

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED **OCT 29 1980**  
DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

**Grainfield Opera House**

AND/OR COMMON

**Grainfield Opera House**

**LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

**Main and Third Street S.**

\_\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

**Grainfield**

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

**No. 1**

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

**Keith G. Sebelius**

STATE

**Kansas 67737**

CODE

**20**

COUNTY

**Gove**

CODE

**063**

**CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

**OWNERSHIP**

**STATUS**

**PRESENT USE**

\_\_\_ DISTRICT

\_\_\_ PUBLIC

OCCUPIED

\_\_\_ AGRICULTURE

\_\_\_ MUSEUM

BUILDING(S)

PRIVATE

\_\_\_ UNOCCUPIED

COMMERCIAL

\_\_\_ PARK

\_\_\_ STRUCTURE

\_\_\_ BOTH

\_\_\_ WORK IN PROGRESS

\_\_\_ EDUCATIONAL

\_\_\_ PRIVATE RESIDENCE

\_\_\_ SITE

**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**

**ACCESSIBLE**

\_\_\_ ENTERTAINMENT

\_\_\_ RELIGIOUS

\_\_\_ OBJECT

\_\_\_ IN PROCESS

YES: RESTRICTED

\_\_\_ GOVERNMENT

\_\_\_ SCIENTIFIC

\_\_\_ BEING CONSIDERED

\_\_\_ YES: UNRESTRICTED

\_\_\_ INDUSTRIAL

\_\_\_ TRANSPORTATION

\_\_\_ NO

\_\_\_ MILITARY

\_\_\_ OTHER:

**OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

**Opera House Company, Inc.**

STREET & NUMBER

**Grainfield, Kansas**

CITY, TOWN

**Grainfield**

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

**Kansas**

**LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

**Register of Deeds**

STREET & NUMBER

**Gove County Courthouse**

CITY, TOWN

**Gove**

STATE

**Kansas 67736**

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

**Historic Sites Survey**

DATE

**1970**

\_\_\_ FEDERAL  STATE \_\_\_ COUNTY \_\_\_ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

**Kansas State Historical Society**

CITY, TOWN

**Topeka**

STATE  
**Kansas**

**66612**

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The old Grainfield Opera House is a two story brick structure with an ornate cast iron front. It is located on the southwest corner of Main and Third Streets, facing east. The building is 50 feet wide and 100 feet long. Stone foundation<sup>walls</sup> are two feet thick and are capped by a dressed water table. Behind the parapet of the ornamental front, the metal-sheathed roof is nearly flat in the center with pitched sections on three sides.

Stone in the Opera House foundation has the streaked cream and brown color of the post rock strata found east of Grainfield. Brick in the walls is relatively soft; at the building corners weathering of individual bricks has exposed a coarse aggregate.

A complete metal facade was provided for the Opera House. At ground level there is a double store front. This floor is divided in half by an interior brick fire wall. Each store front has double entrance doors with display windows on either side. Columns, sills, and lintels are cast iron with the maker's name (Mesker Bros., St. Louis) on the columns. Above the first floor the five bay front is made of galvanized iron with an ornamental fleur-de-lis motif. At the first floor level the facade is anchored into the masonry wall. The upper part of the facade appears to be attached to a frame substructure.

An enclosed wooden stair on the south exterior wall of the building leads from the street to the second floor auditorium. On this side the upper windows are small; they have stone lintels and sills. A single double-hung window at ground level has what was probably the original 4-over-1 sash. There are two chimneys in this wall.

In the rear of the building there are entrances to the cellar and to the ground floor. An open wooden stairway leads to a second floor door. There is a wood beam extending from the wall above the door for lifting material to the second floor. Windows in this wall have brick arches over the openings and stone sills. Built-in roof gutters empty into drainpipes attached to the rear wall. There is a wooden privy behind the building next to the alley.

On the north both door and window openings have dressed stone lintels with keystone accent and stone sills. The upper windows are full size; both windows and the door at ground level on this side are paired. There are three chimneys in the north wall.

Much of the interior of the opera house is intact. There are original wooden floors, lath and plaster partition walls and wooden ceilings.

# 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1887

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Grainfield Town Company

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Grainfield Opera House evidences the aspirations as well as the practical needs of early settlers in western Kansas. As an example of nineteenth architecture, it evidences the wide marketing of factory-produced iron fronts generally, and by the Mesker Brothers firm of St. Louis in particular.

### Chronology

Grainfield, Kansas was laid out as a town by the Union Pacific railroad in 1879. A depot was first opened in August of that year. However, crop failures soon drove most of the first farmers out of the area. In 1886 when the area began to boom again, cattle in the county were worth far more than the crops produced. Gove County was organized in 1886 with a population of "3,032 bona fide inhabitants." In 1887 population increased more than a third and production tripled.

