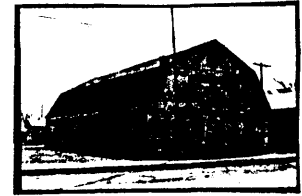


MONTANA HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL INVENTORY



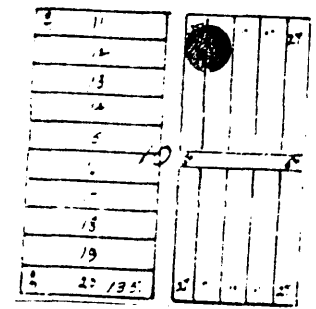
Legal Description: Block 10, Lots 9, 10 OP  
Address: E. Broadway  
Ownership: Name: VFW Hall  
                  %Jack Vaughn  
                  Address: Box 247  
                                  Bridger, MT 59014

Roll# 2/Frame# 18

Historic Name: Bridger Opera House  
Common Name: VFW Hall  
Date of Construction: 1907  
Architect: None  
Builder: Volunteers  
Original Owner: Bridger Opera House Company  
Original Use: Community Social and Cultural Hall  
Present Use: Vacant

Research Sources:

Abstract of Title: Carbon County Courthouse:  
1902, Bridger Improvement Co.; 1906, Bridger  
Coal & Improvement Co.; 1909, Bridger Opera  
House Co.; 1916, Bridger Mercantile Co.;  
1930, Bridger Mercantile Co.; 1944, Bridger  
Post 1543 V.F.W  
Plat Records: Carbon County Courthouse  
Tax Records: Carbon County Courthouse  
Building Permits: N/A  
Sewer/Water Permits: N/A  
City Directories: 1907-1922  
Sanborn Maps: 1907, 1916  
Newspapers: Clarke Fork Herald; 8-15-07; 8-22-07;  
9-12-07; 9-26-07; 10-10-07; 10-31-07;  
Bridger Banner; 11-28-07; 1-2-08;  
1-22-08; 2-20-08; 3-26-08; 4-9-08;  
4-16-08; Bridger Times; 3-22-09;  
10-1-09; 1-6-11; 2-3-11; 4-5-12;  
10-18-12; 12-27-12; 1-3-13; 2-14-13;  
4-11-13; 6-13-13; 8-22-13; 3-20-14;  
4-24-14; 5-1-14; 11-6-14; 2-5-15;  
4-16-15; 1-14-16; 10-26-17; 1-11-18;  
5-10-18  
Other: Articles of Incorporation; Interview  
with Mrs. Mike Kapor



Location Map

## PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:

This gambrel roofed, large rectangular opera house has every appearance of a barn, except that large two-over-two double hung windows were used to light the interior and double, five-panel, wooden doors serve as the main entrance. This one and one-half story wood frame building is sheathed with novelty siding with corner and fascia boards and the roof is covered with green asphalt shingles. The building sets on a rubble stone foundation. Concrete steps lead to the entry. The dance hall has three, four-panel wooden door exits at the (south) rear of the building.

The interior of the building is completely unpartitioned. The walls and ceiling are plastered and the original maple flooring is still in place. A small platform stage sits at the south end of the dance floor. Porcelain-enamel light fixtures hang from the high, "cathedral" ceiling.

## HISTORICAL INFORMATION:

The impetus to construct the Bridger Opera House came suddenly, when in August of 1907 the Northern Pacific Railroad Co. ordered Glidden Mercantile to vacate its warehouse on the railroad right-of-way. The Glidden warehouse had been used for the fair association dances. A scramble to raise money was successful, ground was broken on August 22, and the grand opening of the Opera House occurred Sept. 21, 1907. It had a rock maple dancing floor 50' x 100', which accommodated 60 couples on the opening dance. The following month was spent winterizing the building and constructing the stage.

Articles of Incorporation of the Bridger Opera House Company were filed February 4, 1909, and show George G. Hough, C.J. Baldwin, H.H. Peters, W.H. Hough and R.H. Hough, all of Bridger, the Directors. The purpose of the company was stated as follows:

To support any literary or scientific undertaking, the promotion of painting, music and other fine arts and to provide a place for public gatherings and amusements.

The Opera House was used for dancing, roller skating, basketball, and performances of the Bitner Opera Company, Billings Orchestra, Moore's Concert Company, Joliet Symphony Orchestra, the Bridger Male Choir and Bogard Brothers Orchestra. In 1912 Bridger's first movies were shown here, and the following year the Acme

Amusement Company leased the building for regular showings at 10c per child and 15c per adult. It was the only movie house until the Star Theatre opened on Block 11, O.P. in 1920. It continued to serve for special occasions, celebrations and dances. During World War I the Red Cross had a dance here as a fund raiser, and the military service flag was dedicated here on Mothers Day, 1918.

In June of 1922 the American Legion purchased the Opera House for a meeting hall, and announced plans to remodel. This work may not actually have been done until May of 1927 when McDonough and McCall, managers, completed the "rejuvenation and redecoration."

Although the property changed hands, it continued to be used as a public hall until it was vacated by the V.F.W. Mrs. Kapor remembers having operettas, dances, prize fights and other public gatherings through the late 1920's when she was in school.

**INTEGRITY:**

Original, but deteriorated condition.

**HISTORICAL and/or ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE**

The Bridger Opera House is historically significant as an early 20th century community-sponsored hall for socializing and entertainment. It serves as a testimony to the public spirited nature of the early residents, and today evokes fond memories of the community social gatherings that occurred there. The Opera House played an important role in the social and cultural life of Bridger throughout the historic period. The construction of the building was a community effort and labor and materials were donated by local residents. It is interesting to note that the form of the 1907 Opera House closely resembles that of a gambrel-roofed barn, a structural type common in the Clarks Fork Valley and one that was very familiar to local builders.

**FORM PREPARED BY:**

Name: Carbon County Historic Preservation Office

Address: Box 1651  
Red Lodge, MT 59068

Date: October, 1986

**GEOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION:**

Acreage: 60' x 135'

USGS Quad: Bridger, Mont. 1956 7.5

UTM's: Zone 12, 663805 E., 5017700 N.

