

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

DEC 12 1988

National Register of Historic Places  
Multiple Property Documentation Form

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REGISTER

This form is for use in documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Type all entries.

A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Iowa Opera Halls and Opera Houses: The Evolution of Stage-Focused  
Structures in Iowa, 1850-1925

B. Associated Historic Contexts

N/A

C. Geographical Data

The distribution of opera halls and houses is generally statewide.  
There are in excess of 350 surviving opera houses or halls throughout  
the state.

☐ See continuation sheet

D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Planning and Evaluation.



Signature of certifying official

12/5/88 ✓  
Date

Iowa Historical Society, Bureau of Historic Preservation  
State or Federal agency and bureau

I, hereby, certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

Signature of the Keeper of the National Register

Date

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**E. Statement of Historic Contexts**

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Discuss each historic context listed in Section B.

Refer to attached document.

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**F. Associated Property Types**

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I. Name of Property Type Utility Hall, Opera Hall, (Grand) Opera House

II. Description

See Continuation Sheet, Section F-II, Page 1

III. Significance

See Continuation Sheet, Section F-III, Page 1

IV. Registration Requirements

☒ See continuation sheet  
Sec. F-IV, Pg. 1

☐ See continuation sheet for additional property types

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### G. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

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Discuss the methods used in developing the multiple property listing.

☒ See continuation sheet  
Sec. G, Pg. 1

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### H. Major Bibliographical References

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☒ See continuation sheet  
Sec. H, Pg. 1

Primary location of additional documentation:

- ☒ State historic preservation office  
☐ Other State agency  
☐ Federal agency

- ☐ Local government  
☐ University  
☐ Other

Specify repository: SHPO

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### I. Form Prepared By

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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## Introduction

Opera Houses and Halls are significant for their contribution to the cultural life of Iowa's communities (Criterion A), and that contribution is treated in this multiple property analysis document, entitled "Iowa Opera Halls and Opera Houses: Evolution of Stage-Focused Structures in Iowa, 1850-1932." Individual opera houses and halls are further eligible for their particular significant associations with historic community figures (Criterion A).

The period of significance dates from the onset of a significant live theater presence in this state, linked to the earliest rail and river connections, and terminates with the demise of this theme in 1932, when a multitude of factors resulted in the displacement of live stage by motion pictures and stage-focused theaters ceased to be built. The geographical limits of the context are the present-day boundaries of the State of Iowa. There are some 350 surviving halls and houses which are scattered in every size of community, representing an estimated fifty percent of the historic period opera house population.

Opera halls and opera houses were important to the growth of Iowa communities because of the educational and social functions which they housed. Yet not much attention has been paid them by historians; nor have they fared any better with architectural historians. Much has been written about the State's courthouses and libraries, but little mention has been made of the structures which helped shape and were shaped by the culture of Iowa's cities and towns for over fifty years. Opera houses played a part in the development of the State and cannot be overlooked, especially now, when few remain.

This nomination is concerned with those structures used for live entertainment which were specifically designed for the presentation of drama ("stage-focused" (Allen, p. 26)). Names for these structures varied; some were called theatres or auditoriums, but most were called opera halls or opera houses. Throughout this paper, the words "an opera house" will be interchanged with "a theatre." "The theatre" refers to the theatre industry, which includes "legitimate" theatre and other forms of drama, such as vaudeville. The reason no distinction will be made between the legitimate theatre, minstrel shows, vaudeville (also known as music hall or variety), and other stage presentations is that opera houses in Iowa offered all forms. A theatre company might play one night, a variety bill the next night, and a high school musical the following night.

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Also included in this theme are those structures which were used for live entertainment at one time but were converted to motion pictures. Not included in this theme are structures which were constructed for multiple purposes, i.e., utility halls built in towns where a theatre already existed, fraternal organization complexes, college and university theatres, convention centers, chautauqua buildings, turner halls, and exposition pavilions. These were not designed and built with the commercial presentation of stage shows and drama in mind. Utility halls are included because they generally preceded opera halls and houses; other multiple purpose structures were not as instrumental in the development of the opera hall/opera house types. The time span covered is from 1850 to 1932.

Field experience, contrary to the available secondary literature, argues strongly that the majority of smaller opera houses or halls were mixed use facilities, and were indeed not truly primarily "stage focused" in their everyday use. This truism serves to partially undermine the proposed typology inasmuch as houses of this sort ("opera hall") cannot be readily further distinguished. They simply offered second story halls with minimal elaborate decoration, had flat floors and moveable chairs, and this basis building type was constructed over a broad period of time. Similarly, there is some evidence that the temporal limits of the proposed typology are at best only generally useful. All forms of opera halls/houses appear to have been constructed throughout the period of significance and not in clearly distinguishable successive waves. There were however general successive property types having increasingly elaborate interior and exterior features.

It is intended to eventually add community hall and a movie house components to this nomination package. Such amendments would still require that the primary use of such a facility would have been that of live stage entertainment. It is not intended therefore to include ethnic halls, educational or religious halls, fairground or Chautauqua facilities, or the like under this theme. These would best be treated under their more direct and significant historical associations.

## Historical Overview

In the earlier days of settlement, the desire to make the frontier a "decent" place to live spawned churches and schools. Desire to make a town prosperous spurred campaigns to subsidize railroad companies, in the hope of becoming a stop on a line. Campaigners claimed that by having a station on a line population

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would increase, industry would develop, and local real estate values would rise (Atherton, p. 230). Finally, with the increase and availability of manufactured goods made possible by rail service, citizens sought to "raise [their town's] prevailing standards of taste" (Atherton, p. 126) as well.

There already existed some local thespian clubs and music groups, but with the advent of the railroad it was now easier for the more professional entertainers, theatre companies, and prominent lecturers to travel West (or East from California) and perform at stops along the way. "[T]roupes visiting California will find it to their interest to play Iowa and avoid long jumps" advertised one opera house manager from Ottumwa (Jeffrey's 6th ed., 1883-1884, p. 103). And so the small towns along the rails built buildings specifically designed to show off such attractions, buildings which would be an example of the towns' "level of culture and sophistication" (Allen, p. 421). They built opera halls and opera houses.

These structures were usually located on the main thoroughfares of a town, in the business district or close to it. One reason for this is that it was traditional for entertainment to be found downtown. A second reason is that sidewalks, street lights, and livery services were conveniently nearby for patron use. Third, since most opera halls and houses had offices and businesses on one or more of the buildings' floors, they needed to be adjacent to the business district in order to draw customers (Allen, pp. 236-237). And fourth, since they were central features of town life, they were centrally located so as to create a favorable impression of the town for visitors. The opera house was close to hotels and restaurants (if not next to or above them), and the railroad depot to make it noticeable and readily accessible to traveling strangers (potential patrons) and the theatrical companies which played in it.

While the presence and ornateness of an opera house was an indication of a town's progressiveness, the fact that it was called something other than "theatre" reveals the perjorative associations that the word then conveyed to small town sensibilities. For most people in small towns, the word "theatre" had a sinful connotation. The cultural pattern of early Iowa towns was dominated by a hard-working, "middle-class Protestant group given to religion and stern morality" (Atherton, p. 75). As the main proponents of the "cult of the immediately useful and practical" (Atherton, p. 113), such persons often scorned and condemned literature, drama, music, and art for cultivating impractical leisure skills which did not contribute

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to the family's economic growth. Actors were perceived to be (and sometimes were) idlers and drunkards who travelled from town to town, never settling down to make a "decent" living.

Another reason for the theatre's reputation of immorality could have been the composition and behavior of early American theatre audiences. In the east, audiences until the 1850's were predominantly male, except for the "women who used the theatre as a place of direct solicitation" (Henneke, p. 83), and often rough. "Respectable" women did not go to the theatre because of the vulgarity which they might encounter. Why then, were opera houses built, if the predominant attitude generally considered the dramatic arts evil?

One reason is that not everyone in town was a believer in, or an adherent to the dominant middle-class ideology. In addition to those on the lower rungs of the social ladder, there were "[v]irtually everywhere on the middle border...families which held substantial and respectable places in society without bowing to the [regnant] code" of ethics (Atherton, p. 73). Many of these families played cards, drank wine, went dancing and attended the theatre without guilt. Opera halls and opera houses were often sponsored by prominent businessmen. Some well-to-do business figure would build an opera hall or house in his business block and own it himself, or "give" it to the town to exemplify the cultural standards and pride of the local area (as well as his personal standards, affluence, and generosity!).

A more important explanation perhaps, is the great American desire for economic growth and prosperity, and the outward appearances of such success. As a result of post-Civil War leaps in industrial and agricultural development, American lifestyles began to change. Labor-saving machines created additional time for leisure activities, and older norms about how leisure time should be spent gradually relaxed. Strict rules governing behavior were "not allowed to interfere with the constant itch for bigness, growth, and numbers--in short, with progress" (Atherton, p. 83). Towns hoped to match the growing wealth of the cities and these "aspirations...made villagers conscious that they were almost as rural as the farmers" nearby (Atherton, p. 64). Thus, the urge for the adoption of city-like attributes (such as glamorous opera houses) which would mark the town's prosperity.

