

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

For NPS use only

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

received APR 9 1986

date entered MAY 23 1986

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

**1. Name**

historic Mobridge Auditorium

and/or common same

**2. Location**

street & number 212 Main Street NA not for publication

city, town Mobridge \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of

state South Dakota code 046 county Walworth code 129

**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> NA in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> 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 City of Mobridge

street & number 205 East 2nd Street

city, town Mobridge \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of state South Dakota

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Register of Deeds

street & number Walworth County Courthouse

city, town Selby \_\_\_\_\_ state South Dakota

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Mural Art Inventory has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1984-1986  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records State Historical Preservation Center

city, town Vermillion \_\_\_\_\_ state South Dakota

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<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 Mobridge Auditorium is located on the main business street of town and faces west. Two stories in height, the building is constructed with concrete block around a steel frame and is covered with a brick veneer. Dating from 1936-7, the building is treated in the art deco style.

Rectangular in shape, the building has a raised stage and a storage area toward the back. The two side facades are blank, while the rear has emergency exit doors. The three, secondary, facades are finished in a dark brown brick. The front facade has lighter, tan brick which wraps around to cover several feet of the side facades. Art deco ornamentation is used on the main facade. The entrance is centrally located and covered with a metal canopy and this is set within a recessed panel. Above the door are three windows which light the second floor. A larger, projecting panel surrounds the central panel. Flanking this are three window bays separated by stylized columns or pilasters of brick. All windows are eight over eight panes. Concrete is used on a belt course, cornice and door surround and is incised with stylized deco versions of columns, capitols and medallions.

Ten Indian murals enrich the interior walls of the gymnasium/auditorium. Five on the south wall depict "Ceremonies of the Sioux", while those on the north wall portray "History Along the Missouri River". These paintings by Oscar Howe dramatically recreate the history and culture of the Sioux people.

Each painting is discussed briefly, "Retreat" depicts an Indian who has left his camp to find an isolated place to be with his god. "Christian Service" shows Father Pierre Jean DeSmet conducting a Christian service among the Sioux. DeSmet was one of the earliest and most influential missionaries in the Dakota. "Fool Soldier Rescue", commemorates the rescue of a group of white women and children from a band of Santee Sioux. The "Fool Soldiers" were a group of young Indians from Cheyenne Reservation who through barter with the Santee freed and returned the hostages to safety. "Treaty Making", illustrates the last Indian treaty that was signed in the summer of 1889. It gave to the U.S. Government all the land between the White and Cheyenne Rivers and the areas of Perkins and Harding Counties. "Sakakjawa and Lewis and Clark" portrays the guidance by Sakakjawa of Lewis and Clark on their journey to the Pacific. "Calf Woman and the Mystic Pipe", shows Calf Women, a celestial

# 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 checked="" 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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) Sioux Indian Culture

<b>Specific dates</b>	1936 ; 1941-2	<b>Builder/Architect</b>	architect: Roland R. Wilcken builder: Fred E. Peterson murals: Oscar Howe trim: Tom and John Saul
<b>Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)</b>			

The Mobridge Auditorium is significant as an example of Works Progress Administration art deco architecture and for its mural art work also commissioned by the WPA and executed by acclaimed Sioux Indian artist, Oscar Howe. Howe's work is important within the context of 20th Century American Indian art and South Dakota mural art as it represents his evolution in style from the Santa Fe Studio style to his own unique vision.

Constructed in 1936, the Mobridge City Auditorium was a local WPA project designed by architect, Roland Wilcken. Wilcken was an Aberdeen architect who had several WPA commissions for schools and who also did work for the Episcopal Church's Indian mission schools and churches. Contractor/builder Fred E. Peterson also had his offices in Aberdeen. He worked as a carpenter and drew architectural plans for small commissions. A native of Malmo, Sweden, he came to the United States in 1900. The other contractors who worked on the building were William F. Rose who did the plumbing and heating, Anton Fredburg, engineer and Albin Peterson, superintendent of construction. Constructed for \$115,000 in 1936 and officially opened on May 6, 1937, the building has served a multitude of purposes.

The design qualities of the building are focused on the front facade. Here the typical art deco treatment is used and the front consists of a series of layered, flat planes. The column or pilaster-like features are rendered in brick and the allusion to fluting is stylized into 45° angled triangles of brick. The front entrance is enclosed in a projecting, pedimented plane which has a recessed center panel containing the door. Concrete trim is molded into stylized columns, cornice and decorative panels. The later have a faint allusion to Prairie School decoration. Altogether the building is a well-preserved, modest example of art deco design architecture.

