

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

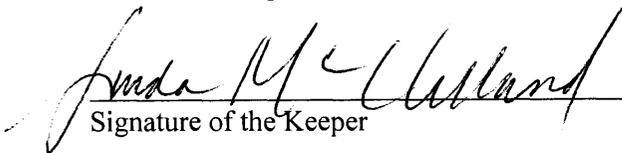
NRIS Reference Number: 06001241

Property Name: Shirley Opera House

County: Rawlins State: Kansas

Multiple Name: Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas MPS

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

 January 16, 2007
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

=====
Amended Items in Nomination:

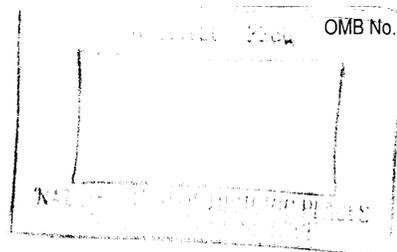
Section 8: Criteria

The period of significance is, hereby, changed to "1907 to 1913," to focus on the year when the building was constructed (under Criterion C) and the period of time it functioned as an opera house and public gathering place (under Criterion A). Also "Commerce" is, hereby, dropped as an area of significance.

The Kansas State Historic Preservation Office was notified of this amendment.

DISTRIBUTION:

**National Register property file
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)**



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 marking "x" in the appropriate box or 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 10-9000a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic name Shirley Opera House

Other name/site number 153-0300-0011

2. Location

Street & number 503 Main Street not for publication

City or town Atwood vicinity

State Kansas Code KS County Rawlins Code 153 Zip code 67730

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.)

Patrick Felner DSHPO 12/6/06
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
Kansas State Historical Society

State or 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 commenting 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. James McAllard 1/16/07
 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:)

Shirley Opera House
Name of Property

Rawlins County, Kansas
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		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	total	

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter Categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: theater

COMMERCE/TRADE: department store

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE: restaurant

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH & 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN MVMT:

Commercial

LATE VICTORIAN

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation: STONE: limestone

Walls: BRICK; STONE: limestone

Roof: METAL: tin

Other:

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Shirley Opera House
Name of Property

Rawlins County, Kansas
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register)

- 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 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

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

PERFORMING ARTS

SOCIAL HISTORY

COMMERCE

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1907-1956

Significant Dates

1907

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

UNKNOWN

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:

Shirley Opera House
Name of Property

Rawlins County, Kansas
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1

1	4	3	2	5	3	7	0	4	4	0	8	2	1	0
Zone		Easting					Northing							

2

Zone		Easting					Northing							

3

Zone		Easting					Northing							

4

Zone		Easting					Northing							

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

Name/title Jeff and Alice Hill, owners

Organization _____ Date July 15, 2006

Street & number 503 Main Street Telephone (785) 626-3740

City or town Atwood State Kansas Zip code 67730

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 SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

Name Jeff and Alice Hill

Street & number 503 Main Street Telephone (785) 626-3740

City or town Atwood State Kansas Zip code 67730

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 Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

Shirley Opera House
Atwood, Rawlins County, Kansas

Narrative Description

Summary

The 1907 Shirley Opera House, located at 503 Main Street, Atwood, Rawlins County, Kansas, is a two-story commercial block building with a partial basement (unfinished). Visible walls in the basement reveal a stacked native limestone foundation. The supporting walls are locally manufactured brick. The front elevation faces south, spans 43 feet and is nestled between a lawyer's office on the east and the U.S. Post Office on the west. The depth of the original building is 78 feet. Two one-story concrete block additions were added to the northeast end in the 1940s. The elegant south face is well balanced with the first story displaying two recessed entrances with oriel windows above the double doors. Framing each of the entrances are two plate glass display windows (four total), each divided into six panes to provide pleasing symmetry. The upper story features the original red brick in a running bond pattern. The east, west and north walls are parged with light gray stucco. The roof is metal, (1980), with a stair-step slope to the north. This building truly stands apart as a grand venture for a small town.

Setting

The Shirley Opera House is located one block east of downtown on Main Street and sits diagonally across from the Jayhawk Theatre (1910). The Rawlins County Court House (1906) is within view to the east and is a contemporary of the Shirley Opera House. One block south is the old Highway 36 route. The high school building is uphill to the east with planted dividers giving the street distinction. Atwood's City Library is to the southeast across the street. The U.S. Post Office shares the Opera House's west wall, resulting in frequent public exposure. To the south is the building that housed the Wolfe Photo Gallery and further south is the impressive Masonic Lodge (1926).

