wood roof deck and built-up roof. All stairs are of wood construction, as are windows in the north and south walls. Interior partitions are frame with wood paneling or plaster on wood lath, and finishes are wood, paint on plaster, and wallpaper on plaster.

The exterior of the opera house has two street fronts (facade or southeast elevation and northwest elevation) which visually show four floors topped by an attic story. As was the original purpose of the design, the ground floor is occupied by a commercial firm. There is also one located in the former main entrance to the opera house, and the marquee which was above has been removed. The opera house itself begins at the second floor and extends the height of three stories. The facade above the ground floor is divided vertically into three bays by means of pilasters which rise without interruption through the third-floor level. At the fourth story the line of the outside pilasters then continues upward above their molded caps, but each of the two inner pilasters breaks into smaller pairs. The single shafts reappear before the cornice line is reached and emerge again in the monitor of the attic story. In the fenestration within the bays, flat, segmental, and round headings combine with subtle differences in window size and number to produce a simple but effective overall composition. Decorative elements include rows of small medallions, corbeled brickwork, the outline of a central arch with keystone, and tracery beneath the monitor cornice.

The rear elevation utilizes the motifs of the facade (pilasters, arches, a variety of window headings, corbeling) and adds a boldly bracketed frieze at the roofline. Also as on the facade, the ground floor is occupied commercially, but to one side can still be seen the original backstage entrance to the opera house: a paneled wooden door raised approximately a foot above the sidewalk and secured with a small padlock.



**8. SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian       16th Century       18th Century       20th Century  
 15th Century       17th Century       19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) **1890**

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |                                                  |                                                 |                                              |                                                      |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal              | <input type="checkbox"/> Education              | <input type="checkbox"/> Political           | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric             | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering            | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) <u>1972</u> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic                | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry               | <input type="checkbox"/> Science             |                                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture             | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention              | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture           |                                                      |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian |                                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Theater  |                                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                | <input type="checkbox"/> Military               | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation      |                                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Music       |                                              |                                                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            |                                                 |                                              |                                                      |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Grand Opera House is built on land purchased in 1889 by J. Marks, L. Rothenberg, M. Rothenberg, and S. Rothenberg of the mercantile firm, Marks-Rothenberg Company. One of the two grantors was H. M. Threefoot, who conveyed to the company "Lots four (4) and five (5) in Block ninety three (93) of Ragsdale's Survey of the City of Meridian." The other was J. C. Lloyd, who sold lots 15, 16, and 17 of Block 93. (In 1971 Lloyd's home, now known as Merrehope, was entered on the National Register of Historic Places on the basis of its architectural and military significance in local history.) The architect of the opera house was G. M. Tergenson, who designed it to occupy one third of the city block of buildings which he drew up for Marks-Rothenberg Company. The exterior was constructed by C. M. Rubush of Meridian and the interior by J. B. McElfacrick of St. Louis. Twenty-five full sets of scenery were painted by the Chicago firm of Sossman & Landes. Under the management of Levi Rothenberg, the Grand Opera House opened on December 17, 1890, with Johann Strauss' The Gypsy Baron performed by the Conried Opera Company. The performance was preceded by a 30-minute address by State Supreme Court Justice Thomas H. Woods, who had traveled from the capital at Jackson, 85 miles away.

Thus was launched an era of entertainment which would include appearances at the opera house by such stars as John Gilbert, Lon Chaney, Geraldine Farrar, Johanna Gadske, Otis Skinner, Norma Shearer, Marion Davies, Helen Hayes, and Sarah Bernhardt. Benefitting from its location on the Atlanta-New Orleans circuit, the Grand Opera House attracted vaudeville and minstrel shows as well as opera and drama, and in its relatively brief existence it became known as one of the best facilities of its type in the South. Opening nights at the opera were elegant occasions, when those attending

...most always wore evening clothes. The masses would crowd around the marble entrance on 5th st., much as the fans now do at a Hollywood premiere, to watch the "first-nighters" dressed in their finery ride up in carriages. Ushers would lead the patrons to their seats, at which time

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Clopton, Brad. Evaluation Study: Restoration of Opera House, Meridian, Mississippi. January, 1967.  
 Interview: Mr. W. J. Johnson, Jr., Executive Vice President, Greater Meridian Chamber of Commerce, Meridian, Mississippi, November 18, 1971.  
 Meridian Public Library, Meridian, Mississippi: "Grand Opera House" Subject and Picture Files.  
 Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi: Meridian Opera House" Subject File.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	
NW	° ' "	° ' "	32°	22'	21"	
NE	° ' "	° ' "	88°	42'	02"	
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **.6 of an acre.**

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
**Dawn Maddox, Architectural Historian**

ORGANIZATION: **Mississippi Department of Archives and History**      DATE: **June 15, 1972**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**Post Office Box 571**

CITY OR TOWN: **Jackson**      STATE: **Mississippi 39205**      CODE: **28**

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION      NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National       State       Local

Name *R. A. McLemore*  
**R. A. McLemore**

Title Director, Mississippi Dept. of Archives and History

Date June 15, 1972

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

*Robert H. Utley*  
 Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date 12/27/72

ATTEST:

*William B. Powell*  
 Keeper of The National Register

Date 12-27-72

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the men would order candy for the ladies, which the ushers would bring down during the first intermission.  
(The Meridian Star, 1953 [issue not known].)

