

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received JAN 10 1985

date entered 1985

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

1. Name

historic Opera House Block ~~Building~~/Central Block Building

and or common Opera House

2. Location

street & number 117-131 North College Avenue n/a not for publication

city, town Fort Collins n/a vicinity of

state Colorado code 08 county Larimer code 069

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 type="checkbox"/> n/a in process | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted | <input type="checkbox"/> government |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> n/a being considered | <input 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 Mountain Avenue Properties c/o Walter F. Brown, President

street & number 117 East Mountain Avenue, Suite 205

city, town Fort Collins n/a vicinity of state Colorado

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. County Recorders Office-Larimer County Courthouse

street & number 200 West Oak Street

city, town Fort Collins state Colorado

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Colorado Inventory of Historic Sites has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1984 federal state county local

depository for survey records Colorado Historical Society

city, town 1300 Broadway, Denver state Colorado 80203

7. Description

| | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Condition | | Check one | Check one |
| <input type="checkbox"/> excellent | <input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated | <input type="checkbox"/> unaltered | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site |
| <input checked="" 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 _____ |

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Opera House Block Building, as it has for over 100 years, continues to stand as the predominant commercial structure in the 100 Block of College Avenue in "new" town Fort Collins. The largely intact 1917 renovation consists of a 100 foot wide three story structure with buff brick veneer terra-cotta with grade level storefronts, interesting upper level window treatment and applied ornament. Some alterations to the 1917 grade level storefront has occurred. However clear evidence exists regarding the original storefront detail which consists of highly geometric leaded glass clerestories which "span" the twenty to twenty-five feet retail modules. Inappropriate although non-destructive painting of the wood windows and metal ornament has occurred on the upper two stories.

Exterior

The original 1881 configuration of the Opera House Block Building, with its Colorado commercial Victorian style facade, consisted of an imposing three story red brick and cut stone structure located on the northwestern corner of the intersection of West Mountain Avenue and North College Avenue.¹ This original construction comprising the the Welch Block, Windsor Hotel, and the Opera House Block created a continuous southern facade three stories high by 130 feet long and an eastern facade (fronting on College Avenue) three stories high by 200 feet long. The first major revisions occurred as a result of significant fire damage in 1885 to the southern 100 feet of the building on Lots 1 through 4.² At this time, the fire damaged roof and third floor of the Welch Block and the Windsor Hotel were not replaced.

In 1917 a major renovation significantly altered the three story Opera House portion of the Block.³ The original 1881 Victorian facade which escaped damage in the 1885 fire, was completely transformed into a totally "new" style unique to Fort Collins. The materials of this 1917 renovation included buff-toned unglazed brick, crafted pastel colored terra-cotta, decorative metal grilles, cornice moldings, pilasters and larger proportions of upper level glazing. The fenestration of this facade, while respecting the original second and third floor fenestration rhythm of 3-1-3, 3-1-3 on the third floor, reflects some Chicago influence. This influence is reflected in the second level large fixed shingle pane windows with operable side lights and matched fixed transoms. The applied ornamentation of the facade consists of reiterated orders of paired pilasters, a strong horizontal alignment carrying through vertical pilaster elements and rather timid geometric and stylized foliage and sculptural ornament.

Interior

The original 1881 Opera House space was located on the second and third stories along the west side of the building. The hall was 100 feet long, 40 feet wide, and 24 feet high.⁴ "The stage is 24 x 40, and 20 feet high".⁵ "Seating capacity was 1,000 with two-thirds of the seats on a level floor and the final one-third being raked. There were four boxes on the east side of the hall."⁶

In 1917, the interior of the Opera House Building was significantly renovated. The original theater space was altered to reflect more classical order through an applied plaster entablature with corresponding paired plaster pilasters. Third floor balconies were built overlooking the dance hall and the two main entrance stairs were revised.⁷ The western portion of the third floor was transformed into a kitchen and banquet hall immediately adjacent to the theater space.

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

Specific dates 1917 **Builder/Architect** (1917) Ansel Pierce --Architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Architecture

The current physical appearance and locally unique architectural significance of the Opera House Block Building is founded on the 1917 renovation performed and supervised by architect Ansel Pierce.

Perhaps Pierce was particularly influenced by the transitioning backdrop of an early twentieth century society when he designed the 1917 commercial facade of the Opera House Block Building. For the materials, motif, and fenestration of this early "new" town renovation subtly speaks of Adamesque¹⁰ transposed to a commercial context and then mixed with American neoclassical but updated with Chicago School overtones, thus marking the individuality of this building.

