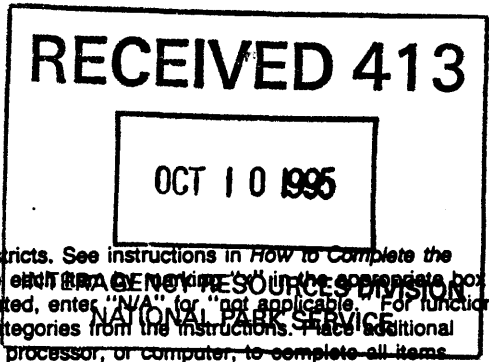


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



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 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 McHaffey Opera House

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 414 Elm Street N/A not for publication

city or town Eldon N/A vicinity

state Iowa code IA county Wapello code 179 zip code 52554

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.)

Patricia Churkin 10-3-95
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State Historical Society of Iowa
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): _____

Edson H. Beall 11-22-95
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action
Entered in the
National Register

McHaffey Opera House

Wapello County, IA

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 | 0 | 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

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/auditorium

COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

WORK IN PROGRESS

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE/limestone

walls BRICK

roof TIN

other

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 or 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

Period of Significance

1891-1945

Significant Dates

1891

1924

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

unknown

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):

- 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

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property .1333 acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 11S 516544.0 4512917.15
Zone Easting Northing
2

3
Zone Easting Northing
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

Jo Eddy
name/title
Eldon Historic Preservation Commission March 25, 1995
organization date
RR 1 Box 81 (515) 652-3158
street & number telephone
Eldon IA 52554
city or town state zip code

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)

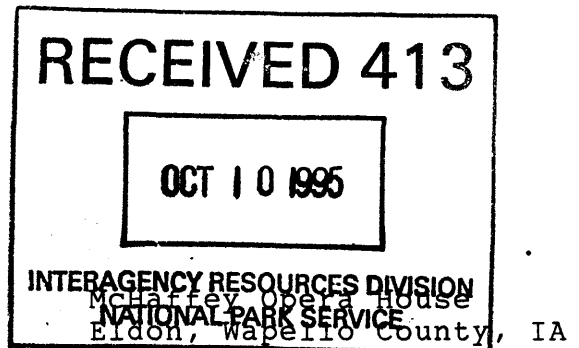
Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

Gothic Area Tourism of Eldon (G.A.T.E.)
name
street & number telephone
Eldon IA 52554
city or town state zip code

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 1

Narrative Description

The McHaffey Opera House is located on the south side of Elm Street on the western corner of the block in Eldon, Wapello County, Iowa. The 45 x 90 foot building was constructed in 1891. It is a three-story, essentially rectangular, brick building constructed in a classical revival style. The building faces north on lots 14 and 15. It has a truncated hipped roof of tin and a rubble-style limestone foundation. There are brick pilasters on the northwest and northeast corners of the building, as well as one flanking each side of the opera house entry door in the center of the facade. A dormer is placed in the center of the north side with 1891 in raised work in the peak of the pediment. D. McHAFFEY is displayed in raised letters beneath the cornice. OPERA HOUSE is displayed in raised letters beneath the dormer, on the frieze. The entry door is in the center of the facade and a door to the left of this is the ground floor shop entrance. Seven windows line the north side of the second floor. The lintels of these windows have been identified by a local contractor as being made of sandstone. They have stone sills. The lintels are continuous across the three windows to the left of the center pilasters and continuous across the three to the right of the center pilasters and single across the center window. The windows on the third floor all-around and on the second floor, except on the facade are of the eyebrow style. The crown work on the facade is of pressed metal.

The interior of the business is a large open space with a small closet located under the staircase. There is more storage and a restroom in the back of the building. The walls are lined with pegboard. The dropped ceiling is of synthetic tiles covering the original decorative tin ceiling. The basement is reached from a set of wooden steps at the back of the business space.

