

**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

1. Name

historic Elgin City Hall and Opera House

and/or common Elgin City Hall

2. Location

street & number Albany and N. 8th Streets not for publication

city, town Elgin vicinity of congressional district 2nd

state Oregon code 47 county Union code 061

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<u> </u> district	<u> X </u> public	<u> X </u> occupied	<u> </u> agriculture <u> </u> museum
<u> X </u> building(s)	<u> </u> private	<u> </u> unoccupied	<u> X </u> commercial <u> </u> park
<u> </u> structure	<u> </u> both	<u> </u> work in progress	<u> </u> educational <u> </u> private residence
<u> </u> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<u> X </u> entertainment <u> </u> religious
<u> </u> object	<u> </u> in process	<u> </u> yes: restricted	<u> X </u> government <u> </u> scientific
	<u> </u> being considered	<u> X </u> yes: unrestricted	<u> </u> industrial <u> </u> transportation
		<u> </u> no	<u> </u> military <u> </u> other:

4. Owner of Property

name City of Elgin

street & number PO Box 128

city, town Elgin vicinity of state Oregon 97827

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. County Recorder

street & number Union County Courthouse

city, town La Grande state Oregon 97850

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Statewide Inventory of Historic Properties has this property been determined eligible? yes X no

date 1976 federal X state county local

depository for survey records State Historic Preservation Office

city, town Salem state Oregon 97310

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 date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

An interesting early example of multi-purpose facility planning in a small Eastern Oregon town, Elgin City Hall and Opera House was built in 1912 to fulfill the dual roles of theater and civic center. It is a two-story rectangular building on basement with brick masonry wall construction designed in the classicizing tradition of the American Renaissance. A three-story section at the rear of the building houses the theater flies. The building measures 50 x 100' and rests on a ground course of rock-faced coursed ashlar.

Among the building's uses in recent years are those of police station and jail, library, Recorder's office, council chambers, fire department, movie theater, and insurance agency office. The City Hall is located on U.S. Highway 82--Wallowa Lake Highway, at the intersection of Albany and North 8th Streets. At this intersection, the highway turns to cross the Grande Ronde River and veer toward Wallowa County, thus making City Hall a focal point to two different vistas along the main thoroughfare.

The principal (east) facade is formally organized into three wide bays in which openings are tripartite groupings of double-hung sash windows--the central openings being largest--with one over one lights. Multi-paned top lights are used above second story windows. The central group of the second story openings and the entrance bay have flat brick arch heads with radiating voussoirs and keystones. Corbeled drip moldings are used above the openings of the outer bays. The crowning entablature rests on bandings of corbeled brick which at the corners are worked into Beaux Arts stylized ornament of raised panels and pendants.

Access to the central, recessed entrance is gained by a flight of concrete steps which was originally framed by solid concrete stepped railings. The steps were modified in later years, and the railings now have a low, curvilinear profile. The original doorway has been modified by the installation of aluminum-framed double-leaf glass doors in a surround of plywood paneling. The entrance bay is framed by rolled metal pilasters and classical entablature in which colored light bulbs are mounted. A neon sign advertising the "Rex Theatre" is mounted above the entrance. A metal panel in the spandrel above the entry carries the title "City Hall." The central bay of the second story is framed by a pair of Ionic pilasters. The crowning entablature, including architrave, garlanded frieze and cornice with dentils, wraps around the front of the building. It is surmounted by a central broken pediment adorned with an acanthus leaf console. An historic view suggests that no ornament, such as an urn or other emblem, was ever placed atop the console. An attic parapet rises above the cornice with a central, rectangular crest. All metal trim and window sash is presently painted light grey in contrast to the red face brick.

Fenestration in the side elevations--north and south--is irregular and consists of one over one double-hung sash windows with rock-cut stone sills. Openings on the ground level have corbeled brick drip moldings. Those at the second level have flat brick arches with keystones. At the front of either elevation are iron stairs descending from the theater balcony.

On the rear, or west elevation, concrete steps lead to the City Recorder's office. This entrance also has been modified and now consists of a single-pane glass door. The sidelights and top light are original. A former basement entry on this elevation has been bricked in. A single-story, tin-roofed shed rear addition of concrete, measuring about 16 x 16', forms the base of a 40-foot-high fire bell tower made of angle iron.

(continued)

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RECEIVED	AUG 4 1980
DATE ENTERED	OCT 10 1980

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

Elgin City Hall and Opera House, Elgin, Union County, Oregon

CONTINUATION SHEET

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The grass-covered lots north of City Hall are thus far undeveloped and are shaded along North 8th Street by four large European birches. The 150 x 150' area serves informally as a picnic area in fair weather.

Inside the City Hall, two small office spaces flank the porch recess. Presently, the City Police occupy one of these spaces, and an insurance agency rents the other. A small central foyer precedes the theater lobby space. The theater space measures approximately 45 x 60' and now contains in the ground story about 300 seats on a sloping wood floor. A balcony extends over a third of the seating area and has a pressed tin fascia. The ceiling also is covered with pressed tin and has a large plaster medallion at the center. The proscenium arch is decorated with Rococco plaster ornament. While most of the ground level seats are replacements, the 100 balcony seats are original. A wood film projection booth was inserted in the center of the balcony.