The second floor fenestration of this facade, while somewhat respectful of the original 1881 Opera House Block rhythm of 3-1-3, 3-1-3, reflects the Chicago School influence,¹¹ a clear departure from the norm on College Avenue in 1917. The facade also hints of Chicago School commercial style through the selection and selected detailing of the buff brick and terra cotta. In combination with this the ornamentation of the facade echos of Adamesque and American neoclassical, applied for effect, as indicated by reiterated orders of paired columns and pilasters, a stronger horizontal alignment carrying through vertical pilaster elements, and rather timid geometric, stylized foliage and provincial sculptural ornament reflected in the upper facade and cornice. Through this interesting overlay of styles, the Opera House Block Building renovation established a clear departure from "typical" Colorado commercial Victorian found throughout "old" town and early "new" town.

Considering all of College Avenue, as well as the Fort Collins' Central Business District, perhaps the only other remaining complimentary commercial or governmental contemporary which similarly represents this early 20th Century Fort Collins architecture, is the "old" Post Office. However this 1908 structure reveals a federal/monumental interpretation rather than the Opera House style. Two other notable buildings which reflected this same period but in a differing early 20th century architectural style, Beaux Arts, have succumbed to demolition. The First National Bank Building (circa 1908) located at the southeast corner of Mountain Avenue and College Avenue is gone and Denver architect Albert Bryam's Unity Church (circa 1904) was totally demolished in 1970.¹²

Certainly in 1917 as well as 1984, the early 20th Century facade of the Opera House Block Building is architecturally unique to "Main Street" Fort Collins. This architectural timepiece subtly reflects an individual version of modish "new town" rather than the predominant commercial vernacular Victorian of both "new" and "old" town. As a result, the 1917 architecture of the Opera House Block Building (Central Block/Opera House) is locally significant within the remaining streetscape of College Avenue and in Fort Collins' Central Business District.

9. Major Bibliographical References

(see continuation sheet, page 2)

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 0.333 acres

Quadrangle name Fort Collins

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|---|---|---------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|
| 1 | 3 | 4 | 9 | 3 | 4 | 9 | 10 | 4 | 4 | 9 | 2 | 7 | 16 | 10 |
| Zone | | | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | |

B

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| Zone | | | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | |

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| Zone | | | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | |

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|------|--|--|---------|--|--|--|----------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Zone | | | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | |

Verbal boundary description and justification Nominated property consists of Lots 5, 6, 7, and 8, Block 21, City of Fort Collins, County of Larimer, State of Colorado with Lots 5,6, and 7 25' x 130' and Lot 8 25' x 190' (see Vicinity Map).

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

state n/a code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Walter F. Brown, President/Richard Beardmore, Partner
Mountain Avenue Properties

organization A-E Design Associates date 11/15/84

street & number 117 E. Mountain Avenue telephone (303) 482-3600

110 North College Avenue telephone (303) 493-8883

city or town Fort Collins state Colorado

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 Barbara Sudler

title State Historic Preservation Officer date 12-21-84

For NPS use only

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

Entered in the National Register date 2-8-85

John S. Burns
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: date

Chief of Registration

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Opera House Block Building/

Continuation sheet Central Block Building

Item number 8

Page 2

Community Affairs and Events

In the late 1800s, many Colorado communities had entered a period of transition in which the improvement of its residents' quality of life became a very important consideration. In most communities, the leadership for these efforts came from enterprising businessmen with the foresight to recognize future needs, to provide an orderly, "civilized" development.

In 1880, fire destroyed Jacob Welch's Mercantile Store in Fort Collins, an event which prompted action from Welch and other prominent businessmen to build the commercial block and theater that had been discussed for several years. Mr. C. R. Welch, J. H. Boughton, Dr. C. P. Miller, M. F. Thomas, P. S. Balcom and F. C. Avery, all key developers of College Avenue in "New" town, included other partners and built "the largest building in Colorado outside of Denver"¹³ located in the Opera House Block Building were Mr. Welch's new store, Mr. Avery's Larimer County Bank, the Windsor Hotel and the elegant Fort Collins Opera House.¹⁴ After completion, the Opera House Block Building was a factor in the development of Fort Collins as a city and regional center. It injected vitality by providing cultural stimuli and commercial opportunity and gave the city a facility where many community and social events other than theater could be held. One event of particular significance held at the Opera House Block Building was the first commencement of a graduating class from the new "Aggie College" (now Colorado State University) in June, 1884.¹⁵

In 1917, a major interior and exterior renovation (supervised by architect/builder Ansel Pierce) was a key factor in extending the local significance into the 20th Century. Further, the heritage of the Opera House Block Building serving as a community social center continued through World War II, as it was continually in use for banquets, proms, wedding receptions, town dances, war effort meetings and many other events over the years. In its history, the Opera House Block Building has also been in continual use by numerous retail/commercial entities. Varying types of enterprises have been located in the Opera House. Presently a candy store, maternity shop, photographer, art gallery, offices, apparel store and ironically, a ballet and contemporary dance studio and one of Fort Collins' two theater groups, Open Stage Theater Company are located there.

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Continuation sheet Opera House Block Building/
Central Block Building Item number 8 Page 3

¹Fort Collins Express, 1923 Special Edition, May 20, 1923.

