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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

MAY 24 1988

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 Anna C. Diller Opera House  
other names/site number NeHBS #JF02-01; OHBIN #02-21-04

2. Location

street & number Commercial & Hilton  not for publication  
city, town Diller  vicinity  
state Nebraska code NE county Jefferson code 095 zip code 68342

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	_____	_____ 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
		_____	_____ Total

Name of related multiple property listing: Opera House Buildings in Nebraska 1867-1917  
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.  
James A. Hanson May 16, 1988  
Signature of certifying official Date  
Director, Nebraska State Historical Society  
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:)  
Beth Boland 7/6/88  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation &amp; Culture: Theatre;

Music facility

Social: Meeting hall

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Vacant/Not in use

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Two-part commercial block

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Unknown

walls Brick

roof Asphalt

other Decorative brick trim

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Anna C. Diller Opera House is located on the northwest corner of the intersection of Commercial and Hilton, at the edge of the downtown district of Diller. Built by the widow of one of the founders of the town, William H. Diller, it was erected as something of a monument to her memory, one appreciated by the town, according to the December 20 *Diller Record* in 1912: "While it is doubtful if such a building in a town the size of Diller will pay, it will be a great boon to the town and will cause Mrs. Diller to be held in grateful remembrance by the citizens for many years to come."

The three-story brick, rectangular building has a hipped roof and full basement. The Two-Part Commercial Block incorporates design elements found in Second Renaissance Revival style architecture. The building exterior is organized into horizontal divisions by pronounced stone belt courses. The first level features typical ground floor facades on two retail establishments. The main entrance to the opera house is located on the east side of the first level, through a single door and up stairs to the second floor. On the second level, the main facade displays round arched openings with keystone ornaments atop the one-over-one pane windows, arranged symmetrically across the front facade. The third level features small attic-story windows, also symmetrically arranged, reflecting the balcony area in the interior space. The main facade shows a raised panel, inscribed with "Anna C. Diller, 1912." The roof was built for tiles, but has been asphalt sheet since the 1980s. The building is 44 feet wide by 120 feet long. The box office remains in the northeast corner of the auditorium, just under the balcony overhang, in front of the stairs leading to the balcony.

The auditorium is 42 feet wide by 67 feet long from the proscenium opening to the back wall. The walls were decorated by Charles Hansen and James Willer of the Diller firm of Hansen & Willer, who also decorated both the Paddock Hotel and Paddock Opera House in Beatrice, as well. The walls were decorated with grape motifs and bands of diamond-shaped patterns. The ceiling decor included motifs of lilies, roses, bands, and ribbons in shades of blue, green, yellow and pink. The artists used both stencil work and free-hand painting in their art process. The ceiling shows some water damage. As a result of this damage, plaster litters the chairs, floor, and steps. The chairs and floor are also heavily coated with bird droppings. The balcony area, which was never finished, later served as a projection booth; a makeshift partition separates its view from the main auditorium. The balcony extends 33 feet, 8 inches from the Commercial Street wall of the building, extending about four feet over the rear of the auditorium. The

 See continuation sheet

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balcony, which has a sloping floor, was never furnished with seats because the project ran out of money before construction was completed. Three large rooms fill the space immediately under the balcony, behind the auditorium. Permanent opera house chairs fill the main level of the auditorium, which is raked (photo #6); those in the dress circle are upholstered. The chairs have sustained considerable damage to their finish due to inadequate care of the facility. Seating capacity is approximately 400.

The proscenium arch measures 20 feet wide by 14 feet high, with wings of 11 feet extending beyond the opening on each side. Storage space exists in the angles created by the parameters of the stage wall (see photo #3). Small, nonfunctional boxes allow direct access to the stage from the auditorium, while a door on the stage right side allows access to the backstage area. The small orchestra pit, about four feet wide, extends between each of these nonfunctional boxes, curling around the 3-foot apron. Wainscoting decorates this entire area opening to the back wall. Makeshift dressing rooms are backstage on the stage left side, with permanent storage above them. One trap door exists stage right rear.

The structural and historical integrity of the building and theatre has been preserved.