Plate glass windows along the north side of the ground floor are the only source of natural light to the business area. These windows are shaded by a shake-shingle awning that extends across the entire facade. An exit door is located on the west wall near the rear of the building and one is located on the south wall leading to the alley. The second floor is reached via a wooden stairway with wooden handrails on each side of the steps. The second story consists of the opera house and a small apartment with the third floor previously housing the balcony. A ticket office is located at

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 2McHaffey Opera House
Eldon, Wapello County, IA

the top of the stairs with the usual glass ticket window. To the left and right of the ticket office are small storage closets. Ramps lead up to the seating area between these closets on each side of the ticket office. There is a raked and tiered auditorium facing a curved stage front with two proscenium doors and a 19 foot 6 inch by 12 foot proscenium arch. The stage is 15 feet deep, with a 4 foot 6 inch apron that masks a footlight trough. There is 10 feet 6 inches of wing space on either side, with dressing rooms off-stage right and left and stacked so that there are four dressing rooms. The walls are plaster with simple stencils decorating the walls and around the lighting fixtures on the ceiling. At the top of the tiered seating a projection room has been built. The apartment lies on the north side of the second floor. It consists of a living area, pantry/kitchenette, bedroom and bathroom. It also has a closet which is located on the east side of the lobby. Seven windows line the north side of the second floor and seven on the north side of the third floor. Seven windows are on the west side of the second floor and an exit door. Four windows are on the west side of the third floor. An exit door leads out of the stage area on the second floor on the south wall. The landings and stairs have been removed from the second floor exits to prevent vandalism.

The east wall is connected to the single story brick building adjoining it. There are three windows on the second floor of the east side and one on the third floor.

There is a small grassy area at the rear of the building with a gravel drive leading to the back door that was formerly used for deliveries to the downstairs business and for taking up the props, etc. needed in the stage area of the second floor. This drive leads to the alley behind the building. A concrete sidewalk extends from each corner of the Elm street block and is continued around the west side of the building and to the rear corner. The building is in poor condition and has had only slight alteration to the exterior since its construction. The ground floor originally had an entrance door to each shop but one was removed when the building was remodeled to house only one store. The awning was added in the 1970's. Three chimneys on the western slope of the roof were also removed in the 1970's. An iron fire escape had been added to the west wall of the building and extending just around the corner to the facade on the third floor. This was removed in the 1970's to discourage vandalism.

The opera house seats are of an older vintage and are thought by Mr. McHaffey's granddaughter to be from the early remodeling of the building. Approximately 150 seats still remain in the building. They are of pressed wood and cast iron construction

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3

McHaffey Opera House
Eldon, Wapello County, IA

with fold-up seats. Two of the six hanging lamps are still intact and are also thought to be from the early remodeling. A piano is still in place in front of the stage and is the same one Mr. McHaffey's granddaughter remembers from the 1920's or earlier. Some back drops are still on the premises. One dressing room is filled with the graffiti of high school students who signed their names to the walls while awaiting their turn on stage for graduation or plays and the dates go back to at least 1911. Play bills, tickets, programs, and posters litter the opera house walls and floor.

The attached floorplans show the original flat-floored construction and the building as it was altered to a raked and tiered design around 1924.

The neighborhood surrounding the opera house was originally business properties and it has remained thus.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 4McHaffey Opera House
Eldon, Wapello County, IA

Narrative Statement of Significance

The McHaffey Opera House is locally significant because of its cultural and entertainment contributions to the community. The period of significance begins with the building's construction in 1891 and ends in 1945.

In the late 19th century Eldon was enjoying a growing population as a railroad town. Incorporated in 1871, the C. R. I. & P. railroad had already completed laying rails and trains had been traveling through the town since October of 1870. Along with the trains came the opportunity of bringing entertainments of all sorts to the town. Railroad employment also beckoned those in search of work to Eldon. One of these railroad employees was David McHaffey, an Irish immigrant who had been in the United States since 1870. He was a superintendant of rail-laying on the Rock Island when he came to Eldon in 1890. He bought some lots in the town when he arrived and found that they contained good yellow clay soil. He opened a brick yard and started making bricks from his property. With the bricks at hand, he decided to build a business property on one of the main streets. His opera house and store fronts were completed in 1891.