To gain the support of middle-class moralists, town "progressives" often advocated the educational benefits which the townspeople could reap from an opera house. If "teaching and



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preaching [are] more noble than the arts because they directly [promote] religion and morality" (Atherton, p. 118), then why not tout the "teaching" potentials of the opera house? In addition to drama, opera houses could be used for religious plays, recitals, and lecture series. But deeply held beliefs change slowly, and most towns probably used the term "opera house" rather than "theatre" to appease the less liberal members of the community.

## The Road to Consolidation in the Theatre Industry

Prior to 1870, theatrical productions were performed by resident stock companies, a set of actors which performed a variety of plays "augmented usually by a visiting star" (Poggi, p. 3). Theatre managers were independent for the most part, owning or leasing the building and controlling actors, choice of plays, and booking the stars.

Gradually, due to media coverage of the stars, stock companies began to rely more and more on visiting stars; the public wanted to see (in person) the stars they read about in the newspapers and saw in the magazines. Stars began to ask for more money, a bigger part of the gross for each performance. To meet public demand for the popular stars, stock company managers cut salaries to lesser actors and reduced the amount of money spent on costumes and scenery. The stars then began taking their own supporting actors and scenery with them as they travelled from performance to performance; they could make more money travelling with a company than alone.

After 1870, this practice of stars taking their own troupe of actors with them evolved into what is called the combination system, a system in which a play (or series of plays) is rehearsed by a single company and then performed around the country. By 1880 this system dominated the dramatic arts in the United States. Of course the system was greatly helped by the burst in railroad construction at this time, and the rise of advertising in the marketing of a product. The combination system made it possible for a national market to consume a standardized product. People all over the country saw the same shows.

The combination system led to a separation between the production of plays and the housing of plays. No longer were the local theatre managers in charge of both aspects of the production. The combination system led to the birth of the

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theatre manager as businessperson. Theatre managers were now men and women who were interested in theatre for the sake of profit. Those who dealt with the performance part of the theatre business became producers. They were responsible for the actual production. This separation created the booking agency, a middle person so to speak, which linked the local managers with the producers. Through the booking agent, producers booked their shows in theatres across the nation.

Since producers did not have much mobility (due to an entire company of actors with their luggage, scenery, costumes, etc.), they had to pay huge rail fares. So in order to pay for travel from say, Chicago to San Francisco, they had to play the small town "one-night stands" en route. It was more profitable to make a little money playing the towns on the way to the next major stop than to simply jump from city to city.

Local theatre managers then began grouping together, sending one representative to Chicago, New York, or San Francisco (mainly New York) to do the booking for a string of theatres in an area. This way they had more bargaining power than a single theatre did; they could book the better shows and thus bring in more revenues. This was the birth of the "circuit," a succession of one-night stands between two or more major cities.

Booking agencies began to grow in power. By the 1890's two agencies controlled most of the theatres in the country. In 1896 they joined (but did not incorporate) to form the Theatrical Syndicate, a monopoly of the theatre industry based in New York. The Syndicate produced plays/shows and owned theatres as well as booked productions. They had exclusive booking rights for hundreds of one-night stands. They "could refuse to give a producer a route" (Poggi, p. 12-13) between two cities unless he/she played in some Syndicate owned theatres on the circuit, and they booked their own productions in their own theatres.

In 1905, the Syndicate monopoly was threatened by the Shubert brothers and a group of other independents who had incorporated to resist the Theatrical Syndicate. They too produced plays and owned theatres in addition to booking. "Unable to acquire suitable playhouses fast enough, the Shuberts began building their own" (Poggi, p. 17). Since they could not or did not want to play Syndicate theatres and they couldn't buy existing theatres soon enough, they built their own. "By 1907 the competition between the [two] had resulted in the construction of so many theaters that [both] were having difficulty filling [their] houses" (Poggi, p. 18).

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The effects of this building boom could have "trickled down" to Iowa. By researching the ownership of opera houses around the state which were built at this time, one could find out whether or not the Syndicate-Shubert competition affected opera house construction in Iowa, and to what extent the state was affected. However, since this is a general view of theatres/opera houses in Iowa, it is not possible to do such research at this time.

Similarly, the problem of filling houses beginning in 1907 could have prompted local managers to book more vaudeville (which became quite popular at this time) or possibly even go out of business. Were any Iowa theatres closed at this time because of the inability to fill the houses? Again, at this time it is not possible to say.

## Hard Times for the Opera House

Opera houses continued to be built until the First World War, but most were constructed from 1880 to about 1910. The opera house reached its popularity peak around 1900, remained fairly popular until World War I, and began to decline after the War. There are several reasons for this decline.

According to Jack Poggi, one reason is the increase in the expenses involved in producing and travelling with a play. He cites cost increases due to World War I inflation, and an "80% increase in transportation costs between 1913 and 1928" (Poggi, p. 36). Because of these increases, it was more expensive to stop at all the one-night stands between major stops. Producers asked local managers for a greater percentage of the gross instead of cutting production costs. Thus, small town theatres could not make enough in an evening to meet the producer's demand for a larger share; they had smaller seating capacities, and stood to lose more because of that. The one-night stands located on direct routes between major cities "survived longer than others, because producers could stop there without increasing their railroad fares" (Poggi, p. 36).

One might ask why managers did not raise their admission prices to accomodate for the reduction in their share of the ticket sales. The answer is that although ticket prices had changed little since the turn of the century, the opera house was drawing fewer people. With higher ticket prices, even fewer would patronize the opera house. The cause of the drop in attendance? The arrival of motion pictures.

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Moving pictures had been in existence since the 1890's, but it was not until The Birth of a Nation in 1915 that film became an art form in its own right. Naturally, the "first movies to reach a town were generally shown in the Opera house" (Dunbar, p. 671). Ticket prices for motion pictures were lower than the prices for live performances in the opera houses, and the first patrons to leave "live" theatres were those with less income. The decline in opera house attendance started during the War and gathered momentum from the end of the war onward.

Thus, because of lower profits or simply because their particular town was now being skipped by theatrical companies, managers increasingly turned to film. The live performances which remained, or became, popular were vaudeville and dramas based on literature (novels, etc.). These were shows which were better seen live than on the screen. Because the audiences began going to the dramas and comedies shown on the screen, small town managers converted to vaudeville and other kinds of performances which Hollywood could not produce as effectively.

A third explanation for the fall of the opera house is the rise of the school auditorium and gymnasium, built because of burgeoning enrollments and a wider variety in school curriculum (Dunbar, p. 672). School dances and presentations consequently moved from the opera house or hall to the new auditorium or gymnasium.

A fourth explanation is that just as better transportation had brought people and better entertainment to the towns, it gradually began to take people and entertainment away. With improved roads and automobiles it was easier to drive to the nearest city or larger town for shopping and a movie.

And finally, enter the radio. Now people could bring drama, music, and comedy into their own homes. No longer did they have to go out for it.

Of course, some opera houses offered live entertainment for years after the introduction of motion pictures, but most did not. In the 1920's live theatre had drawn back into the larger towns (particularly those on direct rail routes) and the cities. By 1930, it had shrunk to the major cities. Opera houses became homes for the Masons, Oddfellows, and Elks (Glenn). They became roller skating rinks, dance halls, and ware houses (Dunbar, p. 672), to name a few uses. Many were abandoned, condemned, torn down, and some remain.

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The State's remaining opera houses are significant in that they are living representatives of the various phases of Iowa's cultural growth. For those who lived between the day of the frontier and the day of industrialism in full stride, "the theatre...was in music, in elocution, and in painting, the source of the best cultural influence with which [they] could...come in contact" (Rusk, p. 439). The history of opera houses can tell one something of the morals, standards, and preferences of communities concerning entertainment throughout the various periods of Iowa development. One can also see in opera house history the general pattern of growth of Iowa towns, from mere frontier settlements to thriving population centers trying to imitate the culture and style of the big cities, to waning communities struggling to keep their individual identities. The opera house was a plaything of an industrial nation's people, a wonderfully exciting toy during childhood, but discarded during adolescence for faster, more mechanized, more modern novelties.

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ARCHITECTURAL CONSIDERATIONS:

Architectural design or style will not be applied to this thematic package. Opera houses in their facade designs naturally reflected contemporary tastes. Commercial fronts by their nature cannot be said to reflect a specific style, but rather embody a collection of stylistic components. An opera house nomination should therefore identify and inventory those components, and the survival of the historic facade elements should play a role in determining the integrity of the nominated resource.

UTILITY HALLS (1850-Late 1870's)

A series of building types evolved as the movement for entertainment facilities grew and flourished. The first structures used for live entertainment (other than courthouses, schools and churches) were usually general utility halls (1850's-late 1870's). These were "multi-purpose social halls...used for dances, lectures, sociables, and community meetings as well as...theatrical productions" (Allen, p. 27). The hall was generally on an upper floor of a multi-storied commercial building.

