

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

### SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 92000354

Date Listed: 4/22/92

Ellendale Opera House  
Property Name

Dickey  
County

ND  
State

#### Multiple Name

-----  
This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

Pete Boland  
Signature of the Keeper

4/22/92  
Date of Action

=====  
**Amended Items in Nomination:**

The level of significance, which was omitted, is local.

This information was provided by Lauren McCroskey of the ND SHPO staff.

#### DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

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 Ellendale Opera House Block

other names/site number Ellendale Opera House

2. Location

street & number 105-111 Main Street  not for publication

city or town Ellendale  vicinity

state North Dakota code ND county Dickey code 021 zip code 58436

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.)

James E. Sperry 3-3-92  
Signature of certifying official/Title James E. Sperry Date  
State Historic Preservation Officer (ND)  
State of 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 the 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

Date of Action

Beth Boland 4/22/92

Name of Property

County and State

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
		structures
		objects
1	0	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/music  
 facility  
 SOCIAL/meeting hall  
 COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store  
 VACANT/NOT IN USE (upper two stories)

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Chicago

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Sandstone  
 walls Brick  
 roof Asphalt  
 other Cast Iron (capitals)  
 Terra Cotta (moldings)

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 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

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1908-1942

Significant Dates

1908

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

George Issenhuth - architect

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): N/A

- 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:

Name of Property

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property less than 1 acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

UTM grid boxes 1-4 with values: 14, 536520, 5094125

UTM grid boxes 3-4

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 Lauren McCroskey, Architectural Historian

organization State Historical Society of North Dakota date 1/15/92

street & number 612 East Blvd. Avenue telephone (701)224-2672

city or town Bismarck state ND zip code 58505

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 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...

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions...

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Located at the west end of a central business district filled mostly with one story commercial structures, the Ellendale Opera House Block is a commanding three story profile at the extreme west end of Main Street. The Main elevation, veneered in variegated pale orange, brown and olive brick set in fine mortar joints, is slightly rectangular in plan and measures one hundred feet along Main Street by eighty feet in width and forty-two feet in height. Walls are composed of architectural tile. The Opera Block rests on a dressed, ashlar sandstone foundation that rises slightly above grade, and occupies roughly half of commercial lots eight, nine, ten and eleven on the southwest corner of block 6 of the original townsite. A fire wall capped by an eighteen inch parapet abuts to the east with a one story Depression era building.

While bays are intact at the first story, original store front materials have been masked by modern brick veneers, covered transoms and new plate glass. Beyond at the second and third stories, walls are recessed and framed by piers ornamented with brown cast iron Ionic pier capitals and bases. Window openings rest on a continuous sill course of smooth, buff-colored sandstone. Original wood sash, now boarded-up with plywood, are intact and operable. Spandrels above second and third story windows are treated with recessed brick panels edged with bead and reel terra cotta moldings. The building terminates with two simple corbeled moldings, the lower of which incorporates a classical bead and reel molding; the upper molding terminates as a slight, flat parapet with concrete coping.

The west and rear elevations are veneered in a lighter non-facing brick set in thick mortar joints. The west elevation is divided into three bays by two unornamented brick piers containing a variety of segmental window openings now boarded-up with plywood: the northernmost bay featuring two segmental window heads at the second story, the central bay with three broad segmental window heads at the first story, and two segmental openings at the second story, followed by a single, centrally placed flat-headed window opening at the cornice line. The southern bay contains two window openings at the second and third stories; a smaller opening identical to the central bay opening occurs next to the pier. The original stage elevator entry, located at street level in the northern bay, has been altered with in-fill materials and a replacement door. A corbeled brick course stepping down

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slightly in the southern bay delineates the second story juncture of office space and auditorium.

The rear elevation of the Opera House Block, punctuated by segmental window openings (now boarded-up), has been stuccoed. Delamination of the stucco on this wall indicates a moisture problem. The western portion lacks any window openings. An iron stairway accesses a second story door in the center of this elevation.

Within the first story, two masonry walls extend from the facade to the rear, with room widths measuring thirty feet, twenty-five feet and forty-eight feet (west to east respectively). The second story is comprised of four office spaces along the facade, with double doors dividing from east to west, as well as the two story auditorium in the northwest corner, and a ticket counter and cloak room in the northeast corner. The third story contains a large reading room and two club rooms arranged along the facade, the westernmost of which served as a Masonic Lodge hall for several decades.

