

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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RECEIVED DEC 6 1976
DATE ENTERED MAR 25 1977

**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

** Lake Benton Opera House

AND/OR COMMON

Lake Benton Opera House

LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER on Benton Street between Fremont and Center Street

--- NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Lake Benton

--- VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Sixth

STATE

Minnesota

CODE

27

COUNTY

Lincoln

CODE

081

CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERCIAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER:

OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

City of Lake Benton

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Lake Benton

--- VICINITY OF

STATE

Minnesota

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Lincoln County Courthouse - Registry of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Ivanhoe

STATE

Minnesota

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Statewide Historic Sites Survey

DATE

1971

--- FEDERAL STATE --- COUNTY --- LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Minnesota Historical Society, Building 25, Fort Snelling

CITY, TOWN

St. Paul

STATE

Minnesota

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

The Lake Benton Opera House is a two story red brick building which faces on Benton Street between Fremont and Center Streets in Lake Benton. It is linked by means of similar material and common cornice line to the adjacent American Legion Club. The principal facade of the Opera House is symmetrical with a three-part entry positioned within a colonnade of four square brick piers capped with unadorned stone capitals. This buff stone is also used in a decorative frieze in which a checker-board pattern is established of stone and brick. Arched windows placed at mid-story flank the entry. Directly above the entry on the balcony level are two doors which flank a central three-part window; all of which open onto a narrow wood-decked balcony with iron balustrade.

The total building measures forty-eight feet by sixty feet in plan with the interior divided into two principal parts. The stage measures twenty-three feet by forty-eight feet and the auditorium (lobby included) measures forty-five feet by forty-eight feet. Present seating capacity on main and balcony floors is 300; originally this capacity was 350, however this was lessened during later remodeling with the removal of several seats and two box seats. A narrow orchestra pit is positioned directly in front of the audience seating at mid stage.

The stage area is comprised of a central stage with maple floor elevated approximately three feet above the main floor. Back stage there are two separate areas designated as dressing rooms. Emergency exits are provided by two stair-cases positioned at either side of the stage which link the balcony with the back-stage area.

During the years after World War II the Opera House was allowed to go into disrepair until it was acquired in a state of advanced deterioration by the City of Lake Benton in 1970. At this time the roof structure had collapsed and required total replacement. The original pressed tin ceiling was irreparable and has been substituted with a paneled ceiling upon which the original design of the tin has been reproduced. The building is presently in use by local groups for theatrical and musical productions. It is in good repair.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
___PREHISTORIC	___ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	___COMMUNITY PLANNING	___LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	___RELIGION
___1400-1499	___ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	___CONSERVATION	___LAW	___SCIENCE
___1500-1599	___AGRICULTURE	___ECONOMICS	___LITERATURE	___SCULPTURE
___1600-1699	___ARCHITECTURE	___EDUCATION	___MILITARY	___SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
___1700-1799	___ART	___ENGINEERING	___MUSIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	___COMMERCE	___EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	___PHILOSOPHY	___TRANSPORTATION
___1900-	___COMMUNICATIONS	___INDUSTRY	___POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	___OTHER (SPECIFY)
		___INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1896

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Unknown

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Lake Benton Opera House is significant as one of extremely few surviving community opera house/theatres to have been preserved and restored through community efforts for the continued service and benefit to area residents.

In 1893 Lake Benton realized the need for a cultural center. A wooden building was constructed to serve the cultural needs of the community, but burned shortly thereafter. Wasting little time, spirited members of the community bought 96 shares at \$100 a piece and in 1896 the present brick building was constructed in the heart of town on what was known as the Opera House Block.

The structure was designed to be spacious and its stage and balcony were curved intentionally to provide space for dancing parties, traveling show troupes and basketball games. The Opera House was always more than just a theatre; it was the host for other, numerous community activities. School plays and concerts, church and lodge meetings, graduation exercises, July 4th and Decoration Day (Memorial Day) celebrations, card parties, old Settlers picnics and even funerals for community leaders were held at the Opera House.

The space left by the decline of the traveling road show troupe was filled by silent movies with local women playing the piano accompaniment to match the action on the screen.¹

Shortly after World War II the Opera House was left unoccupied and unused. Let go for taxes the building stood prey to violent weather and vandals. In 1970 prior to demolition, active community members arranged for its purchase by the City of Lake Benton. The Lake Benton community that contributed to the construction of the Opera House 83 years earlier, now took on the restoration of the building. Local civic groups pitched in and repaired structural deficiencies and replaced or restored interior fixtures that were given to Lake Benton by surrounding communities.

Today with much of the restoration completed, the Lake Benton Opera House has again become a viable community center. An active Drama Society which draws its members from surrounding communities presents sell-out plays. Other thespian groups from Minnesota and South Dakota Universities give summer performances. The Lake Benton Schools again use the Opera rather than the gymnasium stage for school plays and concerts, and the traditional Memorial Day services have returned to the Opera House. Talent and Queen contests sponsored by Civic groups and local art exhibitors make use of the building.

1. With the coming of the "talkies" in the 1930s the level theatre floor was slanted, limiting the use of the Opera House by the community.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Lincoln County Valley Journal, Lake Benton, Minnesota.
St. Paul Sunday Pioneer Press, St. Paul, Minnesota.
Worthington, Minnesota Daily Glove, Worthington, Minnesota.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1
 UTM REFERENCES

A	1,4	71,66,4,0	4,90,41,8,0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

Susan Zeik, Research Historian and Charles W. Nelson, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Minnesota Historical Society

DATE

10/18/76

STREET & NUMBER

Building 25, Fort Snelling

TELEPHONE

612-726-1171

CITY OR TOWN

St. Paul

STATE

Minnesota

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

Russell W. Fridley

TITLE

Russell W. Fridley

DATE

11/29/76

State Historic Preservation Officer

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

CHIEF

[Signature]

DATE

3/25/97

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

[Signature]

DATE

2.24.77

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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Lake Benton Opera House

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 1

In 1970 the restoration goals were to restore and perpetuate Southwestern Minnesota heritage and culture. Today many of these goals have been realized making the Lake Benton Opera House an active and appreciated community center.