Exteriors

Utility halls were usually rectangular in plan and utilitarian in appearance; the utility halls in Allen's study for which structure dimensions are known ranged from 50 to 90 feet in length and from 20-75 feet in width. Stylistically utility halls did not stand out from other commercial structures. They were vernacular in their exterior styling, with elements of Greek Revival or Italianate, ranging in number and kind of such elements. Most were of either brick or wood frame construction, but some may have been wood with an iron facade painted to look like brick or stone. In some locales authentic stone were used. Utility halls had gabled roofs (with false fronts), hipped roofs, or flat roofs behind their cornices.

The ground floor of the building was often a business, such as a store, hotel, saloon, or some kind of office. Entrance to the hall was through the first floor business (the single stairway located within) or independent of the business. In the latter, the stairway could have been between two or more first floor businesses or on the outside wall of the structure.

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## Interiors

Inside, the hall was a rectangular room 45 to 105 feet in length, 30 to 75 feet in width, and 12 to 30 feet in height (based on data from Allen). They had flat floors, removable seats, and small stages (Allen, p. 45); the largest utility halls could have had stages up to 40 feet wide and 30 feet deep (based on data from Allen), but these numbers are small compared to opera house stages 60 feet wide and 40 feet deep (Allen, p. 408). Utility halls afforded few theatrical accessories, mostly in the form of rolled drops and shutters or wings for scenery (Allen, p. 109). Orchestra "pits" were no more than narrow sections roped off from the audience.

The auditorium's capacity was probably between 150 and 700 persons. With that many people, fumes from the gas fixtures, and typically poor ventilation, the atmosphere in the utility hall was rather close. Heating most often came from several stoves placed strategically in the room, but the temperature during winter performances was inconsistent. With only windows to facilitate the flow of fresh air, summer performances were often unbearable.

Such halls usually did not have rooms specifically designed as dressing rooms, but instead doubled storage rooms or closets as dressing rooms when needed. Larger utility halls had dressing rooms but these were still small and spartan in comparison to what would come later. Neither did they contain restrooms, or lobbies to accelerate emergency exiting. Sight lines were not good because of the flat floor and acoustics were no better.

Utility halls were routinely remodelled (Allen, p. 114), as demand for greater theatrical sophistication and audience comfort rose. Rather primitive box seats were made available, and the stage or a portion of the auditorium floor was raked to improve poor sight lines. Some advanced halls were constructed with ticket booths and balconies in them, but most were not. To increase the number of seats utility hall owners enlarged the room or installed cramped balconies. Anterooms could have been added at the head of the stairway or perhaps a ticket booth.

As for interior ornamentation, utility halls had little compared to the playhouses which followed them. Early halls and minor halls most likely had unadorned wall and ceiling surfaces and plain woodwork; later and larger halls may have had some plaster moldings and frescoing. Most interior decorative work as well as most scene painting was probably done locally (Allen, p.

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108-109). Since utility halls date from an early period of Iowa history, few are thought to remain today.

OPERA HALLS (Late 1860's-Mid-1880's)

Exteriors

The second kind of structure used for live entertainment was the opera hall (late 1860's-mid 1880's), which was "stage-focused" (Allen, p. 26), but could still be used for other social occasions. Opera halls ranged in size and decoration from those which were more like general utility halls to those which more closely resembled opera houses. For the most part, opera halls were larger than utility halls (up to 135 feet in length and 100 feet in width (based on data from Allen)), although they still occupied upper story locations in commercial buildings, had movable chairs, and were (originally) lighted by gas (Allen, p. 113). Seating capabilities ranged from 500 to 1,200 people.

Of the structures Allen studied, most opera halls were found to have been "constructed in communities of less than fifteen thousand" people (Allen, p. 179). They were usually found in buildings which formed a business block; occasionally they remained separate from a business block, yet still within the business district. Unlike general utility halls, opera halls were more distinguishable from other commercial buildings. They were usually more highly decorated than utility halls, and neighboring structures too; they stood out as entertainment facilities where utility halls had not.

As for exterior styling, opera halls were much more likely to be of a particular architectural style than utility halls. They represented a greater number of architectural styles than utility halls had; there were probably more opera halls than utility halls built in the Second Empire style, for example. The function of the structure became more specific as communities became able to support increased luxuries in entertainment. Naturally, towns wanted to display such improvements, with the result being more and "higher" styles in architecture.

The architectural styles most common to opera halls in Iowa were Italianate and Romanesque. Like general utility halls, the kind and number of features of an architectural style varied from opera hall to opera hall. Naturally, some opera halls were virtually indistinguishable from utility halls, but on the average, they had more decorative features such as pendants,



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turrets, and geometric designs in brick, wood, or metal. They were also more likely to be distinguished from other buildings by a pediment containing the words "opera house" or "opera hall." Sometimes the entrance was housed in a projecting pavilion which was crowned by the pediment. Another telltale characteristic of the opera hall was the band or orchestra balcony directly above the main entrance, whether or not it was actually used for outside performances.

Building materials used for opera halls included wood and brick like utility halls, but the addition of stone was more common for opera halls than for their predecessors. Iron was more frequently used for opera halls structurally. Opera hall roofs varied depending on the style used, but since the cost of the building was greater than that of a utility hall, the roofing materials were more likely to be slate or metal shingling, as they were better looking and more fire proof.

### Interiors

Opera hall auditoriums were usually rectangular in shape, but larger than that of a utility hall, up to 120 feet in length and 90 feet in width (based on data from Allen). Where utility halls had flat floors, opera halls usually had flat parquets but raked or tiered dress circles. Orchestra "pits" were larger, but not yet sunken as would happen in later houses. This division of the auditorium into sections (parquet, dress circle, boxes, balcony/gallery) was one of the major distinctions between utility halls and opera halls. It clearly illustrates the narrowing of the functions of such structures as Iowans placed growing importance on theatrical entertainment.

With larger auditoriums builders began to install balconies and galleries, in imitation of the well-known Eastern theatres. The terminology for this feature of the auditorium varied from theatre to theatre. The balcony is the first tier of seating above the main floor of the auditorium (above the dress circle); the gallery is the tier of seating above the balcony. The balcony could have been called the gallery, the first balcony, or the family circle. The gallery was often termed the second gallery, the second balcony, or the family circle.

In general, the gallery was home to blacks, lower class spectators and rowdy boys. From the late 18th century onward, the gallery carried a "lower class" connotation and the term "family circle" was employed to convey a more positive image of

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the establishment to the middle class and upper-middle class theatre-goers (Henneke, p. 81), which the management wanted to attract. Galleries often had their own entrances and exits, perhaps to prevent gallery patrons from mingling with the "respectable folk" who sat in the parquet and dress circle.

Opera halls usually did not have both a gallery and a balcony. Most had a balcony but no gallery (Allen, p. 180). Smaller halls had smaller balconies, and vice versa. The shape of the balcony varied from those which were simple spans straight across the back of the hall, to those which curved around three sides of the room. The latter varied from a U-shape to a horseshoe-shape to a bell-shape.

Support for the gallery and balcony usually came in the form of iron pillars or posts from below. But as technology advanced, builders were able to use iron (and then steel) trusses in construction, thus reducing the number of vision-obstructing posts below or eliminating them altogether. Another alternative was to suspend the gallery and balcony from the walls or ceiling by means of steel cables or rods, again reducing the need for pillars.

The stage, being the center of activity in opera halls and not the added attraction it was in utility halls, grew in size as well. Stages could accomodate more scenery than before, but wing and drop scenery running in grooves was still the norm (Allen, p. 180). Some stages even had a number of traps built into them to heighten the excitement of the performance. While there were certainly opera halls with stage dimensions no greater than those of a utility hall, the enlarged opera hall stages could have been up to 65 feet wide and 40 feet deep (based on data from Allen).

Although utility halls may have had one or two theatre boxes, such additions to the auditorium were for the most part introduced to Iowa by opera halls. Boxes were small, private rooms made up of three walls with a door in the rear, or simply sections of seating separated from others around them by curtains or brass, wood or iron railings. The large opera halls, those which were almost opera houses, may have had what were called "loges" or "na celle" boxes as well. A loge is a box in which "the front section of the lowest balcony [is] separated from the rear section by an aisle or railing" (Allen, p. 479). A na celle box is a circular or elliptical protrusion from the wall of the auditorium "which resemble[s] the car suspended from a balloon" (Allen, p. 479).

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Boxes were often placed in the proscenium opening or just outside, on either side of the stage. In later years proscenium boxes were discontinued because as stages grew deeper, it was difficult to see from such a vantage point; proscenium boxes became the least popular seats in the house (Grose et. al., p. 440). Boxes were also have been built into the dress circle, and even at the forward corners of the gallery.