The McHaffey Opera House provided shop space for two businesses on the ground floor for many years. Eventually the partition was removed between the two shops, making one large business space that was used as a grocery store for many years and then an auto parts store.

Dr. S. H. Sawyers was appointed the Rock Island railway surgeon around 1890. His offices were in the north side of the opera house second floor. The population of Eldon at that time was 2,500. So the building was tied to the Rock Island Railroad through another angle, and served the public through providing office space for one of the town doctors.

The McHaffey Opera House was used for many civic, cultural, and entertainment purposes throughout the years. Before the high school gymnasium was built, the high school basketball games were played on the auditorium floor. High school graduations were held there from the time of its construction until 1941. Class plays and declamatory contests were also put on in the opera house. Many politicians who were passing through on the trains spoke from the opera house stage.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 5

McHaffey Opera House
Eldon, Wapello County, IA

The McHaffey Opera House was on the New York Circuit and some of the finest plays of the day were presented in Eldon, often to a full house. The seating capacity, when the balcony was in place, was around 600.

When moving pictures came into vogue, a projection room was built at the back of the seating area and movies were shown. Piano players were hired to keep time with the action on the screen of the silent films.

Local lodges, clubs and civic groups used the opera house to stage lectures, programs and fund raising skits and minstrel shows.

The upper floors of the McHaffey Opera House haven't been in use since perhaps 1947 when the local movie theater was flooded by the Des Moines River and movies were again shown until the water had subsided. David McHaffey's daughter lived in the small apartment that had formerly been the doctors office. For many years she gave piano lessons from her apartment to local youngsters. She would occasionally open the doors to the auditorium to give her students a glimpse, but it was never used as an auditorium again.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 7

McHaffey Opera House
Eldon, Wapello County, IA

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the McHaffey Opera House property consists of Lots 14 and 15 in Block 27 of the Original Town Plat for the town of Eldon.

Boundary Justification

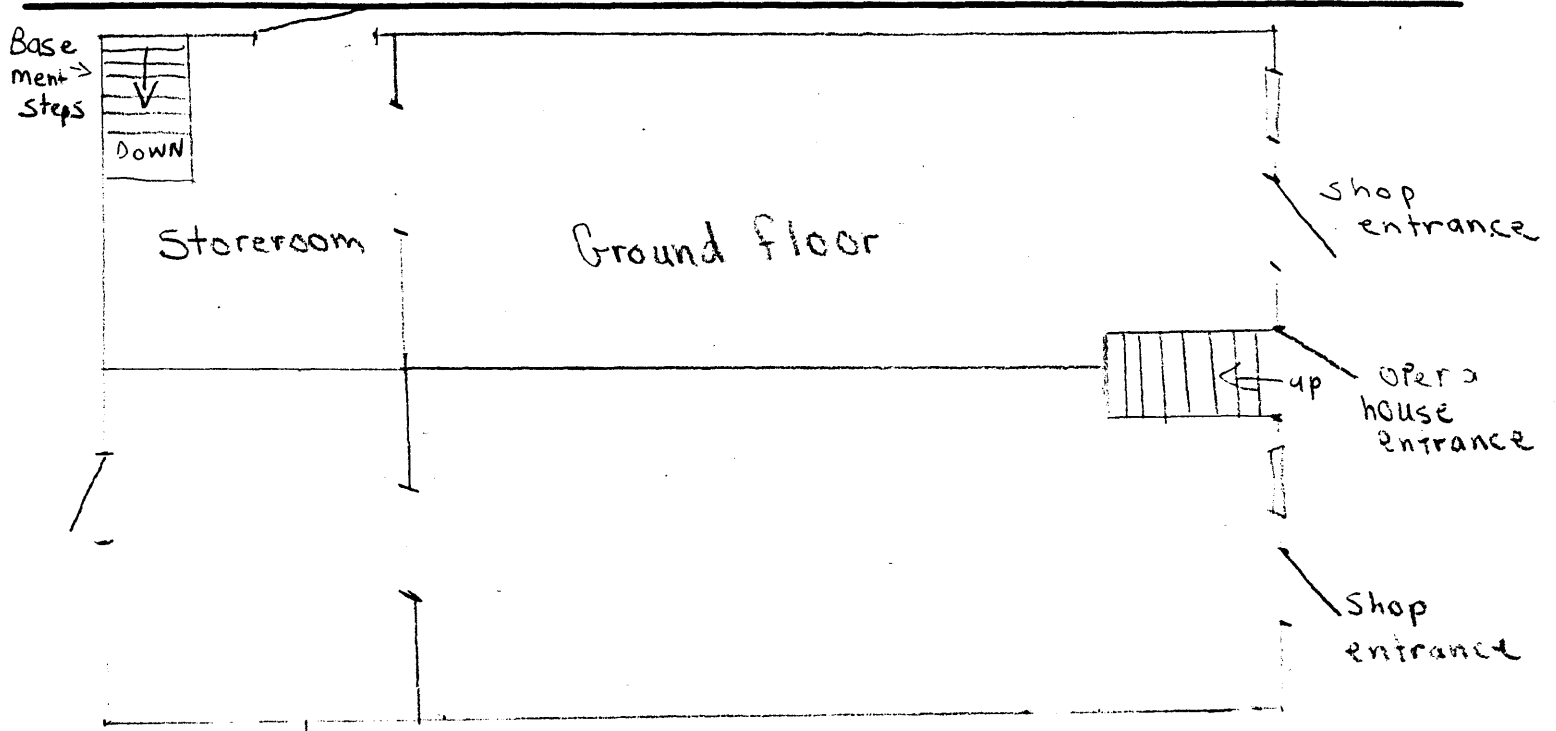
The boundary consists of the legal description of the entire property including the building and backlot loading area that has historically been associated with the Opera House since 1891.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