The stage area behind the curtain was walled off during the 1950s to house the city library and was later converted to the Recorder's office. The basement which once contained dressing rooms for the theater is now used for the furnace and storage. The front portion of the basement originally contained the City Jail, with its two small cells, but is now used only for storage.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1912 **Builder/Architect** John Slater, LaGrande architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Elgin City Hall and Opera House is significant as the most prominent public building in the City of Elgin, and as a well-preserved example of small-scale American Renaissance architecture. For nearly seventy years, it has played a central role in the community as a gathering place for civic functions and for entertainment.

Elgin (population 1,800) is the service center for the rural area of northern Union County in northeastern Oregon. Settlement of the Elgin area began in 1865, about four years after the first settlers established the La Grande community to the south.

The Grand Ronde River crossing at Elgin was a traditional fish-trapping and horse-racing location for the Nez Perce, who met the early settlers during seasonal camas-gathering expeditions. During the 1870s, settlers from the Elgin area began moving north into the Nez Perce's Wallowa homelands, eventually precipitating the tragic Nez Perce exodus of 1878.

The completion of the transcontinental railroad through La Grande led immediately to speculation about a branch line to some point in northern Union County. Anticipating the event, in 1885, Bob Stevenson platted six blocks and a row of lots to form the core of the future city of Elgin. Shortly thereafter, he sold his farm to Jesse Hindman, who subdivided the whole, granting a right-of-way and depot ground to the Oregon Railway and Navigation Company. The City Hall is built on the southern part of Stevenson's farm.

The settlement which gathered around Stevenson's farm incorporated as Elgin in 1891, soon after the railroad arrived. Virtually all freight and traffic for Wallowa County and northern Union County passed through Elgin. The City prospered, growing within a decade to a population of 1,000. By that time, 18 sawmills in the surrounding hills added to the flow of freight.

When, in 1908, the railroad was continued through to Joseph in Wallowa County, Elgin's boom period ended. Business had flourished sufficiently to establish commercial buildings of brick and, especially, native stone (some of this stone, quarried at Elk Flat, forms the basement of City Hall). The city council remained confident enough to proceed with a major public building.

Architect John Slater of La Grande presented the initial plans on June 24, 1911. Three years earlier, Slater had built a large stone and brick high school for the City. The unique feature of Slater's plan was the combination of city offices with a 500-seat auditorium in a single building.

The Council chose a block directly north of the commercial district for the city hall site. At this prominent point, the present Highway 82 turns east to cross the Grande Ronde River and head toward Wallowa County.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Elgin Recorder (microfilm) June 1911 through August 1912.
Proceedings of Elgin City Council 1911-1912.
Hug, Bernal. History of Elgin, Oregon (Xerox copy, Walter Pierce Memorial Library, Eastern Oregon State College, La Grande, Oregon), 1958.
"Elgin Sets National Trend 66 Years Ago," Elgin Recorder (March 26, 1976), 1.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than one (0.62 acres)

Quadrangle name Elgin, Oregon

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A

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

UTM NOT VERIFIED
ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

Zone		Easting			Northing		

C

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D

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E

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F

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G

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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification

Lots 1 through 4 and Lots 26 through 31 of Block 52, Hindman's Addition to Elgin, Union County, Oregon, otherwise described as Tax Lot 5300.

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 Leonard Almquist

organization Union County Museum

date February 26, 1980

street & number PO Box 190

telephone 503/562-6163

city or town Union

state Oregon 97883

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: 

title Deputy SHPO

date July 14, 1980

For HCRS use only

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


Keeper of the National Register

date 10/10/80

Attest: 
Chief of Registration

date 10-7-80

Regional Coordinator

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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The winning bid of contractor John Oberg, accepted on August 22, 1911, was \$4,800 over the \$10,00 in bonds which had been authorized. The city council voted to proceed nonetheless, and Oberg promised a building by February.

By March 16, 1912, installation of the 526 theater seats could begin, and the City authorized \$850 for curtains and backdrops. The "formal garden" backdrop was used for the first public event at the theater--graduation ceremonies for the Class of 1912. In its May 16th edition, the Elgin Recorder proudly proclaimed, "Elgin possesses a municipal opera house unexcelled for beauty and convenience in any city of the State outside Portland." The theater was used for graduations and class plays until after World War II.

On July 3, 1912, all details had been completed and Slater formally turned over keys to the building to the city council. The following day the Opera house overflowed as Walter Pierce (later Governor and Congressman) delivered an Independence Day oration.

"Operas" were not so successful. The Elgin Recorder of August 1, 1912 anticipated "Beautiful Comic Opera Next Monday Evening," but three weeks later headlined, "Elgin People Lucky; Survive 'Chimes of Normandy' and Escape 'La Mascot'."

Originally, the City offices and library were located at the second floor front, with the police department and jail in the basement directly below.* The front of the first floor had two rental offices and the theater entrance. Included in the basement were rooms for the fire department, and dressing rooms. In 1954, when the schools had acquired their own auditoriums and the theater was used exclusively for movies, the stage area was walled off for the public library. When the library moved into the new community center in the early 1970s, the City Recorder's office was transferred to the old stage area. The original city offices are now being considered as a possible location for a community historical center. The theater, which had not been used for a decade, has very recently been re-opened. Some restoration is underway.

In conformity with state law, the City of Elgin is presently revising its comprehensive land use plan, and has received a report on Elgin's historic resources in which the City Hall is listed as one of several buildings with National Register potential. This is the pilot nomination from Elgin, and it is intended to encourage the City Hall's preservation for continued use.

*The council chambers occupied the front portion of the second story.