

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

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

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

For HCRS use only

received 4 SEP 1979

date entered OCT 18 1979

**1. Name**

historic Lisbon Opera House (Preferred)

and/or common J.C. Penney Building

**2. Location**

street & number 413 Main Avenue \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Lisbon \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of congressional district 1

state North Dakota code 38 county Ransom code 073

**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 type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military <input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Alan P. Swedburg

street & number Rural Route # 3

city, town Detroit Lakes \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of state Minnesota 56501

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Ransom County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Lisbon \_\_\_\_\_ state North Dakota 58054

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title North Dakota Historic Sites Survey has this property been determined eligible? \_\_\_\_\_ yes  no

date 1976 \_\_\_\_\_ federal  state \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ local

depository for survey records State Historical Society of North Dakota  
Liberty Memorial Building

city, town Bismarck \_\_\_\_\_ state North Dakota 58505

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## 7. Description

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**Condition**

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

**Check one**

unaltered  
 altered

**Check one**

original site  
 moved date \_\_\_\_\_

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**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

The Lisbon Opera House is a three-story, bearing wall brick structure with a basement, field-stone-and-mortar foundation, and a flat tin-sheathed roof between stepped low parapet lateral walls. Brick corbeling on the symmetrical street facade and arches over the windows indicate the influence of Northern Plains Romanesque revival architecture in the building's design. The rectangular building is sited between two more recent one-story brick commercial buildings, and it faces west on Lisbon's Main Street business district.

The facade carries a three-one-three fenestration pattern throughout all three stories, with one-over-one double-hung rectangular windows on the second and third stories. The ground floor of the facade is finished with a brown tile surface and a "J.C. Penney Co." sign above plate glass windows in metal frames. This 1950's alteration also included removal of the original 8-foot wide main stairway to the opera house on the facade, and replacement with a 3-foot wide stairway on the east end of the north side.

The interior of the ground story has been occupied in speculative commercial space since construction. The west ends of the second and third floors are occupied in office and apartment rooms with windows on the facade. One apartment contains an original fireplace with black tile finish and brown tile inlays. Although some partition alteration has been done in these rooms, the structural integrity and original intent for the space have not been seriously eroded. The office and apartment rooms are now used for storage space.

The main performance space of the opera house occupies the open second and third floor areas to the east of the apartments and offices. A rich brown-earth stenciling decorates the deep cream colored walls throughout the main seating area of the hall, particularly on and near the ceiling. Deterioration of the plaster has caused some of the stenciling to fall away from the ceiling and walls. Of particular attraction is the stenciling around the curved classical proscenium, which displays beautiful multi-hued pattern work. The stage, with its oil foot lamps, is located in the far east end of the building.

A horseshoe-shaped balcony with multiple and reverse curve lines is hung from the roof with steel rods. The curvilinear face of the balcony is articulated with vertically-emphasized wooden panels, giving emphasis to the projection of the balcony from the walls. Seating in the balcony area was maroon velvet anchored chairs, many of which remain in the building. The backstage area retains much of the original hardware and equipment. Backstage dressing rooms remain intact on both the stage and balcony levels along the east wall.

# 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input 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** 1889

**Builder/Architect**

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

The Lisbon Opera House is one of a few remaining prairie opera houses and was one of the largest and finest of its kind. The structure was built in 1889 as a speculative venture by Mary Bemis Parsons and Alice M. Bemis, and remained in operation until 1922. The building was purchased by local businessman E.C. Lucas about 1900, and Lucas successfully promoted live performances in the opera house until motion pictures became available about 1910. Lucas also regularly used the hall for motion picture shows until 1922 when the hall was condemned for fire safety reasons. The performance area has been used since 1922 on an occasional basis for meetings and performances.

Among the events that occurred in the opera house were performances by national touring groups such as the Chase Lester Company, with Clint and Bessie Robbins; a male chorus, "The Singers from Scotland;" a national group production of "Uncle Toms Cabin;" and the 1901 State Convention of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). The latter event was interrupted by news of the assassination of President William McKinley, and memorial services were also held in the Opera House. Local events held in the Opera House included "Decoration Day" (Memorial Day) activities, high school graduations, and class plays such as the 1897 performance of "The Pirates of Penzance." The Lisbon Opera House served as the center for cultural events in the community, and remains as a symbol of the exuberance in construction of opera houses in North Dakota at the turn of the century.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

City Assessor's Book, City of Lisbon, 1889, Ransom County Courthouse, Lisbon, N.D.  
City Assessor's Book, City of Lisbon, 1890, Ransom County Courthouse, Lisbon, N.D.  
Map of Lisbon, Sanborn Map Company, February, 1908.  
Trett, Mr. & Mrs. Lloyd. Lisbon, North Dakota. Personal interview, 21 Nov. 1978.  
Howard, Mrs. Mildred Lucas. Liston, North Dakota. Personal interview, 6 Sept. 1978.  
(See continuation sheet)

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Lisbon

DATA NOT VERIFIED

Quadrangle scale 7.5

### UMT References

A 

1	4	6	0	1	3	6	0	5	1	4	3	8	2	0
Zone				Easting				Northing						

B 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

C 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

D 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

E 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

F 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

G 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

H 

Zone				Easting				Northing						

### Verbal boundary description and justification

Lots 9 and 10 of Block 7, Colton's Third Addition

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

state code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title John Hensrud, Architecture Student; Kurt Schweigert, Architectural Historian

organization State Historical Society of North Dakota date August 22, 1979

street & number Liberty Memorial Building telephone (701)224-2672

city or town Bismarck state North Dakota 58505

# 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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature James E. Sherry

title N.D. State Historic Preservation Officer date 8/27/1979

For HCRS use only  
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register  
Carol Skell date 10-18-79  
Keeper of the National Register  
Attest: William H. Brown date 10-17-79  
Chief of Registration

FHR-8-300A  
(11/78)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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

FOR HCRS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	4 SEP 1978
DATE ENTERED	09/18/78

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 1

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Hensrud, John. Personal inspection, 4 July 1978 and 21 November 1978.  
The Ransom County Gazette. 12 October 1972.