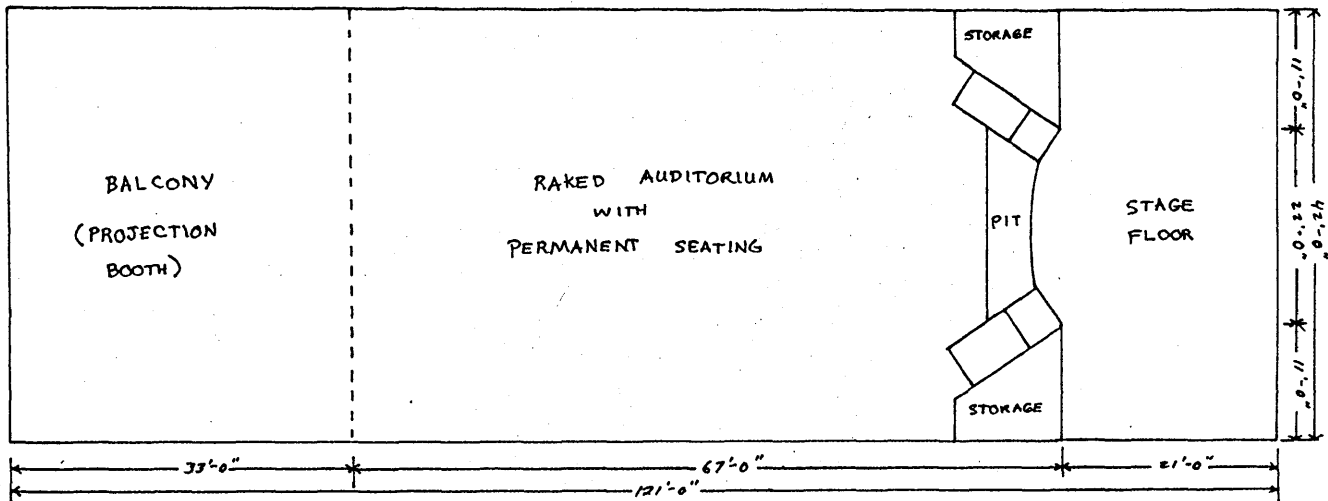
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Floor plan, Anna C. Diller Opera House, Diller

N →



Credit: P. Leitner, Draftsman

**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)

Performing Arts

Social History

Period of Significance

1912-1917

Significant Dates

1912

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.

The Anna C. Diller Opera House is significant for its association with and in reference to the historic context "Aesthetic Systems: Itinerant and Local Performing Arts in Nebraska" and the property type of "Opera House Buildings in Nebraska, 1867 to 1917." Under Criterion A, this opera house is significant in the areas of the performing arts and social history, on a state level, as a well preserved example of an opera house building in Nebraska. The building retains a high degree of historical integrity, possessing the physical and associative characteristics to make it an eligible member of its property type.

This opera house is significant in the area of performing arts for bringing a variety of entertainment to the community of Diller. As a facility for the performing arts, it offered productions such as touring stock companies, minstrel shows, musical concerts, and home talent shows. (See following table of Representative Entertainments 1912-1917.)

This opera house is significant in the area of social history because it gave Diller a neutral, nonaffiliated location for Decoration Day exercises, commencements, and Lyceum Club meetings. (See following table of Representative Entertainments 1913-1917.) In the days before radio, television, and sound movies, activities at the opera house were anticipated for days or weeks ahead of time. It provided a place for people to get together to have a good time and forget their troubles over crops, weather, taxes, the railroads, and the generally hard life of settling the Great Plains.

The period of significance is derived from the original construction date of the building, 1912, the same year that Loock's 1880s opera house burned down. The period of significance continued through 1917, the year considered to signal the end of the opera house era in Nebraska, based on declining numbers of touring companies nationally and rising numbers of movie houses and automobiles. Besides competition from Diller's own Electric (movie) Theatre by 1917, the proximity of the larger towns of Fairbury (12 miles) and Beatrice (21 miles), both of which had large auditoriums able to offer major entertainments, and moving picture theatres

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

See continuation sheet

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 # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary location of additional data:

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

Specify repository:

D. Layne Ehlers (see below)

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property Less than one [ ] acre

UTM References

A 

1	4
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6	7	5	9	8	0
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4	4	1	6	3	5
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C 

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B 

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D 

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See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

This property is described as the south 19 feet of Lot 11 and all of Lot 12 in Block 10, Original Town of Diller, Jefferson County, Nebraska.

See continuation sheet

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary includes the entire town lots that have been historically associated with this property.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title D. Layne Ehlers, Principal Investigator  
 organization OHBIN Study date April, 1988  
 street & number 2302 South 11th telephone [402] 435-6946  
 city or town Lincoln state NE zip code 68502

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by 1917, meant that as more Diller residents bought cars, activities in those nearby cities became a viable option. Limited choices in the Anna C. Diller Opera House doomed it to a dwindling number of sporadic events. In the case of the Anna C. Diller Opera House, it is interesting to note that newspaper references at the time the facility was constructed noted that "it is doubtful if such a building in a town the size of Diller will pay," but that "Mrs. Diller ... proposes to leave the town a substantial monument to her memory." (*Diller Record* 20 Dec. 1912)

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Anna C. Diller Opera House, Diller  
Representative Entertainments, 1913-1917

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DATE	EVENT AND PERFORMERS
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**Social History**