Exterior

The foremost features of the south face are two overhanging oriel windows each having three double hung sashes separated by pressed-metal faced wood. Above and below the panes are pressed-metal cornices, adding further detail. The bottom of the overhangs, visible from the sidewalk below, are also covered with patterned pressed-metal. Centered between these projecting second-story windows are two surface-mounted double hung windows.

Compound pilasters framing the angled entrances and the outside edges of the building are faced with cast iron, showing a flower and vine motif. The display windows sit atop routed wooden panels, as do the double doors.

Brick corbels on the east and west sides delineate the first from the second floor and further enhance the building. Completing the front view above the windows, single brick corbels run the width of the building with a double corbel highlighting the center. A strong finish comes with an overhanging decorative metal cornice that tops the façade and repeats the floral design the outer corners.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

Shirley Opera House
Atwood, Rawlins County, Kansas

The original exterior concrete stair along the east elevation leads to second floor where the Opera House was located. The stairs are shallow and narrow and show wear from 100 years of use, but are quite serviceable. There is an iron handrail attached to the wall of the adjacent building. The east wall of the nominated property is covered with stucco. At the top of the stair is a concrete landing with a wire guard-fence around the east and north ends. The landing is above the roof level of the adjacent building and gives a view of the Rawlins County Courthouse and other buildings. To the north, looking down, there is a narrow enclosed alley between the main floor and the adjacent building (to the east). This is used as a private garden area belonging to the Shirley Opera House. From the above-mentioned landing, there are two single entrances into the second level; neither door is original. There are transom windows above each entrance and exposed brick shows the original arch-work above the doors. Also on this east (side) elevation there are three exposed double hung windows and one window covered in stucco that is visible by outline only.

The north (rear) elevation faces an empty lot at the northwest corner and features a one-story concrete block addition at the northeast corner. On the first level a door in disrepair is centered on the west side. The air-conditioning unit is to the west of this door. A window covered with plywood is east of the door. A window air conditioner is midway and above the door and window. An assortment of electrical lines runs to a power pole north of the building. On the second level, centered in the width of the north end is a modern steel door that has no landing. There appears to have been windows to either side, which are now covered by stucco. Gutting extends from the east and west ends with the downspout running east of the ground level door. All the stucco is a light cream color and in good repair except for a few cracks at the base of the northeast end. There was an access door to the basement that has been bricked and filled in. A basement window, protected by a louvered wooden box provides ventilation in the northwest corner.

The west side of the building is exposed above the roofline of the Post Office and is covered with stucco. Although there were four chimneys originally, there is nothing above the roofline at present.

The addition extending out from the east half of the north side of the original building is in two parts. The initial addition is a one-story rectangle measuring 10' east-west and 12' north-south. This was built during the early 1940s when the building was a meat locker run by Charlie Bird. It is concrete block with a flat, tarred roof and ceramic tile trim. A door leading from the original building has been covered over and is now the site of the commercial dishwasher. Two multi-paned windows are on the west wall. There was a door in the north end that has also been sealed and now has a window style air conditioner in it. There is a small natural gas heater with vent along the east wall. This addition is now used as the dishwashing room for the restaurant. The floor has commercial carpet covering it.

The second addition was built to the east of the first addition sharing the east wall and extending north to create two new rooms; the south part measures 12' north-south and 16' east-west and the north room 20'

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 3

Shirley Opera House
Atwood, Rawlins County, Kansas

north-south. It was built in the 1950s to expand the locker business with a killing floor and cutting area. The roof is metal with an A frame. A commercial grill vent extends above it. The south room accesses the original building through an open doorway. The walls are insulated with vermiculite. A heavy locker style door accesses the north room. A screened door opens onto the alley on the southeast corner where the private garden is located. This room, remodeled in 2003, is now the kitchen of the restaurant and houses the char-grill, stove/oven and prep area. Part of the floor is recessed.

In the north room two sets of freight doors and three windows are along the west wall with two windows on the north end. The east wall is shared with a storage building north of the lawyer's office that is not part of the property. The floors in both rooms are concrete with surfaces sloping toward drains. It is currently used as storage for the restaurant.