Of greater interest are the murals. Within the context of South Dakota mural art, the Oscar Howe murals are an outstanding example. Several historic periods of mural art work have been identified. The first is

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property Less than one

Quadrangle name Mobridge

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UTM References

A 

1	4	3	8	8	1	2	0	5	0	4	3	2	8	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

The site is bounded by an imaginary line which lies 5 feet from the east, north & west walls and by the south wall of the building which abuts its neighbor.

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

state NA code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Carolyn Torma with Scott Gerloff

organization State Historical Preservation Center date February 1986

street & number P.O. Box 417 telephone 605-677-5314

city or town Vermillion state South Dakota

# 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 

title Director, Office of History date 4/2/86

For NPS use only

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

date 5/28/86

Keeper of the National Register 

Attest: date

Chief of Registration

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

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

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet Mobridge Auditorium Item number 7 Page 1

being, with a pipe in her hands which is to bring good fortune to its owners. "The Sun Dance" pictures the most famous of the Dakotan's ceremonies. It is the ceremony in which young warriors prove their courage by withstanding this painful ritual. "Victory Dance" illustrates the dance that celebrates victory over an enemy. "Hunka Ado-Wampi" depicts the prenuptial ceremony for a Sioux woman. "Social Dance" depicts a dance which was primarily for fun and was an important part of tribal life.

Indian artists John and Tom Saul of Fort Thompson added the decorative borders to the murals and throughout the auditorium.

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

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

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet    Mobridge Auditorium    Item number    8    Page    1

the American Renaissance-style murals which were popular for government buildings in the 1900-1930 era. More modest, simple and pastel versions of these archetypal murals are found in the courthouse work of the Oyen Studios of LaCrosse, Wisconsin. The federally-assisted art projects of the 1930s and early 1940s resulted in many "workers-realism" murals. A special program employed Indian artists to paint mural art in schools on the reservations; the two recorded examples of this work are both free-hand naturalistic murals. Another type of realism was employed for locally-commissioned public projects in the 1910-1950 era. Farmers, pioneers and workers in stylized rural settings are the subject of these murals. Later murals dating from the 1960s and 1970s were out-door and school projects which emphasized geometric designs or abstracted designs of local landmarks. Other, more highly personal works include Ole Running's almost dream-like, oddly proportioned murals in the Old Minnehaha County Courthouse, Olive Perchiens English landscapes in the Doland Security Bank and visionary paintings of Christ and Sioux Indian life by Vernon Rock in the Yankton Trustees Prison.

Oscar Howe's work within this context is both unique and innovative. Howe's training at the Studio at the Santa Fe Indian School had encouraged his use of a flat pictorial plan with no fore or background. Shapes were outlined to give a flat, two-dimensional quality. All paintings were to have a strong graphic rather than plastic quality which lent itself well to mural painting. Howe chose for the Mobridge Auditorium a combination of Indian and South Dakota pioneer history motifs, which refer to specific events or myths of the region. Unlike almost all other murals in the state, Howe's are rooted in the very history and cultural legacy of the area. While Howe had been taught to use muted colors, he chose instead the vibrant hues seen in Sioux quilting, quillwork, leather painting and beadwork. The rich blues, golds, and reds were masterfully used to give a depth and emotional impact to the murals.

Howe would go on from this point to develop his own style which was distinguished by his use of traditional, vibrant colors, of subject matter which was a reinterpretation of Sioux Indian history and mythology, and use of "a dynamic, fluid movement based upon edge and contour" (Day and Quintell). The heart of his work was the casein paintings on paper which date from 1955 to 1978. As John Day and Margaret Quintell write, his interests focused on formal considerations. "His emphasis (was) on the development of a consistent and highly integrated system of visual communication". His work starts with a point from which he generates a linear design.