Access to the upper floors and to the Opera House proper is through a small doorway located at the eastern edge of the Main Street elevation. The letters "OPERA," originally affixed above the entry, have since been removed. The straight staircase delivers into a wide lobby area featuring a windowed ticket booth and rear cloak room along the east wall. The second story staircase, featuring a plain turned railing and square posts, continues to the third story via an "el" entered from the west. The railings extend into a balustrade at the third story.

Decorative treatments are minimal but consistent throughout all interior spaces. Slightly rough finished plaster-on-lath walls feature a reddish brown painted "wainscot," with overlying field and ceiling painted yellowish cream. Simple fir woodwork, used throughout the building for office doors and for window frames, bears the original aniline stain and varnish. Repeated throughout is the use of a fine bead and reel molding in corniced window and door head moldings. In the westernmost office space of the second story, as well as in the central office space, coved, pressed metal ceilings feature a gothic quatrefoil motif. Narrow hardwood flooring serves the auditorium as well as the rest of the building.

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The opera house/auditorium was reported to have seated approximately 850 persons, with overall dimensions of sixty feet by fifty-one feet with a ceiling height of twenty-three feet. The plain, unornamented proscenium opening features rounded corners and measures twenty-two feet, eleven inches across by thirteen feet, eight inches in height; the stage is twenty feet deep from curtain line and features a curved, projecting forestage measuring three feet, six inches by five feet in front of the proscenium. The outer margin of the stage contains an electrical light trough. A U-shaped balcony accommodating five tiers of seats surrounds the stage. Paired box seats, now removed but salvaged, were located on the first floor; the gallery retains its original paired box seats. A fly loft, originally located over the stage, has also been removed. An original red velvet stage curtain remains suspended from the original pulley system. Located centrally on the stage floor is a trap door.

The auditorium lacks decorative treatments, apart from panels of vertical, double beaded board used as fronting for the stage and balcony. A simple, paneled pressed metal ceiling is largely intact but rusted from water penetration at some seams. Original, opaque glass fixtures of bulbous configuration are suspended from chains. Hardwood auditorium seats with decorative cast iron frames, all of which have been salvaged, were fixed on movable T-frames to allow easy removal for dances and other events. Knifeblade switches, located stage right, are still in place. The stage wings, accessed on either side by balustraded stairs, feature two sets of small dressing rooms. A skylight of wire glass is found at the southwest corner of the auditorium entrance.

The flat roof is composed of composition built-up asphalt and gravel. Severe leakage of the roof has resulted in a large portion of the ceiling plaster having fallen in the lobby area, just outside the auditorium. Inside the auditorium, buckets are required to catch multiple leaks which pass water through the pressed metal ceiling. A twelve foot high elevator "penthouse" measuring roughly twenty-five by twenty-five feet is located at the northwest corner of the building. The operable stage elevator is accessed by a west side ground level exterior door and delivers into the backstage area.



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Nominated under Criterion A, the Ellendale Opera House Block is the only historic legacy of the entertainment and recreation theme in the community. Having hosted a vast array of cultural functions from opera and theater to boxing matches and roller skating, the building is a significant component of Ellendale's historic role as the social center for much of the county. Reflecting some design qualities of the Chicago School period, the Opera Block merits nomination under Criterion C. Its architectural composition, one of restraint and simplicity, is significant as one of only two structures in Ellendale representing commercial design from this period.

At the time of the Opera Block's erection, Ellendale's Main Street featured an assortment of wooden, boom town fronts, chastely embellished with Italianate cornices, as well as several brick structures with lingering Romanesque treatments. Today, largely a consequence of a disastrous 1916 fire, the commercial district is overwhelmingly characterized by brick Depression era buildings sporting minimal decoration, aside from stepped parapets and inlaid brickwork. Three structures, one, a bank opposite the Opera House Block, and two commercial buildings diagonally and opposite are the only Romanesque survivors.