The opera house also served as the setting for graduation exercises held by the local high schools. Ca. 1919 it was converted into a motion picture theatre, with projection equipment installed on the second-level balcony, from which the seats were removed. The new role lasted only until 1926, when, failing to meet safety requirements for an adequate number of exits, the Grand Opera House was closed. Since that time, it has remained buried in obscurity within the Marks-Rothenberg complex, serving as a warehouse.

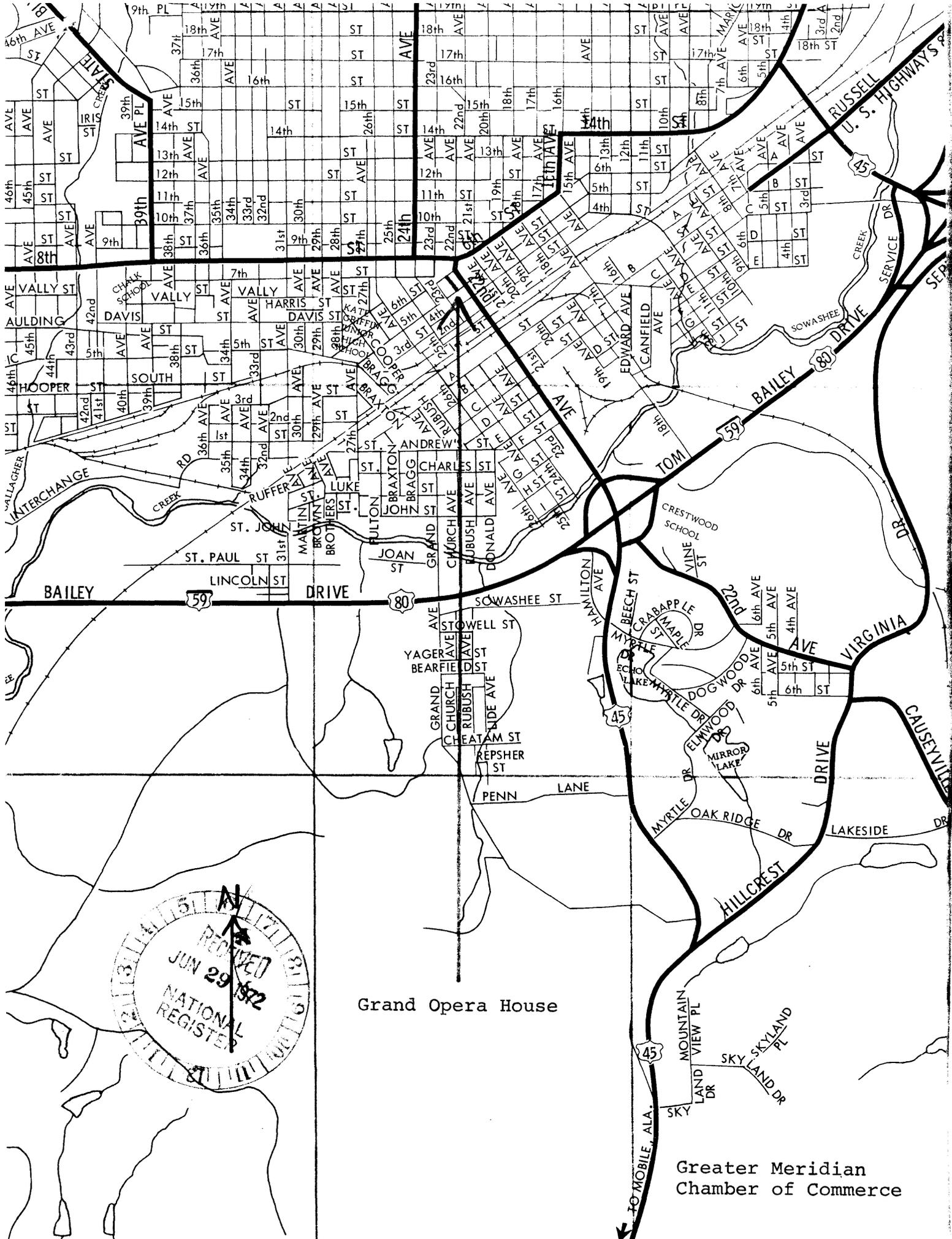
There is interest in Meridian in preserving the opera house as a landmark of local culture and architecture. In 1965 the Greater Meridian Chamber of Commerce conducted a contest to obtain suggestions for sites which could be developed as potentially attractive to tourists. A recommendation that the Grand Opera House be restored to useful service as well as to its appearance as an opera house/music hall of the 1890s was awarded first place among 247 entries. The Chamber of Commerce has followed up on the possibility of developing it as a tourist attraction and auditorium geared to small assemblies (700 or less), thus combining the features of a museum and a theatre. A study done in January, 1967, by Meridian architect Brad Clopton evaluated the structural requirements of renovation, and one year later the Mississippi Research and Development Center, Jackson, analyzed restoration in terms of historic value and community utilization. A lack of funds has inhibited further action to the present time.