May 1913 Decoration Day exercises  
Oct 1913 Regular meetings of the Diller Lyceum Club  
May 1914 Commencement

**Performing Arts**

Nov 1913 Wright-Hall-Marquette Players  
Dec 1913 Ladies Minstrels  
Dec 1914 *Pasquita*  
Oct 1915 *Esther, the Beautiful Queen* home talent cantata featuring Diller  
Male Quartet  
Dec 1915 *A Black Heifer* by the Diller Dramatic Club  
Oct 1916 Hillman Ideal Stock Co.  
Nov. 1916 Jack Champion and Grace Richmond starring with home talent in *Down  
East Folks* and *Honest Hearts*  
Hillman's Ideal Stock Co., Harry Sohns, mgr., in *His Honor the  
Mayor, The Compact, and Trifling with Tomorrow*  
Dec 1916 Theresa Sheehan Concert Co. with Theresa Sheehan and Vivian Des  
Jardins  
Dec 1917 Peru Girls' Glee Club



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Anna C. Diller Opera House. Diller site visit. 21 Feb. 1987.  
Brauch, Todd D. Letter to the author. Diller: 1986.  
"Diller, Nebraska [and] The Dillers." Unpublished ts., Nebraska State Historical  
Society Library.  
*Diller Record*. 5 Jan. 1912 - 28 Dec. 1917.  
Geu, Carol Cook. Letter to the author. Alexandria, VA/Diller: 1987.  
Holle, Lydia J. "History of Diller Village Board Proceedings." Unpublished  
records, Nebraska State Historical Society Library, 1980.  
"Neglected Diller Opera House to be Used Again." *Sunday Journal and Star* 30 Oct.  
1955.  
"The New Anna C. Diller Opera House." *Diller Record* 31 Oct. 1913.  
"Opera House Opened." *Diller Record* 7 Nov. 1913.  
"Opera House Opening." *Diller Record* 24 Oct. 1913.  
Shepherd, Lelia. Letter to the author. Anaheim, CA/Diller: 1987.  
Vaughn, Clay Jr. Telephone interview. Diller: 18 Feb. 1987.  
---. Personal interview. Diller: 21 Feb. 1987.  
"A \$36,000 Opera House." *Diller Record* 20 Dec. 1912.

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Photographs

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The following information is the same for all Diller photographs:

NAME OF PROPERTY: Anna C. Diller Opera House  
CITY, COUNTY, STATE: Diller, Jefferson, Nebraska  
NehBS SITE No.: JF02-01  
OHBIN SITE No.: 02-21-04  
NAME OF PHOTOGRAPHER: Christian H. Ehlers

PHOTO NUMBER: Diller #1  
DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH (and NEGATIVE NUMBER): 02-21-87 (8611/8:37)  
LOCATION OF ORIGINAL NEGATIVE: Nebraska State Historical Society  
DESCRIPTION OF VIEW INDICATING DIRECTION OF CAMERA: Exterior view, looking northwest at the east (front) and south facades.

PHOTO NUMBER: Diller #2  
DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH (and NEGATIVE NUMBER): 02-21-87 (8611/9:2)  
LOCATION OF ORIGINAL NEGATIVE: Nebraska State Historical Society  
DESCRIPTION OF VIEW INDICATING DIRECTION OF CAMERA: Exterior view, looking northeast at the west (rear) and south facades.

PHOTO NUMBER: Diller #3  
DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH (and NEGATIVE NUMBER): 02-21-87 (8611/9:4)  
LOCATION OF ORIGINAL NEGATIVE: Nebraska State Historical Society  
DESCRIPTION OF VIEW INDICATING DIRECTION OF CAMERA: Interior view, looking west at the stage.

PHOTO NUMBER: Diller #4  
DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH (and NEGATIVE NUMBER): 02-21-87 (8611/9:7)  
LOCATION OF ORIGINAL NEGATIVE: Nebraska State Historical Society  
DESCRIPTION OF VIEW INDICATING DIRECTION OF CAMERA: Interior view, looking southwest at the orchestra pit. (Taken from the right front of the stage.)

PHOTO NUMBER: Diller #5  
DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH (and NEGATIVE NUMBER): 02-21-87 (8611/9:5)  
LOCATION OF ORIGINAL NEGATIVE: Nebraska State Historical Society  
DESCRIPTION OF VIEW INDICATING DIRECTION OF CAMERA: Interior view, looking east at the auditorium. (Taken from the stage.)

PHOTO NUMBER: Diller #6  
DATE OF PHOTOGRAPH (and NEGATIVE NUMBER): 02-21-87 (8611/9:10)  
LOCATION OF ORIGINAL NEGATIVE: Nebraska State Historical Society  
DESCRIPTION OF VIEW INDICATING DIRECTION OF CAMERA: Interior view, looking northeast at one of the seats.