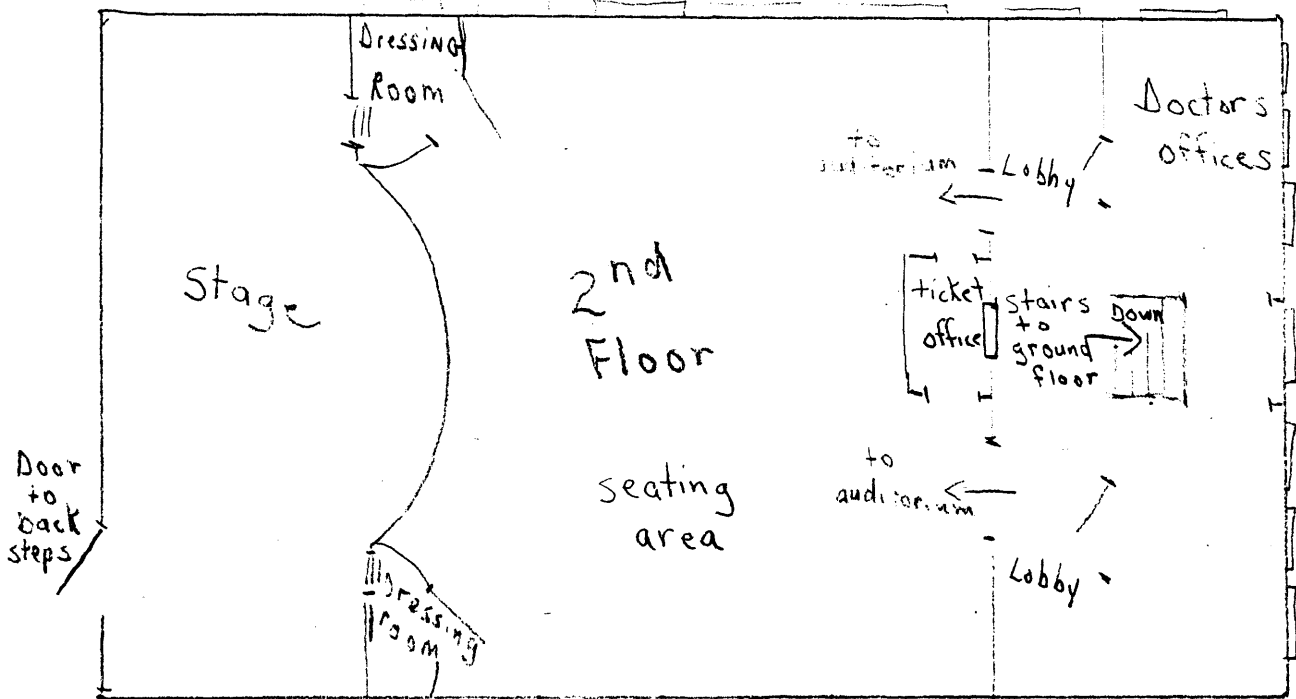
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number Maps Page 8