Interior

Main Floor

The original design of the commercial block building at 503 Main was two distinct spaces divided north to south by a load bearing brick wall. It opens to Main Street on the south elevation through the recessed double doors and are still in use. The porch created by the recessed doors and the overhang of the oriel windows was typical of the Victorian period.

Upon entering the east double doors there is a small foyer created by the enclosing of the angled display windows, with interior windows, and French doors installed in the 1980s. These doors came from the McCook, Nebraska, Post Office of the same era. The windows and doors are framed in with local ash wood cut and planed in Ludell, Kansas, by the Thick and Thin Lumber Company. The raised display windows are accessed through double casement style windows on either side of the door having unique brass locking mechanisms. These currently display western furnishings of the period such as trunks, pie safes, saddles, etc. There are concealed storage spaces below the display windows accessed in the foyer.

The floor on the eastside was rebuilt from ground level in the 1980s in pieces of oak that are laid at an angle to the north-south axis. Along the east wall are cabinets of dark oak that were brought in from the Buck Drugstore in McDonald, Kansas. The bottom portion has sliding panel doors and the top portion has sliding glass doors centered with a mirror and side shelves. There are drawers between the top and bottom portions. This cabinet extends 40 feet, is 8feet high and showcases family china and stoneware from the Atwood Sale Barn that is no longer in existence.

Further along the east wall are two modern sliding glass doors that open out to the garden alley. They are softened by heavy drapes. Between these doors is a functional Sears Player Piano.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 4 Shirley Opera House
Atwood, Rawlins County, Kansas

The ceiling of this east room is pressed tin, not original to the building, but of the same era. It has been painted a creamy white and is highlighted by large prism-shaped opaque lamps hanging from chains and with ceiling fans. The lighting fixtures are believed to be original to the building.

A wall at the north end of this room has been built to create a plating area for the restaurant. A swinging door provides access to this room. This was done in 2003.

Continuing west, at the north end of the main room, an office built in the 1980s is raised above the level of the main floor by 4 feet and has a small paned glass front allowing oversight. Below this office is storage area holding a reverse osmosis system for the restaurant. The office is approached from the east room through a single door opening created through the original brick-dividing wall. A flight of stairs leads to the office door with two more flights divided by a second landing leading to the second floor. These stairs are not original to the building. Storage space has been created to the west of the stairs at the height of the second landing.

Below this landing is a small bathroom. A short hallway, leading to this bathroom, ends with the exterior door on the north end of the original building. In the bathroom there was a north window, which has been covered and now holds a fuse box. Along the west wall of the hallway are storage closets.

The west wall of the main room is the eastside of the supporting brick wall dividing the building. It has a door, not original, roughly centered, that leads to a hallway running north and south. North of the door the wall is smooth plaster with period photographs of the owners' relatives and decorative wall sconces. To the south of the door a recessed area holds custom built cabinets with shelving above and apothecary drawers below. The shelves display photos of Atwood's founding citizens, also relatives of the owners. A plaster covered chimney juts out creating a niche for the hostess counter and cash register. Further along that side is a set of French doors with side windows leading into the west half of the building.

The building's west half is divided into several spaces. The front room now serves as the restaurant pub. The south wall is entered via the recessed double doors below the oriel window. It too has a foyer, duplicating the east entrance. Within the main room is a bar of beautiful design, the top being created by different woods in a butcher-block style. The west wall holds the back bar. Its base is an oak cabinet from a diner in Bird City, Kansas. The top is modern construction enhanced with decorative molding and oak appliques to create an antique look. The pub tables and chairs are antiques from Scotland. Historic photographs decorate the walls. A potbelly stove graces a corner, but is not used. The floor is original wood, refinished. The ceiling has the same pressed tin as the east side along with the same lighting and a fan.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 5

Shirley Opera House
Atwood, Rawlins County, Kansas

French doors lead to a narrow hallway in an L shape. This separates the main room from the Bird Locker storage room that has thick insulated walls and a heavy locker door. This room is 12' X 12' and has been carpeted. It is used for extra seating and holds a big screen TV. Down the long carpeted north-south hall is a handicapped accessible bathroom accessed through a multi-paned door. The bathroom has a painted plywood floor. Access to the basement is through a floor-door in this bathroom. The short hall to the small bathroom has smooth tile and the small bathroom has linoleum flooring.