As periodic fires began consuming many of the wood clad buildings just after the turn of the century, local officials and business leaders began reconstructing their community in brick. Concurrent with the opening of the fire-proof, tile and brick Opera House Block in 1909 was the construction of the Dickey Hotel. The Hotel, also executed in a simplified Chicago School theme, with rusticated brick base, mid-section of windows recessed between piers and metal cornice, is extant at the east end of the same block. Both the Dickey Hotel and the Opera House Block opened within weeks of one another, and both were reported to have cost \$40,000, each. The two buildings benefited one another as out of town theater goers often took lodgings in the hotel.

The Opera House Block appears to have been initiated as a one story commercial project for three retail operations which may have been burned out of makeshift wooden buildings previously located on this same site. Seeking improved quarters, the proprietor of Randall's General Store borrowed money for the construction of new commercial space. The owners of Nathan's

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Hardware, the Ellendale Cafe and William Hecklesmiller, restaurateur and billiard room operator, soon committed themselves as tenants in Randall's project.

At some juncture in the conceptual stage of the project, these and other business leaders formed an Opera House Corporation, with the goal of adding a two story opera house to the top of their commercial enterprise. Historical recollections credit these individuals for their civic awareness and for their interest in providing entertainment facilities for the surrounding region.<sup>1</sup> When completed, the top section of the building was leased to the Ellendale Commercial Club for a period of ninety-nine years.

That the Opera House was not merely an amenity for the culturally enlightened is glimpsed in a period account of the building's construction: "... the town owed it to its farming community to provide some place of amusement and expressed the belief that the farming community would appreciate and patronize such a place."<sup>2</sup> In this respect, the Ellendale Opera House Block differed from many opera houses that were erected to serve the cultural appetites of elite clientele and newly displaced easterners.

The Leader further reported the success of the Opera House in serving a farming audience: "The Leader is especially pleased at seeing so many of our farmer friends present enjoying this new play house, because in all the Leader has said in advocating the building of an opera house...The large attendance at performances, justifies the efforts of the Commercial club and the belief that an opera would be appreciated by our farming constituency."<sup>3</sup> Clearly this building was intended for cultural and social outreach for those who might not normally partake of theater, opera and dance. The modest appointments of the Opera House may well reflect the agrarian orientation of its patrons.

The range of activities that took place at the Opera House secured the building's role as the multi-functional, social catalyst for the surrounding area. Removable seating also added to the auditorium's versatility. A stock company was in residence twice a year for two weeks, and Shakespearian plays and comic opera such as Gilbert and Sullivan were featured regularly until 1917; thereafter, firemens balls, high school graduation ceremonies, boy scout meetings, movies, dances, boxing matches

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and roller skating were offered in the auditorium until the mid 1970s. Other tenants throughout the building's history included the Commercial Club and American Legion as well as dentists and attorneys. "Masonic Lodge Rooms" at the third story are prominently indicated on a 1927 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map.

The architectural treatment of the Opera House Block qualifies as a modest interpretation of Chicago School design. The characteristic three part elevation is dominated by a mid-section composed of seven piers that rise from store fronts. The piers, which are lightly embellished with classical Ionic pier caps, provide an irregular pattern of bays and sash openings at the second and third stories. The lack of uniformity in the facade makes the building an anomaly among the state's opera house designs.

George Issenthuth, a Huron, South Dakota architect of some import, designed the Opera House Block as well as one other known building in North Dakota. Arriving in Huron, Dakota Territory approximately 1880, he worked as a builder and contractor and eventually studied architecture through a correspondence school from which he received a certificate in 1895. By 1938 Issenthuth was registered as an architect in Sioux Falls, although he is known to have apprenticed draftsmen in his office as early as 1908.<sup>4</sup> He opened an architectural practice in Huron in 1906, shortly before his design for the Opera House Block was executed, making this project one of his earliest professional commissions. St. Anthony's Catholic Church in Linton, a brick structure of Gothic revival inspiration built in 1915, is the only other North Dakota work currently identified.

In South Dakota his works are better inventoried and include a number of schools as well as the somewhat comparable city hall/jail/fire station building in Brookings. The latter is of the same vintage as the Opera House Block (1912) and also reflects a sparing application of Chicago School details such as bays recessed in piers, pier capitals and classical cornice.<sup>5</sup> Issenthuth garnered the bulk of school building commissions in South Dakota and proclaimed in a 1910 advertising flyer to be "known over the entire state for ability and square dealing."<sup>6</sup> Among the stock plans furnished by this year were schools, business blocks, residences, churches, and seven opera houses, of which the Ellendale Opera Block is the only such identified

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commission in either North or South Dakota.