McHaffey Opera House
Eldon, Wapello County, IA



→ North



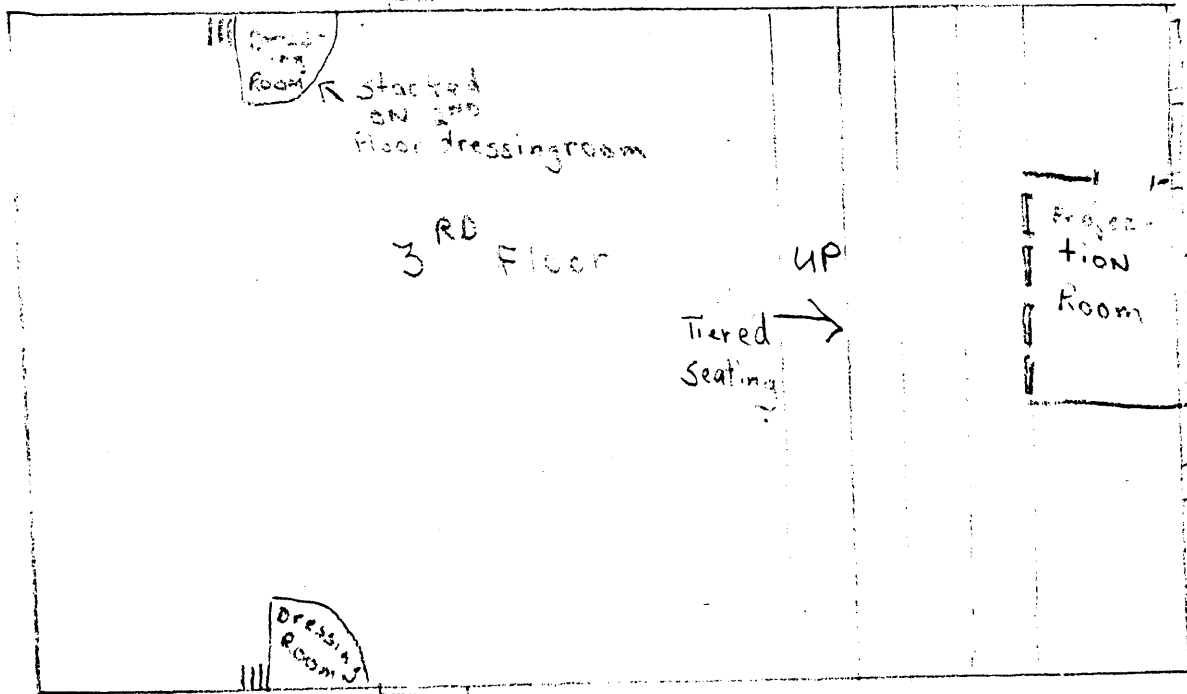
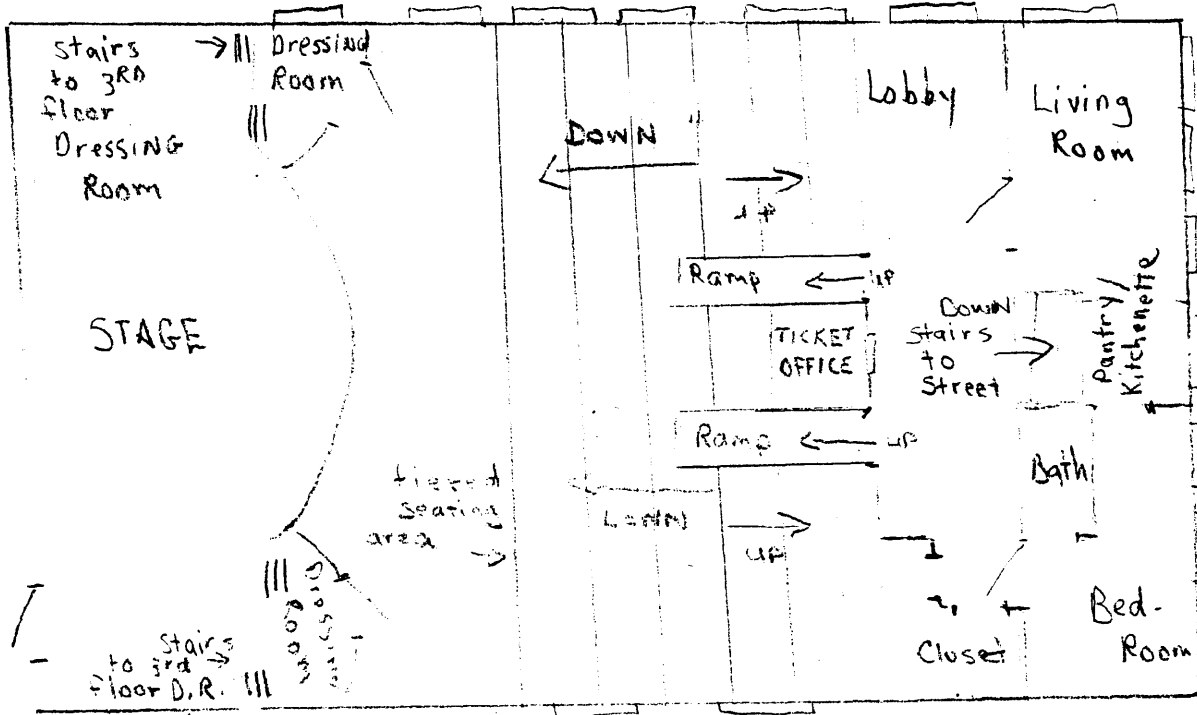
ORIGINAL FLOOR PLANS