Second Floor

The original Opera House portion encompassed the entire upstairs with no division. The pine floor and pressed tin ceiling are original. The brick walls are covered in plaster and stucco with some exposed brick showing. There is no evidence of permanent seating arrangements as the floor is without scars. The stage, which is no longer intact, was centered at the north (rear) end. There is a delineation line in the floorboards showing its position. Some of the ceiling is unpainted, while other areas show a variety of paint colors. Some of the tiles are damaged and will need to be replaced.

An apartment was built at the south (front) end using about 1/3 of the space. It is now mostly dismantled to return the upstairs to its original state of one great room. The original access to the upstairs was from the concrete stairs along the east wall. There are two doors, each showing an arched brick pattern at the top and transom windows above as mentioned previously.

A row of 5 four-by-four posts support the roof trusses north-to-south above the load bearing center wall. They are not evenly spaced, but are at gradually closer intervals as you move south. They extend into the ceiling tiles. There are two iron rods tied into the east/west walls to offer further support.

There is no integral wiring, plumbing, heating, or air conditioning in the north two-thirds. In the former apartment area there is old wiring and plumbing which is non-functional. There was a natural gas heating stove that has been disconnected.

The window glass is original. The woodwork around the windows has no ornamentation and is painted white. There are at least two layers of wallpaper on the south wall of the apartment. The oriel windows have window seats creating storage. The trim work enclosing the oriel windows is gone and will require restoration.

There is a modern steel door on the north wall, does not have a landing or stairs leading from it.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 6

Shirley Opera House
Atwood, Rawlins County, Kansas

Narrative Statement of Significance

The Shirley Opera House, erected in 1907 at 503 Main Street, Atwood, Rawlins County, Kansas, is significant under National Register Criterion A for the areas of ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION, PERFORMING ARTS, SOCIAL HISTORY, and COMMERCE, and under Criterion C for the area of ARCHITECTURE as documented in the Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) "Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas."

The Shirley Opera House exemplifies the historically important period for the refinement of places for entertainment in newly developing communities during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Construction of the building coincided with the building of the Rawlins County Courthouse, the creation of permanent sidewalks, and the establishment of a public waterworks. The commercial block building style combined with elegant Victorian detailing established it as a building of merit, meant to bring distinction and permanence to a community that had recently celebrated 25 years of existence. Although its period of significance as a place of arts and entertainment runs from its construction in 1907 until the mid 1920s, the property's significance as a place of business related to local commerce extends to 1956, the mandatory 50-year mark. During its time as a place of entertainment, the upstairs provided a community gathering place for entertainment of all types: traveling road shows, musicals, debates, local theatricals, dances, political rallies and graduation exercises. Concurrently the main floor supported many types of businesses, all typical commercial industries of an agricultural town.

The architecture has remained significantly unchanged and is representative of Atwood commercial architecture at the turn of the century. Shirley Opera House is unique as there are no other commercial buildings remaining of that era that have not been altered significantly.

Community History

According to William Cutler's *History of Kansas*, the Kansas Legislature created Rawlins County in 1873 and it was officially organized in 1881. J. M. Matheny and T. A. Andrews laid out the town of Atwood in 1879, which would later become the county seat. In 1881, when the township had reached a population adequate to support an election, William R. Shirley, a citizen of the county since 1879, was elected township trustee. With the establishment of Atwood as Rawlins County's Seat William R. Shirley became the county clerk. Later serving as a sheriff (1886-1888) and probate judge (1904-1907), W. R. Shirley played an important role in the business and politics of Atwood.¹

Because of its location in northwest Kansas, Atwood developed later than many eastern Kansas towns. The earliest commercial frame buildings, most of which are no longer extant, were erected during the

¹ History of Rawlins County, Rawlins County Genealogical Society, 1988, Volume 1.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 7 Shirley Opera House
Atwood, Rawlins County, Kansas

1870s and 1880s, while more permanent structures took shape around the turn of the century. A local brickyard opened in 1905, which fueled this growth and development. A local newspaper noted:

...the Atwood Brick yard under direct management of Eb. Shirley and Walt. Wallace began the making of brick last Monday morning. Clay samples of the material being used indicate that the finished product of this company will be of superior quality. Judge Shirley, senior member of the company, informs us that the work will be pushed as rapidly as possible, so that it will not be long until our people can obtain good brick at a minimum price.²

These bricks were part of several of the earliest permanent structures in Atwood, including the Shirley Opera House.