The number of boxes was most likely an even number, to maintain symmetry. It was as low as two or as high as ten, depending on the size of the opera hall. The number of people which a box could seat varied between theatres and within a theatre itself. Small opera halls had only two boxes seating four people or so, located in the front corners of the room. (Some had no boxes at all!) Large opera halls, on the other hand, offered a variety of boxes for patrons to choose from: family boxes seating up to sixteen people to loges seating only four, all at various spots in the auditorium.

Utility halls were usually reached by way of a single staircase, which created problems for a quick exodus in an emergency, and some opera halls were no better. But on the whole, opera halls provided more (and wider) entrances and exits from the auditorium. The typical arrangement consisted of a ground floor devoted to shops and/or offices with the main opera hall entrance in between. The second floor was given to business offices and the opera hall. Opera halls could also have been on the third or fourth floor, with the floors below occupied by businesses and the theatre's "support service" offices.

At the top of the main stairway was the lobby, a new development. The size of the lobby varied, of course, according to the number of people the auditorium could hold, but most opera halls did not have large enough lobbies to accomodate a full house of patrons in an emergency (Allen, p. 180). Many opera halls did not have lobbies per se, but had receiving areas somewhat like large hallways, which might have been shared with the occupants and clients of the other businesses on that floor. And too, some opera halls may have had small lobbies which patrons entered from a communal hallway.

One could purchase tickets at the ticket booth which was probably situated near the main entrance stairway, either at the top or the bottom of the stairs. Ladies' and gentlemen's "retiring" rooms were usually adjacent to the lobby area, if the opera hall had them. Stairs to and from the gallery were probably located either just off the "lobby" or just inside the

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ground floor entrance to the hall, at the bottom of the main stairway.

"Support services" included the manager's office, an office for the director (if there was one), an apartment for the manager's family (unusual) (Allen, p. 149), and the theatre storage rooms (for scenery, properties, miscellaneous items).

The addition of the dressing room as a component of the theatre design also accompanied the opera halls in Iowa. Rooms specifically intended for the putting on and taking off of theatrical wardrobes and make-up were first included in some utility halls, but opera halls were the first to make them the rule rather than the exception. The largest halls had more dressing rooms than the small halls, and they had dressing rooms with good lighting and comfortable furniture. Dressing rooms numbered from two to twelve, depending on the size of the establishment, and were located just off stage, under the stage across a hall from the stage entrance, or on the floor above or below the auditorium.

To amend the utility hall problem of poor air circulation, opera halls were often built with a domed ceiling or a flat ceiling with a dome in the middle. The dome facilitated the removal of "foul" air; the air rose to the dome where flues discharged it from the auditorium. Some opera hall auditoriums had windows which could be opened, but others, being located within a building, did not. In either case, fresh air was still brought in from the outside by means of a series of air ducts placed around the room.

Furnaces were usually placed in the basement of the building, providing heat to the whole building through ducts and registers; some opera halls had stoves throughout the auditorium like utility halls. Steam heat was also a possibility, in which case the boiler was placed in the basement and radiators were installed in the upper floors.

On the whole, interior stylistic elements of opera halls were greater in number and kind than those in utility halls. More attention was paid to the feeling the auditorium might convey to the audience, and thus decorations were often installed on a grand scale. Interior styles could have been "Moorish," "Queen Anne," "French," "Oriental," or "Eastlake," but most halls had a more "Classical" look. Greek columns and pilasters, dentils and Roman arches were typical even in houses which claimed to be of other styles.

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Plaster medallions carved with likenesses of famous poets, authors, playwrights and beautiful women were popular. Scrolls, lyres or other musical instruments, and the masks of comedy and drama could have been placed around the auditorium as well. Pendants, brackets, and bullseyes were used in interiors, not just on exteriors, along with beaded moldings or moldings of airy floral garlands. Walls and ceilings were frescoed with murals of classical or romantic scenes, gardens or floral arrangements, and scenes with figures representing the muses, or such themes as science, agriculture, and liberty.

OPERA HOUSES (Late 1860's-1925)

The third type of building was the opera house, which Allen found to be "built most often in communities of over fifteen thousand" persons (Allen, p. 180). Opera houses typically followed opera halls, but not always. Some towns built opera houses without having had opera halls, and other towns continued to use their opera halls, without building opera houses.

This type, however, was not so straight-forward as the preceding two types. The opera house category was in essence made up of three sub-types, what Allen calls the "transitional opera house" and the "Grand opera house," and lastly, the regular opera house, a sub-type which was made up of those opera houses which were neither transitional nor grand. Each sub-type had unique characteristics and characteristics common to the other two.

Exteriors: Characteristics Common to All Sub-Types

In their exterior styling, opera houses were more likely to embody a particular style, even more so than opera halls. A wider variety of styles was probably exhibited within this type than in the previous two types. In addition to the still popular Italianate, opera houses could have been built in the Second Empire, Romanesque, Renaissance Revival, Neo-Classicism, Beaux-Arts Classicism, Sullivanesque, or Commercial styles.

During the 1890's the most popular architectural style was probably some form of Romanesque, especially Richardsonian Romanesque.

"For the most part exteriors were designed with arches encompassing doorways and windows, rusticated rough hewn stonework of red and brown sandstone, or dark brick laid in interesting patterns" (Allen, p. 414-415).

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Turrets and towers were pervasive and were most often placed in the center of the facade, capping a projecting pavilion, or on the corners of the building. At the turn of the century, however, there was a move away from ornate exteriors. The new look was a more austere Romanesque (Allen, p. 415). This was more popular in the smaller towns, which didn't have the economic/population base necessary for the construction of elaborate opera houses.

Opera houses were usually built of brick and had more stone and/or terra cotta used for exterior decoration. Facades were usually divided into three sections, sometimes five, with the middle part being the opera house entrance, as had been the practice in opera halls. This middle section was often projected outward from the main face of the building, and it was not unusual to find a porch or portico covering the entrance. Pediments were still common, but the use of a band balcony was probably not as widespread in the opera house category as it was in the opera hall type. These theatres were much larger than previous theatre structures, ranging from 100 to 200 feet in length and from 60 to 110 feet in width (based on data from Allen).

## Interiors: Characteristics Common to All Sub-Types

There are a number of things which the opera house sub-types had in common, as mentioned above. For instance, they probably shared similar entry ways. The doorways of the opera houses in Allen's study varied from ten to twenty-six feet in width, with at least one set of double doors. These entrances could open into a vestibule or directly into a lobby. The lobby was on the same level as the entrance, or on the same level as the rear of the auditorium. In some houses, the lobby was split into several levels.

Each of the sub-types had some sort of landing, foyer, or lobby area immediately outside the entrances to the auditorium on all levels, something which opera halls hadn't yet developed. This was a necessity since the number of people in attendance often rose above 1,000 in number and grand opera house audiences could exceed 2,000; with these large crowds, stairways could easily become clogged in an emergency. The main lobby of course, was the largest, with the balcony lobby second and the gallery landing third largest. (Some grand opera houses may have had two galleries, in which case the landing for the uppermost deck would probably have been the smallest.) Such spaces in transitional houses and regular opera houses were smaller than those of the

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grand opera houses, perhaps nothing more than a hallway at the rear of each section of the auditorium.

Within each of the sub-types, the location of the ticket office might have been at the entrance, in the lobby, or someplace in between, in a vestibule for example. One ticket office might have served both gallery spectators and main floor patrons, or those purchasing tickets for the gallery may have had to do so at their own ticket booth. Gallery entrances were often separate from those used by the rest of the house, and the gallery ticket office could have been found at the head or the foot of the gallery stairs, or in the gallery lobby. In some transitional opera houses, the ticket office may have been located in the basement of the structure.

The auditorium itself maintained the seating divisions ushered in by the opera hall, but grew in size. Like the opera hall and utility hall before it, the opera house auditorium's shape was rectangular. Opera house auditorium dimensions ranged from 60 to 135 feet in length and from 40 to 80 feet in width. The only real distinction between the transitional opera house and the other two kinds of opera houses was that transitional houses still had flat parquets. In each sub-type orchestra pits were now truly "pits". Dress circles continued to be tiered or raked, as did balconies and galleries. (In contrast to opera halls, transitional houses had balconies and galleries.) All the opera houses had theatre boxes too, but grand opera houses probably had more boxes and perhaps a greater variety of box styles (loge, na celle, etc.).

Where opera halls only occasionally had restrooms (called "retiring rooms" in more genteel establishments), opera houses made them the norm. Transitional houses, however, did not include lavatories in their restrooms, as grand and regular opera houses usually did. These rooms were placed just off the main lobby for those seated in the parquet or dress circle, and just off the balcony lobby for those seated there. Some playhouses had lavatories for the gallery as well, but it was not unusual for gallery patrons in some theatres to be required to visit outhouses.

In addition to restrooms with toilets, many opera houses sported parlors, one each for men and women. The parlor or receiving room for men was often termed the "smoking room." These, a general reception room (presumably for celebrations before or after a performance), a cloak room, the manager's office, and perhaps a director's office were most often located

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just off the main lobby. Of course, these were not standard features for all theatres, but one would expect most grand opera houses to have several of them.