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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number Maps Page 9

McHaffey Opera House
Eldon, Wapello County, IA



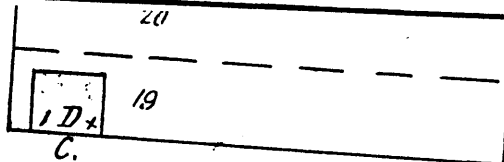
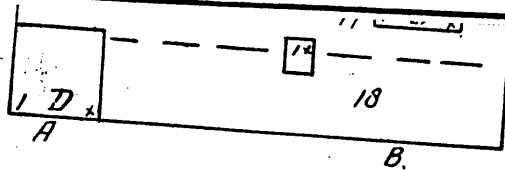
Remodeled floor plans; ca. 1924

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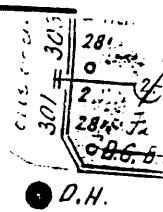
National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number Maps Page 10

McHaffey Opera House
Eldon, Wapello County, IA



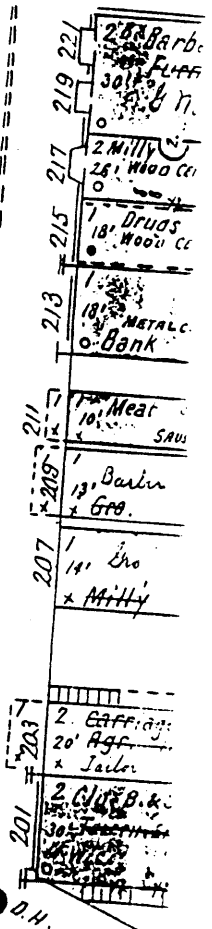
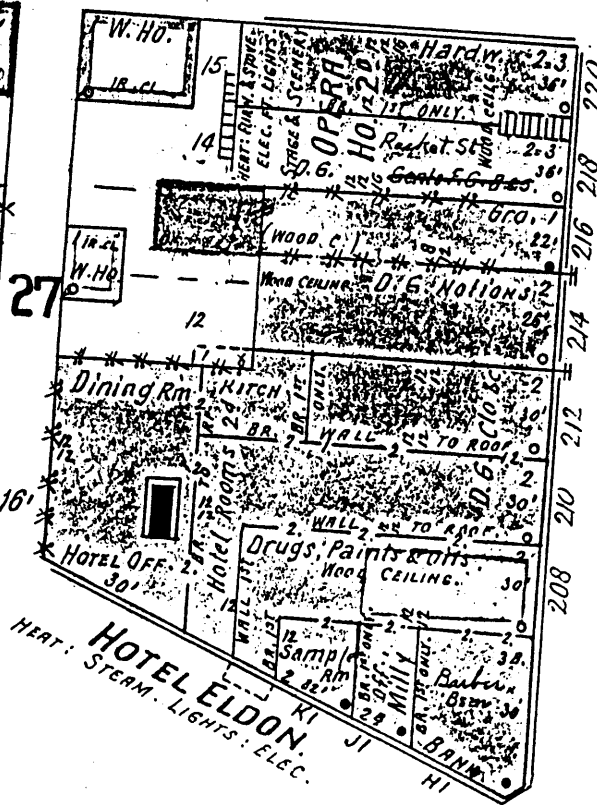
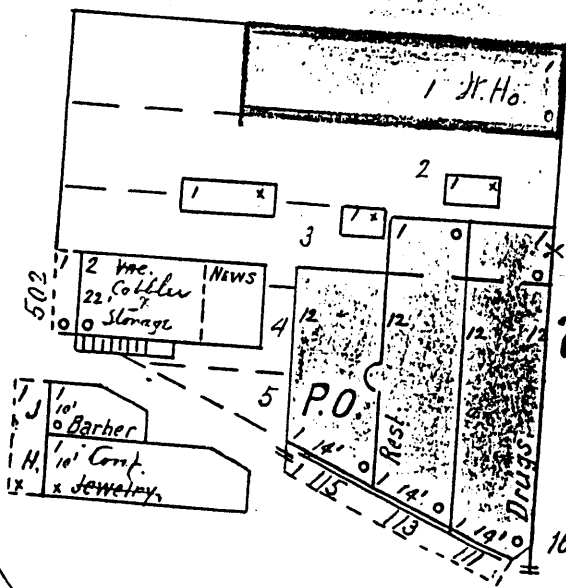
Sanborn Fire Map
1900



66'

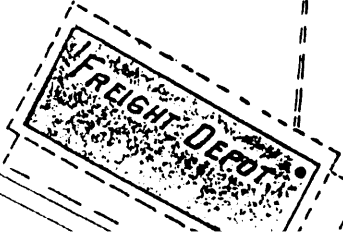
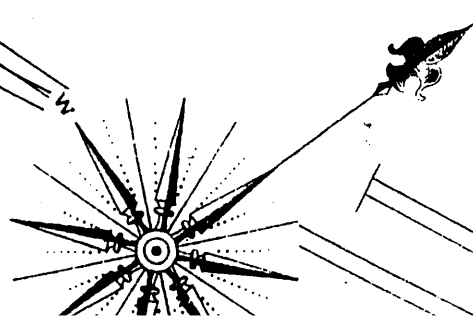
SPEAKING
PLATFORM

D.H.



66'

D.H.



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number Maps Page 11

McHaffey Opera House
Eldon, Wapello County, IA