Other downtown commercial and civic structures in Atwood were built during this same period of growth and expansion, including the nearby Romanesque style Rawlins County Courthouse (1906) and the Jayhawk Theatre (1910).

The population of Rawlins County climbed from 5,241 in 1900 to 6,380 in 1910 and continued to increase steadily until the 1930s. Like other rural western Kansas counties, however, the numbers have declined since the 1930s. Rawlins County population dipped below 3,000 in 2000.

Property History

Located on Lots 13-14 the Shirley Opera House was the creation of an influential pioneer in Atwood's beginnings. As previously noted, William Shirley was an early Atwood resident and community leader. The local newspaper reported in 1907, "The Shirley Opera House, which he is now building in Atwood, will be a lasting monument to his memory in Rawlins County."³ The newspaper quoted the *Topeka State Journal* as saying, "He (Mr. Shirley) and Cy Anderson are said to have been the balance wheel and mainspring in the Rawlins county machine."⁴ Shirley was clearly instrumental in projecting a future of refinement for the citizens of Rawlins County.

Reflective of many nineteenth-century opera houses across Kansas, the Shirley Opera House occupied the upper floor of a two-part commercial block in the heart of downtown. The Shirley Opera House fits the architectural mold of opera houses outlined in the MPDF:

² *The Republican Citizen*, June 30, 1905.

³ *Ibid.*, 10 January 1907.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 11 April 1907.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 8 Shirley Opera House
Atwood, Rawlins County, Kansas

While the form of theater buildings continued to adapt the two-part commercial block form typical of nineteenth century main street construction, special attention was given to both the interior and exterior design of opera houses. The exterior treatments expressed the Late Victorian idioms popular at the time... More commonly, the builders of Kansas opera houses adapted simpler variations of popular architectural styles and applied them to vernacular commercial block forms.⁵

Notices for appearances and shows began to appear in the local newspapers. The first notice of a performance at the newly constructed Shirley Opera House appeared April 25, 1907. "COMING – A Prince of Liars, at Shirley's Opera House, Friday, May 10th, produced by Atwood home talent, directed by Miss Beulah Monroe."⁶ Other notices followed: "Friday evening, May 17th, the Atwood Orchestra will give a dance at the Shirley Opera House in Atwood. Everybody is invited to attend." "On Tuesday evening, June 11th, the Woodmen will give their First Annual Grand Ball at the Shirley Opera House in Atwood. Everybody invited. Remember the date and watch for bills."⁷

Traveling performances were soon on the agenda as was recorded under the bold heading: "FOUR NIGHTS in ATWOOD Eb Shirley, manager of the Shirley Opera House, has contracted with the Ruth Craven Company to give four performances in Atwood, beginning July 10th. First night, 'Her Fatal Error,' a four act comedy drama. Second night, 'The Golden Giant Mine,' a four act western play. Third night, 'The Police Alarm,' a four act melodrama, strong in comedy. Fourth night, 'Wild Cat the Romp,' a four act comedy. Specialties each night between the acts."⁸

Entertainment continued into August. *The Republican Citizen* shows the bill "GRAND CONCERT The Event of the Season—Opera House, Atwood, Kansas, Saturday evening, August 17th."⁹ The popularity was growing as reserved tickets were now going on sale. It advertised on November 12, 1907 the GRAND MINSTREL by The Atwood Orchestra.¹⁰

Traveling performance groups such as the Ted North Players and the Hillman Stock Company brought important entertainment to a culture-hungry community. Local resident Lyda Munger said, "We were

⁵ Elizabeth Rosin, Dale Nimz, Kristen Ottsen, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form "Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas," 23 December 2004. National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, Washington, DC, p. F 60-61.

⁶ Ibid., 25 April 1907.

⁷ Ibid., 9 May 1907; 23 May 1907.

⁸ Ibid., 20 June 1907.

⁹ Ibid., 7 July 1907.