The heart of the theatre is obviously the stage, and here too, the opera house had gone far beyond the opera hall. Prosceniums were larger and more embellished than they had been in previous theatrical structures. Based on data from Allen's study, opera house proscenium openings could vary from thirty to forty-five feet in width, and from twenty to forty feet in height.

Together, proscenium and stage gave the play, show, or opera being presented a quality never before seen in the state. Like the arch framing them, stages had also become more complex and exciting. Box sets, bridges\*, and flown scenery were now used in addition to traps, thus making performances much more

- \* "[P]ortions of the stage floor which ran horizontally and could be removed to allow for furniture, heavy scenery and large objects from below to be raised to stage level" (Allen, p. 268).

realistic. In the change from opera hall to opera house, shutters and grooves had gradually become obsolete. Transitional houses would have used shutters and wings sliding in grooves more than full-fledged opera houses would have.

Opera house stages ranged from forty to eighty-five feet in width, twenty to fifty feet in depth, and thirty-five to seventy-five feet in height (based on data from Allen). Grand opera houses would naturally be in the upper reaches of these ranges, with transitional houses and regular opera houses falling in the middle and lower parts of the ranges.

The enormous stages and more advanced scenery of the opera houses led to an increase in the height of stagehouses. Several transitional theatres, and virtually all of the grand opera houses, had stagehouses towering over the roofs of their auditoriums, containing "[f]ly areas of between fifty and seventy-five feet" (Allen, p. 408). Some theatres even had elevators installed so that heavy scenery, properties, and luggage could be raised from one level of the stagehouse to another (Allen, p. 214-215, and p. 309).

Accommodations for theatre performers improved along with those of the people who came to see them. Although the locations



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of dressing rooms remained the same, they were larger and more numerous (perhaps as many as twenty) than in the playhouses of earlier days, and indoor plumbing became the mode during the 1890's. The dressing rooms may not have been fitted on the scale of the rooms used by theatre patrons, but nevertheless, there was a rise to more expensive furniture, more mirrors, and better lighting and ventilation. Since the structures were larger, there was also more room for such things as actors' meeting rooms, orchestra rooms, and storage rooms.

The most important thing to note about the interior plans of opera houses is that "business enterprises...were planned around the theatrical function of the building and were placed in portions of the structure inessential to theatrical function" (Allen, p. 232). It was not unusual for opera houses to shelter some kind of shop or office in their front corners; these spaces were not vital to the functioning of the theatre, and because they were prime business locations, they were let as such. Although the corner businesses were not related to the opera house, they did not detract in any way from the structure's primary purpose. The building was known first for its theatre and secondly for whatever else was inside it. The opera house was not so much in the block with the tobacco shop, for example, as the tobacco shop was in the opera house block. On the other hand, the corner businesses may very well have been somewhat related, or complimentary to the opera house. They may have been music stores, soda shops, restaurants, perhaps drinking establishments.

Another improvement opera houses made over prior theatres was relatively consistent heating. Heat from huge furnaces circulated throughout the building via more modern ducts and flues. Furnaces resided in the basement of the opera house or in an annex separated from the main building. Some opera houses were heated by steam from the city steam plant. Although heating was better, cooling still remained much the same. Air circulation was immensely improved, but air conditioning was still a thing of the future. Windows and fans remained the primary sources of cooling.

After size, the most noted feature of an opera house was its lavishly decorated interior. Similar to opera hall interiors, styles such as "Oriental," Arabesque," and "Italian Renaissance" were probably widespread. However, classical elements such as columns, dentils and pilasters remained common. Also retained from the days of the opera hall were bullseyes, pendants, and beaded and garlanded moldings. Allen writes that

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"once a community or one of its benefactors was committed to the construction of an opera house, pride and commitment brought pressure to build solidly and expensively" (Allen, p. 238). And build expensively they did.

Marble, glazed terra cotta tile, and carved woodwork came into vogue, lessening the reliance on plaster. Polished marble was used for columns, pilasters, stairsteps, decorative balustrades and statues. Different colored marble slabs were laid in geometric designs for vestibule and lobby floors, as were glazed tiles. Exquisitely carved and inlaid woodwork became popular. Elegant rails and posts were often cast in bronze or brass. Iron railings and posts were nickel- or silver-plated, gilded or painted. Wood was also gilded. Everywhere, mirrors and gilt reflected light from enormous chandeliers, definitely creating the aura of a palace.

"Exterior design often had little to do with interior design," (Edwards, p. 310) and even though the trend after 1900 was toward plainer exteriors, opera house interiors continued to be glamerous. As could be expected, grand opera houses were much more elaborate than regular or transitional houses, both inside and out.

## TRANSITIONAL OPERA HOUSES (Late 1860's-Late 1880's)

The transitional opera house falls between the opera hall and the grand opera house in the typology. The transitional opera house overlaps the opera hall in construction dates, and it somewhat overlaps construction dates for the early grand opera houses. These structures were transitional because they were often more like grand opera houses than opera halls in size, decoration, and general atmosphere. Yet they still had not shed such opera hall characteristics as flat parquets, faulty accoustics and ventilation, and upper story locations in commercial buildings (Allen, p. 231).

The architectural styles which predominated in the transitional opera house sub-type were probably Italianate, Second Empire, and Romanesque. Transitional house exterior decorations were similar in kind to those of the opera hall, but greater in number. As for interiors, transitional houses were much more like grand opera houses than regular houses or opera halls. Even so, they were still not quite as splendid as the grand houses. Wood and plaster predominated more than marble and terra cotta.

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As mentioned above, the transitional opera house had the same interior components as the other two sub-types. However, the dressing rooms were probably not as large and sumptuous as those of the grand opera houses, nor were the parlors and restrooms. Stairways and aisles were narrower too.

## GRAND OPERA HOUSES (Early 1880's-1925)

The grand opera houses began to appear in the early 1880's, but most were probably constructed between 1890 and 1910. Of the grand opera houses, R. K. Allen says,

"With few exceptions, these were ground floor theatres, and all were planned exclusively for the presentation of drama. They were ornately magnificent and represented the high point in theatre building before the coming of motion pictures" (p. 26).

It is within this sub-type that one would expect to find the greatest adherence to a particular architectural style. Probably few grand opera houses were constructed in the Commercial Style because of that style's utilitarian look and grand opera houses were not utilitarian in nature. These structural fantasies would be most often found in the cities, but many towns certainly reproduced them to the best of their abilities.

Grand opera houses were more likely to be designed and/or built by well-known people in the theatre-building business. (Design and scene painting for the larger playhouses were no longer done locally.) They had the largest auditoriums, lobbies, restrooms, stairways, aisles, stages, dressing rooms, and fly spaces. Grand houses were the largest, most elaborate, and therefore, the most expensive theatres in the typology. In terms of materials used, design/decoration, construction methods, and audience comfort/safety, grand opera houses were definitely at the top of the theatre list.

## REGULAR OPERA HOUSES (1880-1925)

Regular opera houses were constructed between about 1880 and 1925. They were ground floor theatres, but definitely not grand opera houses. Because of the big time span, it is expected that there will be a wide variety in architectural style and

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degree of decoration. Those constructed after the turn of the century were more likely to be of the Commercial style than opera houses built before.

Regular opera houses were generally smaller than transitional or grand opera houses. They had smaller lobbies, auditoriums, dressing rooms, stages, and fly lofts. They may have had only one balcony and no gallery; perhaps they had both. If regular houses had both gallery and balcony, they were smaller than those of the grand and transitional houses. Regular opera houses seated from 300 to 900 people. They had restrooms, but they were smaller than in the other two sub-types, and not so elegant. Regular opera houses may have lacked parlors, coat rooms, theatre boxes, and offices other than the manager's. Later opera houses may not have had the traditional businesses in the front corners.

This sub-type was also characterized by less decoration than the other two sub-types. They were plainer on the exterior and in the interior. They utilized more wood and plaster than the transitional and grand theatres did. Compared to the grand and transitional opera houses, regular houses' wall and ceiling surfaces were relatively unadorned, and coloring may have been more subdued. The reason for this was that many of these opera houses were small town theatres, and small towns could not build on the scale of the larger towns and cities.

Safety Features

As opera houses developed from utility halls to true theatres, increased emphasis was placed on audience safety. People began to demand larger entertainment facilities; with this demand came the call for safer structures. The technology evolving at the same time helped theatre builders satisfy those requirements.

The old wood frame utility halls were fire traps and townspeople knew it from experience. So, one of the first steps toward safer theatres was the replacement of wood with brick, stone, or hollow brick. Later on, opera halls and opera houses began to use poured concrete. Some theatres covered as much wood as possible with metal, usually tin, and metal roofs gained in popularity too.

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Another improvement begun in the days of the later utility halls was the addition of more exits. Designers drew taller and wider doorways into blueprints, and they drew in more of them. Doors opened outward or hung on reversible hinges.