Because the Opera House Block began as a commercial project, with retail businesses and office space at the first story, it is suspected that commercial orientation dominated the design of the facade. It is also possible that the varying dimensions of store front businesses, previously established, dictated pier placement and sash disposition when the top stories were conceived. The location of the first story wall divisions and the fact that few window bays are identical [2 - 2 - 3 - 2 (paired) - 2 (paired) - 1] support this supposition.

The design is illustrated in a February 11, 1909 edition of the Leader. Here the building appears as a unified design, in spite of the structure's purported beginnings as a one story commercial project.<sup>7</sup> Given oral accounts that business leaders began construction of the first story, only to modify their plans by adding two additional stories, it is not clear whether Issenhuth was commissioned from the beginning, or whether he was later engaged to design a compatible two story addition above the retail fronts. Irrespective of oral histories, which recount a two-phased design of the building, a newspaper rendering attributes the entire three story project to Issenhuth.

The building does not follow the conventions of many opera house designs, which normally prescribed a symmetrical facade with prominent central entry. Of the surviving and intact opera houses in North Dakota, only the Larimore City Hall and Opera House (National Register listed) exhibits the classic formula of symmetrical facade with slightly projecting entry. Others, including the Lisbon Opera House (National Register listed), the much altered Velva Opera House (Welo Building) and the Lankin Opera House of 1905 were similarly predisposed to the retail operations they housed and took shape as commercial fronts. Two exceptions also greatly altered, the Grand Forks Opera House and the Wahpeton Opera House, reflect symmetrical facades with focused, central entries. Both of these have suffered exterior defacement and interior remodeling that have in-filled and destroyed their opera house spaces.

In North Dakota and other communities in the northern Plains, conventional opera house designs devoted solely to entertainment were the exception rather than the rule. As with the Ellendale

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building, many "opera houses" in the state, including the Larimore Opera House, Jamestown Opera House, Williston and Breckenridge (Minnesota) combined civic or retail functions such as city government, fire protection, libraries and commercial businesses.<sup>9</sup>

Presently the Ellendale Opera Block stands in a high state of architectural integrity, though deferred maintenance has permitted rapid deterioration of the building's roof system. The roof demands immediate attention in order to prevent further damage to the third story and auditorium space. While retail businesses continue to occupy the store fronts, community and civic leaders search for a preservation plan that will return the historic opera house to productive service.

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NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Monteith, Donna. Oral interviews conducted with Preston Coleman, Donald Monteith, Leona Monteith, Flora Slocumb, Ed Leiby of Ellendale, 1973.

<sup>2</sup> Dickey County Leader and Ellendale Commercial. February 11, 1909 edition, pp. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> State Historical Preservation Center Architect's File on George Issenhuth, South Dakota Historical Society, Vermillion.

<sup>5</sup> State Historical Preservation Center, South Dakota Urban Survey Form for the Brookings, City Hall, South Dakota State Historical Society, Vermillion.

<sup>6</sup> "George Issenhuth, Architect, Huron, South Dakota," advertising flyer, 1910.

<sup>7</sup> Dickey County Leader and Ellendale Commercial, June 18, 1908 edition, pp. 1.

<sup>8</sup> McCroskey, Lauren, Larimore City Hall/Opera House, National Register nomination form, 1990.

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Ellendale Opera House  
Dickey County, North Dakota

## Amendment

### 11. Form Prepared By

Add "with research assistance by Phyllis Hokana Klose, 8000 41<sup>st</sup> Street SE, Jamestown, ND 58401, 701-252-0902"

### Additional Documentation

#### Photographs

On all photographs: replace "Photographer: Lauren McCrosky" with "Photographer: Ms. Gayman"

On Photograph labeled "Moveable Seating," replace "Unknown" with "Camera facing southwest"

On Photograph labeled "Ladder to Loft," replace "Facing SW" with "Camera facing northwest"

On Photograph labeled "Two open doors" replace "Facing S" with "Camera facing northeast"