¹⁰ Ibid., 12 November 1907.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 9 Shirley Opera House
Atwood, Rawlins County, Kansas

even glad to go to a funeral and when Shirley's Opera House opened, I remember we walked through snow up to our knees three nights in a row to watch a stock company that was traveling through."¹¹ Public meetings were also held at the Shirley Opera House to discuss matters such as organizing a baseball team and regarding the organization of the first free public library.¹²

Political rallies were also held at the opera house as was recorded under the headline: GOV STUBBS AND I.D. YOUNG CAMPAIGN IN RAWLINS, "The opera house was well filled when Hon. I. D. Young, Progressive nominee for congress was introduced by Judge Chambers Tuesday afternoon."¹³

Other uses for the upstairs included a shooting gallery, dances, and graduation ceremonies. There was even a wrestling match that was advertised to take place July 23, 1908. "Don't forget the big wrestling match between Ernest Nelson, the heavyweight Swede of Omaha and Bert Kesselring, the local lightweight champion, at the Shirley Opera House, Saturday, August 1."¹⁴

A 1909 ad in *The Republican Citizen* describes the Cash Grocery of the opera house block run by W. R. Shirley. "It was related that Mr. Shirley traditionally would stay open until he sold one dollar's worth of candy and then close the store for the day. A variety of candies were displayed in glass jars and a goodly sack of sweets could be purchased for a penny."¹⁵ In 1910 the Atwood Literary Society, organized by James D. Greason, met at the Opera House.

Ownership of the property transferred in 1913 to Dr. L. G. and Minnie Graves, who then sold it to Dan Cashman, Lon Nickols and Frank Prochazka. It was sold to F. A. Webster for \$4500.00 in 1919. Creating living quarters and an office, Mr. Webster began printing the Atwood *Patriot* within the opera house walls. In 1928 he deeded the building to his wife Hattie. Half was leased to the Little family for a printing office and the Atwood *Patriot* became the *Citizen Patriot*. The remaining half was leased to the U.S. Post Office.

A dentist, Dr. Dowler rented part of the upstairs to serve as his office and living quarters. C.A.P. Faulkner purchased the building in 1938 and maintained ownership until 1970. The U. S. Post Office lease continued for a time. Other renters were the Moss Grocery, the Owl Café and a restaurant run by Art David and Lottie Fuller. A saloon managed by Bert Hotchkiss was the site of a shooting. An abstract office, in the west side of the main floor, was operated by Gertie Cox McIntosh and also housed a four-bedroom apartment where her family resided.

¹¹ Ruth Kelly Hayden, *The Time That Was*. H. F. Davis Memorial Library, Colby Community College, 1973.

¹² *The Republican Citizen*, 2 May 1907 and October 24, 1907.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 6 October 1910.

¹⁴ Hayden, *The Time That Was*.

¹⁵ Ona Mae Ratcliff, "The Old Opera House" in *Citizen Patriot*, 14 October 1976.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 10

Shirley Opera House
Atwood, Rawlins County, Kansas

In the early 1940s, Bird Locker, a business still remembered today, began when Charlie Bird ran a meat locker and grocery during World War II. Ownership changed hands in 1970 when Arlie Hafer, who had worked with Charlie Bird, purchased the building, continued to rent lockers and built the processing rooms on the north end. In 1975, when government regulations forced him to close the business the building was sold to Ronald Van Riessen, a frozen food distributor from Ft. Collins, Colorado. This was the only time the building was owned by someone outside of Rawlins County.

Sold again in 1976, Fred Downing a local antique dealer purchased the building and set up Horsetrader's Antiques. Then in 1975, "the local music club presented a musical melodrama based on the background and setting of the old opera house with characters named for the towns of the county and dramatizing a turn of the century romance and court trial."¹⁶

In 1980 the building was put to public auction. Purchased by Darrel and Deanie Weber it received substantial restoration and repair. They opened Homesteaders, an import and spice store.

Don Beamgard purchased the building in 1997 and transferred ownership to his son Dick. More repairs were completed along with the installation of central air conditioning in the main floor. This Old House, a home interior store, and The Mustard Seed, a tea-shop and spa, were businesses during that period.

