

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only  
received SEP 5 1984  
date entered OCT 4 1984

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

1. Name

historic Litchfield Opera House

and/or common Litchfield Community Building

2. Location

street & number 126 N. Marshall Ave. N/A not for publication

city, town Litchfield N/A vicinity of ~~Congressional district~~

state Minnesota code 22 county Meeker code 093

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<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 type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" 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 Litchfield

street & number 126 N. Marshall Avenue

city, town Litchfield N/A vicinity of state Minnesota

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Meeker County Court House

street & number Sibley Avenue and Fourth Street

city, town Litchfield state Minnesota

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Statewide Survey of  
title Historic Resources has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1981  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Minnesota Historical Society—Ft. Snelling History Center

city, town St. Paul state Minnesota

## 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	N/A
<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 Litchfield Opera House/Community Building is a one-story, rectangular structure measuring 52 feet north-south X 107 feet east-west. This beautifully decorated Renaissance Revival building boasts many designs and patterns unique to its locality and surrounding structures. The soft yellow clay brick, manufactured locally, and layed in a running bond, contrasts with the red brick and red terra cotta patterns which accent two elevations of the structure.

An interesting aspect of the building's design, is that it is only finished on two sides, the south (side) and east (rear) elevations are void of any decoration. The front facade is divided into three bays, with the central or entry bay projecting slightly in front of the bays on either side. The lower half of the front facade is patterned in red brick which portrays a rusticated form and adds a sense of extra depth to the structure. The front windows, still have the original fanlights, but are now covered with energy saving panels. Red terra cotta, egg and dart molding; frames the spandrels above each window. The pattern is also present in the window arches and the pair of circles above each front window. Above the entry, plied ornament wreaths, with terra cotta and quarry cut stone arches, gives evidence of the building's cultural purpose.

The front facade is also highlighted by a trimmed and decorated pediment, which continues into parapets that square-off the building's front and side walls.

Modillion blocks run below the pediment as well as the cornice.

The north elevation is consistent with the front facade design. Major features include a Palladian window, common to Renaissance architecture. Fragments of a parapet that has been removed are evident at the roof line on this elevation. The windows on the north elevation display the original fanlight absent from the front elevation..

Little has changed on this stately building, only minor renovation has altered it since its construction in 1900. Sometime between 1930 and 1939 the interior of the building was remodeled to be used for city offices, which still remain today. Originally, the main auditorium floor was 50 X 60 feet; the orchestra pit and stage 50 X 36 feet. The seating capacity ranged from 600 to 1,000. The building was wired forelectricity, and 200 lightbulbs lit the interior. A large lobby, ticket and coatcheck rooms, plus spacious dressing rooms, provided comfort for performers and patrons. Balcony steps and the balcony itself are near their original state. Hardwood floors cover the terraced seating platforms, which rests above the front entrance. A full basement under the building is divided into storage and meeting rooms.

The building is located in downtown Litchfield and is surrounded by similar commercial and industrial buildings. The Opera House was built on the site of an earlier Opera House and once was the neighbor to a steam driven Merry-Go-Round, enclosed in a one-story frame building.

# 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** Built 1900      **Builder/Architect** Builder: N.P. Franzen, Architect: W.I. Towner

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

The Opera House has served the City of Litchfield for over eighty-three years. It has survived thousands of visitors, either reaping the benefits of its social functions or treading the halls to meeting places or information offices. The turn-of-the-century brought many changes to Litchfield. A committee of businessmen organized in 1899, recognized the need for expanding meeting places and theatrical performances. They wanted social cohesion and interaction between the citizenry and decided a new town hall was needed to replace the obsolete one constructed in 1871. The building was paid for by the Township of Litchfield, which owned the lot on which it was erected. Completed in November 1900, the structure cost the citizens \$12,000. The evening of November 8th marked the opening of the new building and the opening of "The Marble Heart", starring William Owen, the first of many operas and performances to be presented from the stage. In June 1911 the City of Litchfield purchased the building from the township. Town meetings were held in the spacious auditorium. People cast their ballot here on election days. Men and women enlisted for military service here. Major decisions effecting the community were decided here. About fifty years ago the building was remodeled for use as city offices, new movie theatres had long since emptied the opera house. Today the building houses a variety of civic offices and organizations. Litchfield senior citizens meet here, so do the Girl Scouts, the Draft Board has a home here, and so does Community Education. Public officials and the Police Department occupy some of the rooms.

The Litchfield Opera House is historically significant in the fact that the building has been a focal point in the community continuously for more than 83 years. First as a theatre, providing a place for social intercourse for Litchfield citizens, and now supportively as administrative and community service headquarters. The building is also a well preserved example of Renaissance Revival style architecture, rare in Litchfield and Meeker County.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Souvenir Program of the Litchfield Opera House, November 8, 1900.  
Litchfield News Ledger (newspaper) Nov. 8, 1900.  
Litchfield Saturday Review, November 10, 1900

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property Less than one acre

Quadrangle name Litchfield North

Quadrangle scale 1:24 000

UMT References

A 

1	5	3	8	0	0	0	4	9	9	8	0	10	10
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

Legal Description: Lot 1, Block 66 - Town of Litchfield

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

state None code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title James A. Szevich (and Brian C. Pease, 415 E. Third St., Litchfield, Mn. (612) 693-6169)

organization The House Detective date November 15, 1983

street & number 454 N. Smith Avenue telephone (612) 222-8160

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 State Historic Preservation Officer

date

8/24/84

For NPS use only

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

[Signature]  
Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the  
National Register

date

10-4-84

Attest:

Chief of Registration

date