

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received JUN 23 1987

date entered JUL 28 1987

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

1. Name

historic RALSTON OPERA HOUSE

and or common SAME

2. Location

street & number 501-503 MAIN STREET

NA not for publication

city, town RALSTON NA vicinity of

state OKLA code 40 county PAWNEE code 117

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input checked="" 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 MR. L. WILLIAM HISER, JR

street & number 400 CLEVELAND STREET

city, town PAWNEE NA vicinity of state OKLA

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. OFFICE OF COUNTY CLERK

street & number PAWNEE COUNTY COURTHOUSE

city, town PAWNEE state OKLA 74058

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title OKLAHOMA LANDMARKS INVENTORY has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1983 federal state county local

depository for survey records STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE - OKLAHOMA HISTORIC SOCIETY

city, town OKLAHOMA CITY state OK 73105

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date <u>2-11-87</u>

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Ralston Opera House is a fifty by eighty foot (50x80) building constructed of local native sandstone in 1902. The building is two stories, and six bays wide, being divided into two (2) commercial spaces on the ground level and performance theatre area occupying the entire upper floor.

The primary exterior construction of the building is a native, sienna colored sandstone. The front wall is rusticated, while the rear and exposed side walls are finished flat and rough.

The lower store front is a Metzger Brothers cast-iron storefront frame with wooden storefront windows, two doors, entresole and center opening. The two outside doors each feature a four pane, fan window above. The center opening in the lower storefront provides access to the upper floor. The lower storefront is protected by a canopy that attaches below the entresole.

The upper storefront is of the mentioned rusticated sandstone and is penetrated symmetrically by six stilted, arch head 1/1 windows. The front elevation is finished by a parapet of rusticated and smooth finish stone to give the impression of a battlement with pinnacles on each end and a cartouche on top.

The lower floor is divided by a party wall. Historically and currently, two areas were and are being used for a hardware store and a general merchandise. The building has recently undergone a sensitive rehabilitation and the interior of the two sides, which still retained most of the historic fixtures and furnishing of the two businesses, have been returned to their historic appearances.

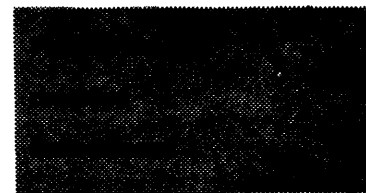
The upper floor is occupied by the theatre staging and audience areas. Though the roof had deteriorated to an extreme point, the interior of this floor, including the stage area, was remarkably well preserved. At the head of the stairs is the ticket booth, flanked on each side by doors leading to the audience area. The audience area occupies the space from the interior of the front elevation up to the foot of the stage and is flat throughout. The floor is a one by four (1x4) tongue and groove and the ceiling is a beaded car siding and the walls are plaster over stone.

The stage area is fronted by a narrow curved proscenium which features a metal lined footlight trough containing early porcelain bulb holders. Though not confirmed, the metal liner may indicate a use of a limelight system prior to electrification. The stage continues to the back and side walls of the building creating the upstage, back-stage and wings. The backstage area is serviced on center by steps leading to double doors exiting the theatre area. Above the stage, the historic fly-system is still in place, including many of the pulleys and stays. Access to the upperstaging area is provided by stairs on each side.

Though various areas of the building had deteriorated, the overall integrity of the building was never in danger. The rehabilitation has corrected the causes of deterioration and repaired the results of those causes.

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RALSTON OPERA HOUSE

CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES:

<u>Type</u>	<u>Number</u>
Building Ralston Opera House	1

NONCONTRIBUTING:

None None

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/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) Entertainment
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1902 **Builder/Architect** Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Ralston Opera House is significant in the commercial development and entertainment history of Ralston, a small north central Oklahoma town of 495 people.

Live performance theater buildings usually along the railroad are significant because they represent some of the main sources of culture and entertainment in the early days of Oklahoma. Most of the earliest structures have deteriorated or have been torn down. Those theaters remaining have adjusted their featured entertainment to correspond with the changing trends. Earliest theaters featured touring plays and musicals. These 'opera houses' often acted as public meeting places with speakers such as William Jennings Bryan and Carrie Nation drawing large audiences. Vaudeville acts followed later and often shared billing with silent movie features. After sound was introduced, those theaters which emphasized motion pictures experienced a higher survival rate. Currently the trend has gone full cycle, returning once more to theatrical productions, especially those sponsored by community theaters.

Located along the railroads, these theaters could easily be built with a variety of materials shipped in on the trains. Touring companies usually traveled only to those communities easily reached by railroads so that a minimum of effort was needed to transport not only the performers but all of their equipment and costumes. Proximity to the railroad allowed those people who wanted to attend performances in other towns to reach them with ease.

Ralston was established on the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad in 1894. A.M. Harry had the Ralston Opera House constructed in 1902. He and his brother were partners in the venture. The building served the small community with retail businesses housed on the first floor and a live performance theater ("opera house") on the second.

Commercially, its hardware and general merchandise/clothing stores served vital needs of the community and the surrounding area; historically, being the primary source for a wide variety of items. The needs of the local population of merchants, craftsmen and agriculturalists were supplied with tools, parts and devices needed to operate from the hardware store. The general merchandise and clothing store, in turn, provided the goods and items common to every person: clothing, shoes and drygoods.

Culturally, the Opera House area of the building served as the primary focal point and gathering place for both social and recreational events made possible and associated with such a facility. Located fifteen to thirty miles from all other towns and yet still on the railway, various traveling troops of entertainers made use of the Ralston Opera House and the audiences that the facility could offer. In addition to the professional performances, local talent and groups made frequent use of the building and its resources. The Opera House functioned until the mid-1920s.

Retail businesses similar to the original continue to operate on the first floor of the Ralston Opera House today. The building had remained in the hands of Harry's step-

9. Major Bibliographical References

Oral interview with Mrs. Helen Bullock, June 30, 1983, Ralston, Oklahoma
Oral interview with Mrs. Carol Borman, November 15, 1983, Stillwater, Oklahoma
(see Continuation Sheet)

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Fairfax, Oklahoma

Quadrangle scale $\frac{1:24,000}{7\frac{1}{2}''}$

UTM References

A

1	4	7	0	3	1	6	0	4	0	4	2	0	5	5
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

Lots 9-11, Block 13, Original Townsite of Ralston

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

state NA code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Nicola Perkins, Supervised by Dr. George O. Carney; edited by Melvena Heisch

organization Department of Geography

date November 1986

street & number Oklahoma State University

telephone 405/624-6250

city or town Stillwater

state Oklahoma 74078

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

C. E. Petcoff

title

date

6-17-87

For NPS use only

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

William B. Bushong

date

7/28/87

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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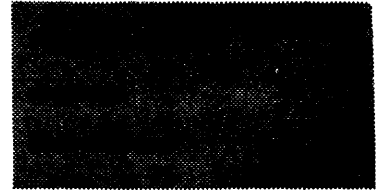
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daughter until quite recently. The current owner has rehabilitated the building under provisions of current federal income tax incentives. The Ralston Opera House is one of the most prominent reminders of the heritage of this small Oklahoma community.

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RALSTON OPERA HOUSE

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, Ralston, Oklahoma, 1909 and 1924.