In 2002, the current owners Jeff and Alice Hill took ownership and opened The Aberdeen Steakhouse and Pub on July 4, 2003. To accomplish this a commercial kitchen was installed in the north addition, a handicapped bathroom was installed and a wall was built to create a plating area at the northeast corner of the main building. Photographs of Rawlins County citizens from the early 1900s create an authentic atmosphere.

On November 20, 2005, a concert was held at the nearby Jayhawk Theatre to introduce the Shirley Opera House Project to the community. The plan was to restore the upstairs to a performance and dance hall. Al Petteway and Amy White, Celtic acoustic musicians, came from North Carolina solely for this event. They hope to return to perform the grand opening of the restored Shirley Opera House. The community is enthusiastic about the reopening of our most impressive landmark.

The current owners hope to restore the building to its glory days as an opera house much like it was described in the Atwood *Patriot* on April 25, 1907: "The concert given by the band Saturday evening at the Shirley Opera House filled every available seat and many were obliged to stand. The concert was the first entertainment held in the new Opera House, and although not yet finished, when completed it

¹⁶ Ibid.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 11

Shirley Opera House
Atwood, Rawlins County, Kansas

will be as fine an opera house as is to be found in northwest Kansas and the people of Atwood are justly proud of it.”¹⁷

Summary

The Shirley Opera House meets the registration requirements for opera houses as outlined in the MPDF “Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas.” According to the MPDF, “opera houses often occupied the upper stories of a commercial block in the heart of a downtown...” and “special attention was given to both the interior and exterior design.”¹⁸ The intact storefronts and open space of the second story of the Shirley Opera House communicates its historic function as a public space used for performances, gatherings, and business, therefore qualifying it for listing under Criterion A in the areas of ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION, PERFORMING ARTS, COMMERCE, and SOCIAL HISTORY. Moreover, the exterior of this two-story downtown building maintains its architectural integrity as a Victorian-era commercial block, and therefore qualifies for listing under Criterion C for ARCHITECTURE.

¹⁷ Hayden, Ruth Kelley. The Time That Was.

¹⁸ Rosin, et. al. “Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas,” p. F 60.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 9 Page 12

Shirley Opera House
Atwood, Rawlins County, Kansas

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Courtright, Alfareta. An Old Time History of Rawlins County, Kansas. Ralph Printing & Lithographing Co. Omaha, Nebraska 1961.

Hayden, Ruth Kelley. The Time That Was. H. F. Davis Memorial Library, Colby Community College, Colby, Kansas 1973.

History of Rawlins County, Kansas. Rawlins County Genealogical Society, Atwood, Kansas 1988.

Opera House in Atwood restored to period, *The Prairie Peddler*, February 20, 1983.

The Republican Citizen, 30 June 1905; 10 January 1907; 11 April 1907; 25 April 1907; 2 May 1907; 9 May 1907; 23 May 1907; 20 June 1907; 7 July 1907; 12 November 1907; 24 December 1907.

Ratcliff, Ona Mae. The Old Opera House, *Citizen Patriot*, October 14, 1976.

Rosin, Elizabeth, Dale Nimz, & Kristen Ottsen. National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form "Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas," 23 December 2004. National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, Washington, DC.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 13 Shirley Opera House
Atwood, Rawlins County, Kansas

GEOGRAPHIC DATA

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated building is situated in Lots 13 and 14, Block 19, original town, Atwood, Rawlins County, Kansas.

Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the parcel of land that is historically associated with the resource and is bordered by the U. S. Post Office building on the west, an alley to the north, Lewis & Beims Law Office to the east, and the city street of Main on the south.

Photographic Information

The following information is consistent for all photographs:

1. Shirley Opera House
2. Atwood, Rawlins County, KS
3. Photographer: Kristen Lonard
4. July 14, 2006
5. Digital photographs on file at the Kansas State Historical Society

- Photo #1: South (front) elevation, view from the southwest
- Photo #2: South (front) elevation/East elevation, view from the southeast
- Photo #3: South (front) elevation, west entrance, view from the south
- Photo #4: South (front) elevation, upper story, cornice, view from the southwest
- Photo #5: North (rear) elevation, view from the north
- Photo #6: Interior, first floor, east side dining room, view from the north
- Photo #7: Interior, first floor, west side dining room, view from the south
- Photo #8: Interior, second floor, view from the north
- Photo #9: Interior, second floor, view from the south
- Photo #10: Interior, second floor, bay windows, view from the north