While opera halls made some changes for better safety, most came about with the opera houses. Some opera halls had taken advantage of iron pillars and trusses, but by the time opera houses arrived iron was cheaper and more readily obtainable. The Bessamer process (perfected after the Civil War) made extensive use of steel possible (Jandl, p. 86), just in time for use in opera houses.

Opera house galleries and balconies were supported independently by pillars and bases of their own. They were not reliant upon outer structural walls, or the parquet or dress circle floors for support. That way, if the main auditorium floor collapsed, it would not take the gallery and balcony down with it. Another use for iron was in the fire escapes which were bolted onto theatres' outer walls.

Other changes made for opera house patrons included: brick walls separating the stagehouse from the auditorium, furnaces or boilers separated from the rest of the structure by brick or stone walls, large lobbies and vestibules just outside the main exits from the auditorium, water hoses or hydrants in the building, and of course the genesis of ground floor auditoriums.

Around the stage area, even more care was taken. The reason for this is that props, rope, paint, and scenery of canvas and wood were always present on stages and each was very flammable. Scenery was brushed with a fire-retardant material, so that they would not burn (or not burn as easily) in a fire. Metal curtains may have been hung behind the proscenium, to separate the house from the stage if necessary (Allen, p. 251). Some opera houses used asbestos curtains instead of metal (Allen, p. 339). One opera house in Allen's study even had "a large reservoir [of water] located over the stage in case of fire" (Allen, p. 185).

As ground floor theatres became standard, the older, upper story theatres such as opera halls and transitional opera houses became outmoded in terms of safety. Because of new building codes specifying ground floor theatres, many opera halls and transitional houses were relegated to a lower status or abandoned (Glenn).

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Illumination: From Candles to Electricity

Early halls in Iowa probably used candles or kerosene lamps for house illumination until the 1860's, when gas light became the mode. Candlelight made for poor visibility, and gas alleviated this problem. However, for all its brilliancy, gas light still had flaws. The abundance of gas footlights, chandeliers, and wall sconces generated intense heat and fumes; it overcompensated for poor visibility by surrounding actors' faces with light, leaving no shadows (Grose and Kenworthy, p. 449). Shadows help express the mood of a play and gas lighting was so bright that it reduced actors' abilities to convey their nonverbal messages to the audience. But the biggest problem with the use of gas light (as with candles and kerosene) was that it was so flammable.

Kerosene continued to be used in some halls even after gas became the norm, but by the late 1870's those halls had made the switch to gas. Gas made lighting more efficient by means of a dimmer board (called a "gas table" (Barton)) which controlled all the lights in the house, and an electric spark could be employed so that all the fixtures could be lit at once (Allen, p. 229). Kerosene may have been better than candles, which would account for its longer period of use, but in the end, cheaper and cleaner gas rendered kerosene lamps obsolete in the theatres.

The year 1879 marked the birth of Thomas Edison's incandescent lamp. Prior to this, arc lights and lime lights could have been found in large theatres, but it is doubtful that electric lighting was used in Iowa before 1885. Electricity was preferable to gas, kerosene, and candles because stage and house lighting could be more easily controlled, and the intense heat and fumes of previous lighting forgotten. Even more important, the fire hazards of gas, kerosene, and candle flames were eliminated.

Gas was supplemented by electricity in the late 1880's and replaced by it about a decade later. (However, some halls in the smaller towns continued to use gas lighting until the First World War!) The reason that electric lighting did not supplant gas sooner than the late 1890's is that electricity was not reliable; the likelihood of a power outage was such that gas was needed as a back-up means of illumination. Of course, some theatres used their own electric generators, rather than depending upon the public power supply. More dependable power plants were developed in the first decade of the 20th century, and most theatres "went over" to electric before 1915.

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**Exterior Integrity Considerations:** These criteria apply only to associations based on Criteria A and B.

- 1.) **Location:** The property should be situated on its original site. If a structure has been moved historically, but no real change has been made in its setting then locational integrity may be waived. For example, a hall or theatre built in 1865 in one part of a commercial district and moved in 1893 to another location in the commercial area may still be eligible, because the structure's basic setting is the same. However, if the building had been moved to the outskirts of town, its setting has been destroyed and it may not be eligible.
- 2.) **Setting:** Setting is the relationship a structure has to other buildings in its immediate environment. Most halls and theatres were built in non-rural areas, in towns and cities. They were usually built in or near business districts, often within a block of buildings. Later theatres were more likely to be free-standing structures. Thus, for a theatre or hall to retain its integrity in terms of setting, it should have the same general relationship to other buildings in its area as it did during its period of construction.
- 3.) **Design:**
  - Plan:** Utility halls usually had rectangular building plans, as did opera halls and opera houses, although square shapes would not be unusual. Whether square or rectangular, the structure should retain its historic plan.
  - Massing:** Two buildings may have a rectangular shape yet have entirely different massings. One may be rectangular in a vertical direction (tall and narrow), and the other rectangular in a horizontal direction (short and wide). Utility halls, opera halls, and transitional opera houses tended to be vertically oriented. Grand and regular opera houses, as ground floor theatres, tended to be less vertically massed. Whatever the historical massing, vertical or horizontal, the building today should have the same massing.
  - Facade:** Ideally, of course, the hall or theatre should completely retain its facade. In reality, very few are pristine. Since changes HAVE occurred affecting the design of most theatres and halls in Iowa, the facade can be

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divided into three components which when compared in terms of integrity, can make judging total design integrity a little easier.

- A.) The first component is the publicly visible roofline. This includes cornice and pediment (if the building had a pediment), as well as the actual roof. The cornice and pediment should at least remain, because quite often they were two of the most distinctive and recognizable features of the facade. If the roof itself was not visible behind the cornice and pediment, changes in its shape may be allowable, provided they did not significantly alter the hall or theatre inside.
- B.) The second component of the facade is the ground floor, which includes the building's entrance or entrances and its storefronts (if it had stores in its front corners). Unfortunately, this part of the facade is the one most likely to have been altered. In order for the ground floor to possess the character which it did at the time of its construction, entrances and storefronts should retain their historic size (dimensions), lines, and placement in the facade. For example, recessed entrances or those that have been moved out take away an important part of the structure's historical character, and hamper integrity, as do storefronts which have been filled in.
- C.) The third component is comprised of the stories between the ground floor and the roofline. This part of the facade would probably have undergone the least amount of change. Here, what is of importance is fenestration and the band balcony, if the structure had one. If a hall or theatre did have a band balcony, then one should still be present. More important however, is the building's fenestration. Windows should be of the same size and placement as when originally constructed.

Amount and Style of Ornamental Detailing: There are a number of stylistic attributes which halls and theatres in Iowa might have represented. Those are sometimes classified under the following stylistic headings: Greek Revival, Italianate, Second Empire, Romanesque, Renaissance Revival, Commercial Style, Neo-Classical Revival, Beaux



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Arts Classicism, and Sullivanesque. Opera halls and houses however don't have "styles" but there are key features which help identify a structure as being influenced by a particular style. The following architectural guides are recommended for linking features and stylistic traditions:

John J. -G. Blumenson, Identifying American Architecture: A Pictorial Guide to Styles and Terms, 1600-1945. (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1977)

Marcus Whiffen, American Architecture Since 1780. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969)

Utility halls would be expected to possess fewer stylistic features than would opera halls or houses. Grand opera houses of course, had the most ornamental exterior detailing of all the types.

4.) Materials: These are the actual materials of which a hall or theatre has been constructed, the actual fabric of the building. Ideally, all of a building's original materials should remain, but such a building would be rare. Some parts of the structure will be original and others not. Of these parts, the walls are the most important. The materials comprising the side, rear, and especially the front walls should be historic materials. If the halls or theatre was built of brick in 1889, then most of the bricks forming the building today should be the same ones installed in 1889.

Next in importance is the fenestration. At least hoodmolds and sills should remain, if the original glass does not. As a rule, windows which have been partially or totally filled in, leaving only their outlines, are not allowable. However, partial in-filling may be allowable given that the infill is removable and most other features of the facade are intact.

If the building's historic doors are not now present, then the lintels or arches above the doors should be. In general, doors and windows should retain original design and organization, if the glass they originally held is no longer present.

As for the roofline, the cornice and pediment should be of historic fabric. The roof, however, may have been replaced and not affect integrity if it follows the basic design of the original roof and most other construction materials are present.

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If any part of a building has been covered or added to so that it is ineligible, but the original surface or features are undisturbed underneath and accessible, the building may be eligible when the coverings are removed. For example, an opera house now covered with metal siding may not be eligible, but if the siding is taken off and the original facade is relatively unscathed, then integrity may be retained and National Register eligibility restored.

## Interior Integrity Considerations:

If the building has no auditorium or "support service" components remaining, yet it is known that the structure was once a theatre, then its eligibility rests entirely upon exterior integrity. A structure which may once have been an opera hall, for instance, but is now apartments on the inside can still be National Register eligible by virtue of a well-preserved exterior.

If there are remaining interior characteristics which point to the building's theatrical function, integrity does not rely so much upon the structure's exterior condition.