Early in March, 1887, the Grainfield Town Company, which had taken over the site from the railroad, was reorganized with seven principal partners. Their first step was to build a structure which would not only provide storerooms and a meeting hall, but also impress on the passerby that Grainfield was an attractive, permanent town. On March 25th the local newspaper announced simply, "a large brick block will be built on Main Street this season with store rooms below and opera hall above."

Late in April specifications were published for bids to construct the Opera House basement. J. B. Beal, chairman of the building committee, noted that the town company would furnish the stone and lime on the site. Stone for the foundation was hauled in by the carload on the Union Pacific Railroad. The new building was located two blocks north of the depot, approximately in the center of town.

M.P. Kavanaugh completed excavation for the Opera House cellar by May 6. Three stone masons from Bunker Hill (a town 100 miles east of Grainfield on the Union Pacific line) began work on the basement walls early in June. At the same time a brick kiln northwest of town was "fired up." Bricklaying began about the middle of August and was finished October 7. Then the iron front was put in and the roof laid. Fred Boyer was in charge of the carpenter work. When the building was finished, even the editor of the Grinnell Golden Belt, the newspaper of Grainfield's neighbor and rival, had to admit, "the Grainfield Opera House is undoubtedly the finest building between Salina and Denver."

Early in 1888, the Grainfield Cap Sheaf moved into the north half of the building. Rafferty Brothers moved their mercantile store into the south half

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(see attached sheet)

ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED  
UTM NOT VERIFIED

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1

QUADRANGLE NAME Grainfield

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24

UTM REFERENCES		
ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
A <u>14</u>	<u>31713</u>	<u>31010</u>
B		
C		
E		
G		
D		
F		
H		

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

(See attached sheet)

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Julie A. Wortman, Architectural Historian  
Dale Nimz, Historic Preservation Department

ORGANIZATION Kansas State Historical Society DATE 10-1-80

STREET & NUMBER 120 West 10th TELEPHONE 913 296-3251

CITY OR TOWN Topeka STATE Kansas CODE 66612

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL      STATE      LOCAL X

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 Joseph W. Snell

TITLE Executive Director, Ks. State Historical Society DATE 10-14-80

**FOR NPS USE ONLY**

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE 11/29/80

ATTEST: [Signature] DATE 11/29/80

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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**Alterations:**

This building presents substantially the same appearance as it did when completed in 1887. In the south half of the store front, windows have been boarded up. A stained glass panel in the center of the second floor facade has been removed. Missing details from the northermost bay of the second story facade include medallions, a column cap, and part of the column base.

The roof has been coated with tar or asphalt. At the southwest corner of the building, a concrete wall approximately 8' tall and 10' long has been poured to buttress the brick walls. Rear doors to the cellar and first floor have been enlarged. A window opening in the north wall has also been widened and the opening beside it filled with brick.

Inside, only the upstairs meeting room has been renovated. The floor has been carpeted, walls paneled, and an acoustical tile ceiling installed.

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late in February, 1888. A harness shop was housed behind the printing office on the ground floor. Upstairs were offices and meeting rooms. The auditorium was used for performances, dances, and church programs. A private school was once held upstairs and the first high school classes in town were held downstairs on the north side.

Early in the twentieth century, a grocery store operated in the building. Enlargement of the north and west entrances probably occurred during the 1920's when the Shaw Motor Company used the whole ground floor. At the present time the north half of the Opera House is vacant. The south half is used as shop and storage for Walt's Home and Auto. The Masonic Lodge occupies one of the second floor rooms on the east.

For most of its existence, the Grainfield Opera House has been a community center. It was designed to accomodate a variety of commercial and social uses. The building is associated with the early optimism and subsequent fortunes of Grainfield and the surrounding agricultural territory.

Architecturally, the combination of local materials with a factory-made ornamental front is a design solution reflecting historic circumstances and the ambitions of the town company partners. The iron front was cheap and quickly installed--creating the appearance of sophistication in a frontier town.

Mesker Brothers was one of the leading producers of galvanized iron fronts in America. Ben and Frank Mesker opened their foundry in St. Louis in 1881. Throughout their career, they used a distinctive fleur-de-lis motif in their ornamental designs in contrast to another brother, George, of Evansville, Indiana who used a morning glory motif. The Grainfield Opera House front was probably ordered from a catalog, shipped in sections on the railroad, and then assembled and attached to the masonry block by local workmen.

THIS STATEMENT REFLECTS CURRENT KNOWLEDGE AND MAY BE SUBJECT TO FUTURE AMENDMENT.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Grainfield

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The nominated property occupies Grainfield City Lots 1, 2, and the south four feet of Lot 3, Block 25. The property is approximately 50 feet by 100 feet in size.