9.

Mississippi Research and Development Center, Management and Technical Services Division, Jackson, Mississippi. Analysis of Proposed Old Opera House Restoration, Meridian, Mississippi. January 5, 1968.

Personal inspection by Dawn Maddox November 18, 1971, and May 26, 1972.

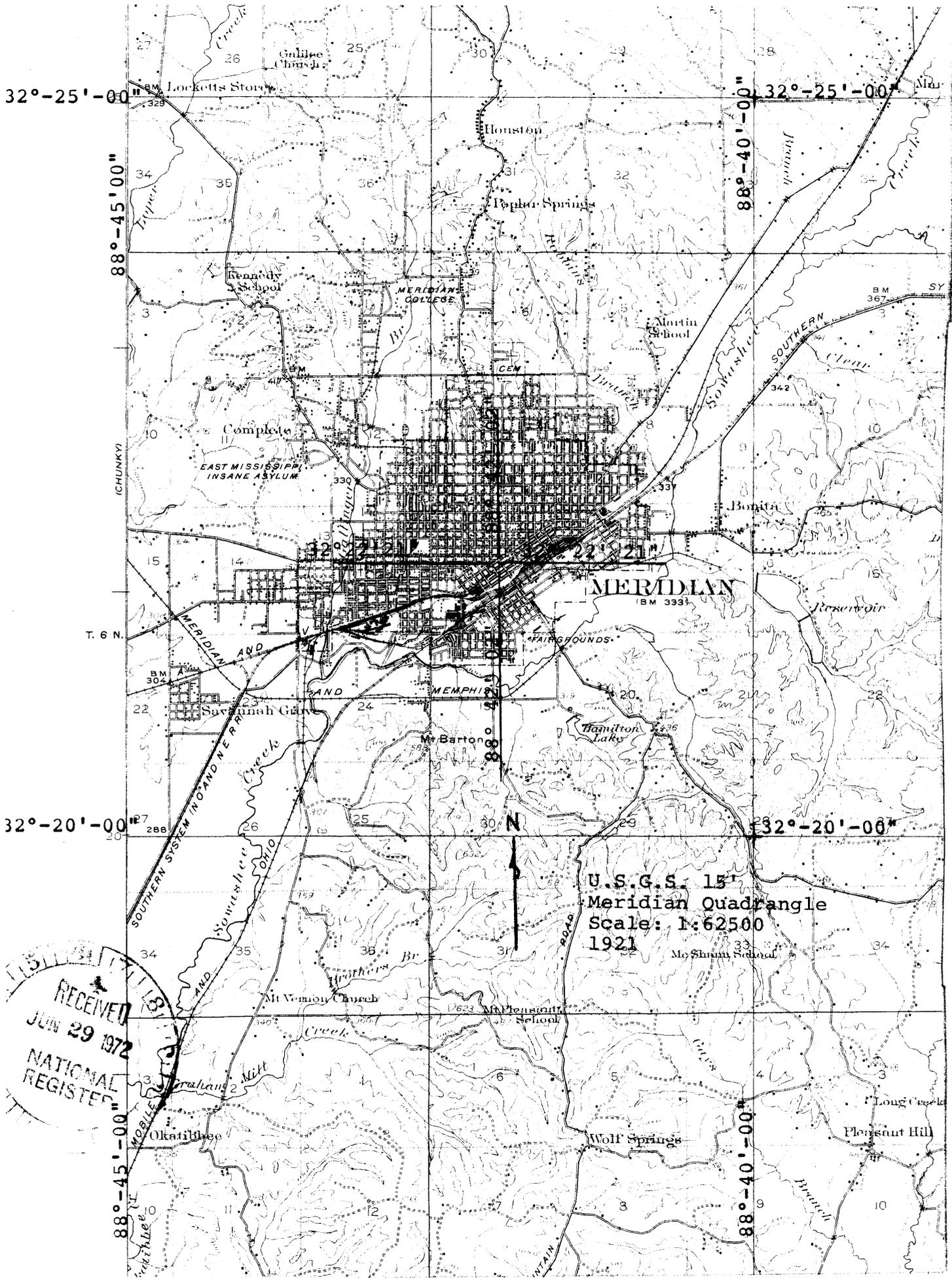




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JUN 29 1962  
NATIONAL REGISTER

Grand Opera House

Greater Meridian  
Chamber of Commerce



32°-25'-00"

32°-25'-00"

32°-20'-00"

32°-20'-00"

88°-45'-00"

88°-40'-00"

RECEIVED  
JUN 29 1972  
NATIONAL  
REGISTER

U.S.G.S. 15'  
Meridian Quadrangle  
Scale: 1:62500  
1921