## Organization of Interior Spaces:

Ranking of interior organization by importance, and within each organizational area, a ranking of components in order of importance:

--Entrance to theatre: main lobby, ticket office, any vestibule or landing area on the way into the theatre auditorium

If these things still exist, do they retain their original placement, dimensions, fixtures, general decorations/style?

--Stores facing the street, opening onto the street, comprising the main facade (important because of their impact on exterior appearance)

Stores should retain the same relationship to the rest of the building (the theatre and theatre entrance) that they did during the theatre's period of operation.

--Theatre: auditorium, stage, balcony, sloped or tiered floors, orchestra pit, box seats, gallery

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If these things still exist, do they retain placement, dimensions, fixtures, general decorations/style?

--Other: offices, public hall, whatever else the building housed

Fixtures: are railings, balustrades, seats, radiators/heat registers, lights (spotlights, footlights, chandeliers, wall sconces, etc.) still present?

Locational Patterns of Property Types:

It is not expected that one building type will be found in one particular region of the state. It is more likely that all types are relatively evenly distributed around the state. However, it is expected that the older structures will be found in the smaller towns; that is, utility halls and opera halls will probably be found in those towns. Larger population centers undergo more change and in these, probably only transitional and grand opera houses now remain. The oldest structures and earlier styles would be found in the Eastern part of the state, as that was the first to be settled.

Current Condition of Known Properties:

Unfortunately, without field investigation, it is difficult to tell what condition existing Iowa opera houses and opera halls are in, given the age and incompleteness of the files made for the 1978-1979 Office of Historic Preservation survey. It is known that few remain virtually unaltered, and that many are ineligible because their integrity has been seriously compromised. Just how many are altered but still eligible is not known, but it is the feeling of the Office that enough exist to warrant preparing a multi-property (thematic) nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

Basis for the Typology:

The opera house typology is based mostly on the functions of the structures. As the function of the buildings gradually narrowed from multiple uses to primarily the presentation of drama, specific building types emerged. The typology is also based somewhat on style, as there were decorative trends within the typology, just as there were for other building types. These structures moved from being utilitarian in exterior and interior appearance to being as ornate and exotic as possible on both the

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inside and the outside, to being rather plain on the exterior yet expensively attired in the interior.

The typology is based upon the original utility hall/opera hall/opera house typology created by Ned Donahoe. Reynolds Keith Allen expanded it to include utility halls, opera halls, transitional opera houses, grand opera houses, and great grand opera houses. This author has subsequently altered the typology to move from utility halls to opera halls, to transitional opera houses, to grand opera houses, to regular opera houses.

### Information Needs:

As mentioned above, further investigation is needed to assess the impact of the Theatrical Syndicate-Shubert Brothers conflict at the turn of the century. How many theatres were built in Iowa around 1905 as a result of this competition? How many were closed as a result of the surplus of theatres?

Also requiring further study are the influences of women, blacks, and ethnic groups on theatre building in Iowa. How did townswomen influence the decision to construct or not construct opera houses in Iowa communities? Nothing was found to reveal the existence of black resident stock companies or black-owned opera houses in the state. Did blacks build or operate theatres of their own?

Virtually no mention of theatres built by and for ethnic communities was discovered. The "Deutsches Lieberhabertheater" was active in Davenport between 1855 and 1910 (Schick, p. 104), but other than that, references did not address ethnic theatres or ethnic productions. How did Germans, Swedes, Norwegians, Czechs and others contribute to the building of opera halls or houses in the state?

Other gaps in information lie in the area of actual theatre construction. More investigation needs to be done of those opera houses designed by William Foster and Oscar Cobb, well-known theatre architects. Also of interest are the carpenters and fresco artists (such as Louis Syberkrop of Creston) who were regionally famous for the opera house interiors they created.

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MASTER LIST OF KNOWN EXTANT THEATERS,  
OPERA HOUSES, COMMUNITY HALLS IN IOWA

Town:	Type	NR Eligible	NR Listed
Ackley	regular	?	
Albia-King	"	yes	
Albia-Perry	"	?	
Alden	opera hall	?	
Alpha	regular	yes	
Ames	opera hall	no	
Anamosa	grand?	?	
Anthon	regular	yes	
Avoca	opera hall	?	
Baldwin	regular	yes	
Barnes City	"	?	
Beaman	"	?	
Blairsburg	"	yes	
Blairstown	"	no	
Blakesburg	"	?	
Blockton	"	?	
Bloomfield	"	?	NRHP
Bloomfield	"	?	"
Bonaparte	transitional	yes	
Bondurant	regular	yes	
Boxholm	"	?	
Breda	"	?	
Bristow	"	?	
Brooklyn	"	yes	
Burr Oak	hall	?	
Burt	regular	?	
Calmar-Nichols	"	no	
Calmar-Frana	"	?	
Camanche	hall	yes	
Carlisle	regular	no	
Carson	hall	?	
Cedar	?	?	
Cedar Falls	transitional/ grand?	yes	
Cedar Rapids	theatre	?	
Centerville-Orpheum	regular	no	
Centerville-Majestic	regular	?	
Central City	opera hall? regular?	yes	
Chariton	hall?	no	

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Chelsea	ethnic hall	?	
Clarence	hall?	no	
Clarinda	regular/ transitional?	?	
Clarksville	regular/ transitional	yes	
Clinton	?	no	
Clinton-Orpheum	regular/ transitional?	no	
Clutier	ethnic hall	yes	
Clutier-Hall	" "	yes	
Coggon	regular	no	
Colfax	"	no	
Columbus Jct.	regular/ transitional?	yes	
Conrad	regular	?	
Corning	regular/ transitional?	yes	
Corydon	regular	no	
Crawfordsville	"	?	
Cresco	transitional/ grand?	yes	NRHP
Cushing	regular	yes	
Danbury	transitional/ grand?	yes	
Dayton	regular/ transition?	yes	
Decatur City	regular	yes	
Decorah	regular/ transition?	yes	NRHP
Dedham	regular? hall?	no	
Deep River	regular? hall?	no	
Denison	?	?	
Derby	regular	no?	
DeWitt	regular	no?	
Dexter	hall	yes	NRHP
Dixon	hall?	no?	
Donnellson-Dickey	regular	yes?	
Donnellson-Krebill	regular?	?	
Dubuque-Majestic	grand	yes	NRHP
Dubuque-Grand	"	?	
Dyersville	regular/grand?	?	
Earlham	regular	?	
Eddyville	regular	?	

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Eldon	"	?	
Elkader	regular/grand?	yes	NRHP
Elkport	hall	?	
Elma	regular	?	
Essex	opera hall	?	
Eldridge Turnhalle			
	ethnic hall	yes	NRHP
Fairfield-Orpheum			
	regular?		
	theater?	no	
Fairfield-Victory			
	regular?	?	
Farmersburg	regular?	yes	
Fayette	regular	yes	
Fonda	regular	yes	
Ft. Madison	regular? hall?	no	
Garden Grove	regular	?	
Garner	regular?		
	theater?	no	
Garner	regular	?	
Garwin	theater? hall?	?	
Geneva	regular	no	
Goodell	hall?	no	
Gladbrook	theater? hall?	no	
Grand Mound	regular?	no	
Grand Rapids	regular	yes	
Gravity	"	yes	
Greene	"	no	
Greene-Capital			
	theater?		
	regular?	?	
Greenfield	regular/grand?	yes	NRHP
Greenville	regular?	?	
Grundy Center	theater	no	
Guthrie Center			
	regular	yes	
Hampton	transition?		
	grand?	yes	
Hillsboro	regular? hall?	yes?	
Hopkinton	hall	no	
Jamaica	regular	no	
Jefferson	regular? hall?	yes	
Jessup	regular? hall?	?	
Independence	opera hall	yes	
Iowa City	grand	no	
Iowa City-Englert			
	regular	?	