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

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

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet    Mobridge Auditorium    Item number 8    Page 2

---

Born in 1915 on the Crow Creek Reservation, Howe was a Yanktonai Sioux. His ancestors were tribal leaders who painted the yearly winter counts of the tribe on hide. In 1922 he was sent to the Pierre Indian School from which he graduated in 1933 at which time he had already shown serious promise as an artist. He worked for two years as a laborer, but when he came down with tuberculosis, he was sent to New Mexico to recover. He enrolled at the Studio of the Santa Fe Indian School in 1935. The Studio was run by Dorothy Dunn and produced a generation of nationally and internationally acclaimed Indian artists. Regretably Dunn based much of her ideas of what Indian art should be on Southwest Indian traditions and a rather rigid code developed as to what the Indian students were to paint. In the 1950s and 1960s Oscar Howe's stature and personal evolution as an artist helped to change that constricting policy which had inhibited Indian artists. In 1938 Howe graduated as the class salutatorian and had exhibited his work across the United States and in Paris and London.

He returned to South Dakota and began teaching at the Pierre Indian School which paid him only room and board. In 1940 the South Dakota Artist's Project of the WPA awarded him the commission to paint the ceiling of the Mitchell City Library. As a result he was awarded a scholarship to study mural painting at Lawton, Oklahoma, under Olaf Nordmark.

In 1941 he once again returned to South Dakota and was awarded the Mobridge Commission. When World War II broke out he was drafted, but his draft was deferred several months in order to allow him to complete the murals. Working 20 hours a day, he completed them in June 1942 and went on to serve in the Army until 1945.

While in Germany he met his future wife, Heidi. A prize in 1946 from the Philbrook Art Center at Tulsa, Oklahoma allowed him to finance her trip to America and in 1947, they were married. After the War, Howe received a B.A. from Dakota Wesleyan and a M.F.A. from the University of Oklahoma. He taught in the Pierre public school system at Dakota Wesleyan College and in 1957 came to the University of South Dakota as Assistant Professor and Artist-in-Residence. In 1960 he was made South Dakota Artist Laureate. A year prior to his death in 1983, Howe's work was treated in a retrospective exhibit organized by the Oscar Howe Art Center and the University of South Dakota Art Galleries. It traveled from South Dakota to the Thomas Gilcrease Museum in Oklahoma and the Heard Museum in Arizona. At a time when American Indian artists are receiving wide national and international acclaim, Howe remains a pioneer in the attempt to find expression for Indian ideas and culture and a leading figure in the successful effort to blend two cultural traditions into a visionary whole.

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

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

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet    Mobridge Auditorium    Item number    8    Page    3

As the Oscar Howe murals are less than 50 years old several issues concerning their exceptional significance must be addressed.

1. Level of significance

The murals have a state level of significance for their importance to the overall history of mural art in South Dakota. In addition, Howe was the state's artist laureate and had a national reputation as a painter who expressed his Native American culture in his work.

2. Property and significance

The Howe murals relate to several themes in mural art. First, as a graduate of the Santa Fe Indian School, Howe gains significance from his association with this historic institution and its revolutionary program of the 1930s which had a major impact on Native American art. Secondly, Howe's work can be seen within the context of Sioux Indian mural art, which dates from c1929 to the present. His work is an outstanding example of academic training being brought to bear on traditional art forms and myths. His success is evident in his stature and reputation as an artist. Thirdly, Howe's work represents one of the best examples of a WPA or government-assisted art project growing out of the Great Depression in South Dakota.

3. Perspective

See attached list of exhibits and publications.

4. Recent structures

Not applicable

5. Scholarly evaluation

See general section 8 essay.

6. Fragility

The murals are suffering from some cracking of the surface and from stains caused by leaking water. Generally, the City maintains the murals carefully. However, all mural art is inherently fragile due to the strain and stress of the wall surface and to rapidly changing tastes in interior decoration. While the Howe murals are in no immediate danger, they should be regarded as more fragile than his paintings and their protection is more important at this date.

7. Comparative value

See #2 of this page and the section 8 essay.



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

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

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet Mobridge Auditorium

Item number 9

Page 1

Gardner, Ray, et al., Mobridge: Its First Fifty Years, ed. Julius Skaug.  
Mobridge: privately printed, 1967. 250 pp. illus.

"Oscar Howe: Artist of the Sioux" pamphlet, Vermillion, South Dakota.

Pennington, Robert, Oscar Howe: Artist of the Sioux, Sioux Falls,  
South Dakota: O'Connor Commercial Printers, 1961. Illus., notes,  
appendices.

Dockstader, Frederick J., editor, Oscar Howe, A Retrospective Exhibition,  
Tulsa, Oklahoma: Thomas Gilcrease Museum Association, 1982.

Pipe, Rebecca, "The New Deal Art Projects: An Overview". MSS. State  
Historical Preservation Center, 1985.