²Evadene Burris Swanson, Fort Collins, Yesterdays, (Evadene Burris Swanson, 1975.)

³The Weekly Courier, December 14, 1917, p.2.

⁴The Triangle Review, August 25, 1976, p. 14A.

⁵Fort Collins Express. April 20, 1882, p. 1.

⁶The Triangle Review, August 25, 1976, p. 14A; Fort Collins Express, April 20, 1882, p. 1.

⁷Weekly Courier, December 14, 1917, p. 2.

⁸Fort Collins Express, 1923 Special Edition, May 20, 1923.

⁹Evadene Burris Swanson, Fort Collins, Yesterdays, (Evadene Burris Swanson, 1975), p. 115.

¹⁰A Concise History of Western Architecture, R. Furneaux Jordon, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., Reprinted 1974; American Buildings and Their Architects, The Colonial and Neoclassical Styles, William H. Pierson, Jr. Doubleday & Co., Inc. 1970.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Swanson, op.cit., p. 115.

¹³Ft. Collins Express, April 20, 1882, p.1.

¹⁴Swanson, op. cit., p. 115.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 115.

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Continuation sheet Bibliographical References Item number 9

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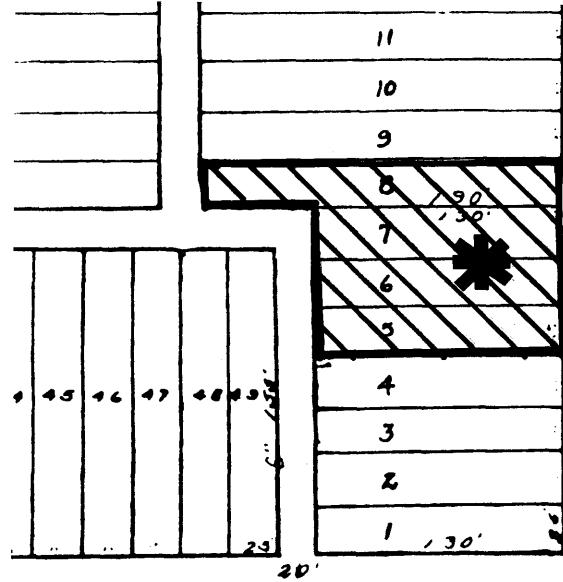
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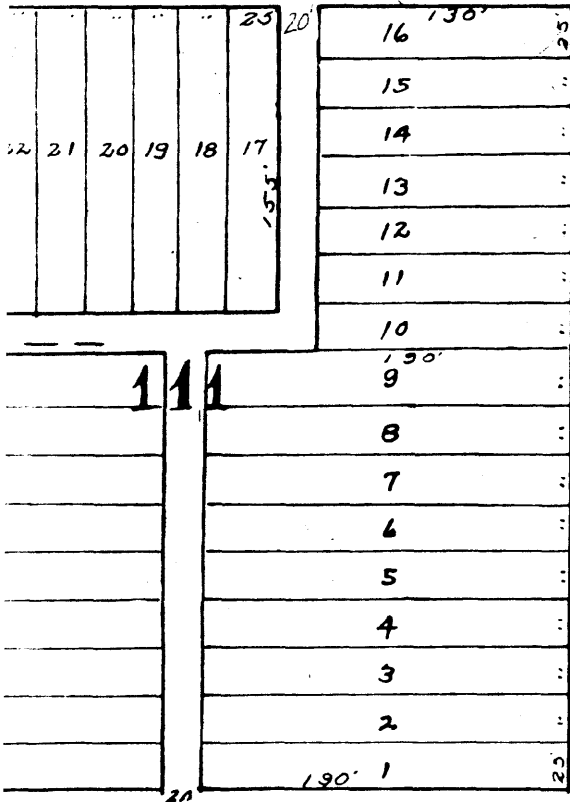
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117-131 N. COLLEGE
 REFERENCED — trimble ct.
 OPERA
 HOUSE
 BLOCK
 BLDG.

HISTORIC OLD TOWN

MT. AVE.



140

COLLEGE AVE.

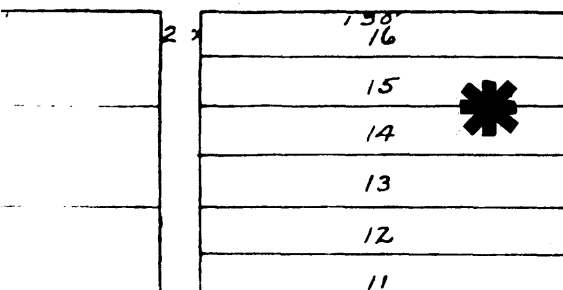
* first national bank
 (demolished)

Opera House Block Building
 Larimer County, Colorado

Scale: 1"=100'
 Date: Unknown
 Fort Collins Vicinity Map

OAK ST.

100'



post
 office

VICINITY MAP

scale:

1":100'