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Iowa Falls	transitional/ grand	yes	NRHP
Kellogg	regular	no	
Keokuk	transitional/ grand	yes	
Keokuk-Gibbons	regular	yes	
Knoxville	"	no	
Lamoni	regular/ transitional?	yes	
Latimer	hall	no	
Lenox	regular	yes	
Lisbon	regular/ transitional?	yes	
Low Moor	hall	no	
Lowden	regular	yes	
Luana	regular? hall?	?	
Lynnville	regular	yes?	
Madrid	"	yes?	
Malcom	hall?	no	
Manchester-Plaza	regular? hall?	?	
Manchester-Castle	post 1935	no	
Manly	regular	?	
Marion-Daniels	regular	no?	
Marion-10th	regular?	no	
Marion-7th	regular	?	
Marion-Garden	"	yes	
Marshalltown	"	no	
Mason City-Parker	regular/ transitional?	?	
Mason City-Wilson	regular/ transitional?	?	
Maurice	regular	yes	
Maxwell	"	yes	
Maysville	house	no	
Mediapolis	regular	yes	
Monmouth	regular? hall?	yes	
Monona	regular?	?	
Moravia	regular?	no	
Moulton	regular	no	
Mt. Pleasant-Union	opera hall	yes	



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Muscatine-Crystal			
regular	yes?		
Muscatine-Princess			
regular? hall?	?		
New Hampton-Auditorium			
regular?	yes?		
New Hampton-Theatre			
regular?	no		
New Liberty hall	no		
New Sharon theatre	no		
New Sharon-School			
hall?	no		
New Sharon Opera House			
regular	yes		
Newton theatre?	?		
Nichols regular	no		
Odebolt regular	?		
Ollie-Latoska "	?		
Ollie-Opera House			
regular	yes		
Onawa "	?		
Onawa-IOOF hall	no		
Onslow hall	no		
Osage regular	?		
Osceola "	?		
Oskaloosa "	no	NRHP	
Oskaloosa-Mahaska			
theatre	no	NRHP	
Ossian Opera House			
regular	yes		
Ossian-Bullard			
theatre ?			
Ottumwa theatre	no		
Ottumwa-Rialto			
theatre no			
Oxford regular	no		
Oxford Jct. ethnic hall	no		
Pella regular	no		
Perry grand?	yes?		
Pilot Mound hall?	no?		
Plano hall?	no		
Prairie City regular	?		
Prairie City theatre	no		
Randolph regular	?		
Redding "	yes		
Rembrandt "	yes?		
Remsen "	yes		

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Riceville	"	yes	
Ridgeway	theatre? hall?	no	
Ringgold	regular?	yes?	
Rodney	theatre? hall?	no	
Rock Rapids	regular	yes?	
Russell	"	yes	
St. Olaf	1939	no	
Salem	regular? hall?	no	
Salem-Rialto	regular?	yes	
Searsboro	hall?	?	
Sioux Rapids	regular?	yes?	
Smithland	regular	yes	
Solon	ethnic hall	no	
South English	IOOF hall	?	
Springville	regular	?	
State Center-Star			
	hall	no	
State Center-Manwaring's			
	hall	?	
State Center-Liston			
	regular	no	
State Center-Masonic			
	hall	no	
Story City	regular	yes	
Tabor	"	?	
Templeton	"	?	
Tipton	"	yes	
Toledo	"	yes	
Tripoli	:	no	
Truro	regular?	no	
Vining	ethnic hall	no	
Viola	hall	no	
Volga	regular/		
	transitional?	yes	
Wall Lake	regular	?	
Walnut	"	?	
Washington	"	no	
Waucoma	regular	yes	
Waukon	regular/		
	transitional	yes?	
Wesley	regular	?	
West Branch-Union			
	regular	yes	NRHP
West Branch-Macumber			
	regular	yes	NRHP
Westgate	"	?	
West Liberty	"	yes	

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West Union	theatre?	no	
What Cheer	transitional?	yes	NRHP
Whiting	regular?	no?	
Wilton	regular?	no?	
Winfield	regular	yes?	
Winthrop	"	?	
Worthington	hall	?	
Wyoming	regular?	no	

Key:

Types:

opera hall=opera hall  
opera house has three subsets:  
    regular=regular opera house  
    transitional=transitional opera house  
    grand=grand opera house  
theatre =building appears to have been primarily a single story movie  
          house (additional documentation needed)  
hall     =community hall, lodge hall (additional documentation required to  
          show primary use was live stage)  
ethnic hall=German or Czech fraternal/ethnic hall.

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## PRIMARY SOURCES

Cahn, Julius. Official Theatrical Guide. Issues from the years 1896, 1898, 1899-1900, 1907-1908, and 1908-1909.

[Cahn-Leighton?]. The Cahn-Leighton Official Theatrical Guide. 1912-1913.

Cahn, Julius; Hill, Gus. Theatrical Guide and Moving Picture Directory. 1921.

Cox, James S., ed. The Opera House Reporter. Estherville, Iowa: James S. Cox, Vol. 4, No. 27, 26 August, 1904.

Hill, Gus. National Theatrical Directory. New York: William Green, 1914.

Jeffrey, Jonathan B. Guide and Directory to the Public Halls, etc. of the Cities and Towns of the Western, Southern, and Middle States of America, 1st ed. Chicago: Jonathan B. Jeffrey, 1878, and subsequent issues with similar titles for the following years: 1879, 1883-1884, 1886, 1889.

The theatrical guides were helpful in gaining a sense of theatre and stage sizes, and also the size of the towns in which theatres were located. All the Cahn-associated guides were published in New York. The Opera House Reporter was useful in that it contained photos of some opera houses. Several more issues were investigated and found to be interesting but of no real use for a paper about theatre structures. This periodical contains mostly advertisements for travelling productions and scene painters. All primary sources are on file in the Office of Historic Preservation, Historical Museum, Capitol Complex, Des Moines, Iowa 50319.

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SECONDARY SOURCES

Academic American Encyclopedia. "Music Hall, Vaudeville, and Burlesque," by Robert C. Toll. 1985 ed.

General history of vaudeville and related comedy drama; nothing about vaudeville in the Midwest or about the structures which housed this form of drama.

Allen, Reynolds Keith. "Nineteenth Century Theater Structures in Iowa and Nebraska 1857-1900: A Classification of Selected General Utility Halls, Opera Halls, and Opera Houses as Described in Local Newspapers and Histories." PhD. dissertation, Florida State University, 1981.

Excellent source; title is self-explanatory; elaboration of theatre typology developed by Ned Donahoe.

Atherton, Lewis. Main Street on the Middle Border. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

Good reference for history of settlement and development patterns of the Midwest; general information about theatre in this region.

Donahoe, Ned. "Theatres in Central Illinois--1850-1900." PhD. dissertation, University of Illinois-Urbana, 1953.

Good source, could be more extensive, but the typology is valuable.

Dunbar, Willis Frederick. "The Opera House as a Social Institution in Michigan." Michigan History Magazine, October-December, 1943, pp. 661-672.

General history of opera house functions, decorations.

Edwards, John Cornwall. "A History of Nineteenth Century Theatre Architecture in the United States." PhD. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1963.

Informational, but emphasis is largely on the Eastern United States.

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Glenn, George. University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa. Telephone Interview by Tracy Cuning, Office of Historic Preservation, Iowa State Historical Society, 12 January, 1987.

General information; George Glenn and Richard Poole (of Briarcliffe College in Sioux City, Iowa) have made a reconnaissance survey of theatre structures in Iowa which will probably be published in the summer of 1987.

Gottfried, Herbert; Jennings, Jan. American Vernacular Design 1870-1940, An Illustrated Glossary. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1985.

Good book for those without training in architectural history. Very useful for general architectural trends, but not enough about theatres or opera houses.

Grose, Donald B.; and O. Franklin Kenworthy. A Mirror to Life: A History of Western Theatre. Chicago: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1985.

Good general history of theatre since Ancient Greece. Good source of information about scenery, stages, lighting; very little about "opera houses."

Harris, Cyril M., ed. Dictionary of Architecture and Construction. St. Louis: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1975.

Excellent reference for those with little training or experience in architecture or building construction, yet not too general. Title is self-explanatory.

Henneke, Ben Graf. "The Playgoer in America (1752-1952)." PhD. dissertation, University of Illinois-Urbana, 1956.

Very interesting work about the development of norms for audience behavior, although emphasis is on Eastern half of the United States.

Jandl, H. Ward, ed. The Technology of Historic American Buildings: Studies of the Materials, Craft Processes, and the Mechanization of Building Construction. Washington, D.C.: Foundation for Preservation Technology, 1983.

Good source of information about use of iron and steel in construction. Title is self-explanatory.

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Kidney, Walter C. The Architecture of Choice: Eclecticism in America, 1880-1930. New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1974.

Interesting, but contains only a cursory look at theatre architecture.

McArthur, Benjamin. Actors and American Culture, 1880-1920. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984.

Great book about the "love-hate" relationship between actors and their audience; unfortunately contains little about theatre in the Midwest.

Mahan, Bruce E. "At the Opera House." Palimpsest, 5 (November, 1924): 408-423.

Entertaining, but not much about the opera house structures themselves.

Poggi, Jack. Theater in America, The Impact of Economic Forces, 1870-1967. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1966.

Excellent source for the origins of the combination system and for the history of theatre in the United States from an economic point of view.

Rusk, Ralph Leslie. The Literature of the Middle Western Frontier. New York: Columbia University Press, 1926.

Informational in some respects, but mostly concerned with the states East of Iowa between the late 1700's and the mid-1850's.

Schick, Joseph S. The Early Theatre in Eastern Iowa. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939.

A better title would be "Theatre in Davenport, Iowa," as that is about all Schick discusses. Good history of theatre in that town, however, especially the German theatre.

Whiffen, Marcus. American Architecture Since 1780, A Guide to the Styles. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1969.

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Iowa Opera Halls and Opera Houses MPS  
Adams County and others

Date Listed

COVER

- SA 1. Corning Opera House
2. Deutsche Opernhaus
3. Steele's Opera House
- SA 4. Union Hall
- SA 5. Volga Opera House