

64500911

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Multiple Property Documentation Form**

This form is used for documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form (National Register Bulletin 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information. For additional space, use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

New Submission Amended Submission

A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

B. Associated Historic Contexts

(Name each associated historic context, identifying theme, geographical area, and chronological period for each.)

The Historical Development of Public Entertainment in Kansas, 1854-1955

C. Form Prepared by

name/title Elizabeth Rosin, Partner, assisted by Dale Nimz, Ph.D., Historian and Kristen Ottesen, Architectural Historian

company Historic Preservation Services, LLC

street & number 323 West 8th Street, Suite 112

telephone 816-221-5133

city or town Kansas City

state MO zip code 64105

D. Certification

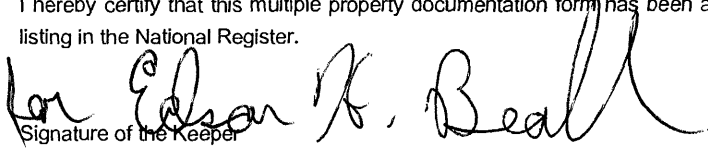
As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria.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


Signature and title of certifying official Christy Davis DSTIPO

Date 12/23/04

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

Date Feb. 9, 2005

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Multiple Property Documentation Form**

Page 2

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

Table of Contents for Written Narrative

Provide the following information on continuation sheets. Cite the letter and the title before each section of the narrative. Assign page numbers according to the instructions for continuation sheets in How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form (National Register Bulletin 16B). Fill in page numbers for each section in the space below.

	Page Numbers
E. Statement of Historic Contexts	
(If more than one historic context is documented, present them in sequential order.)	
The Historical Development of Public Entertainment in Kansas, 1854-1955	1-56
F. Associated Property Types	
(Provide description, significance, and registration requirements.)	
Community Halls	57-59
Opera Houses	59-62
Conversion Theaters	63-64
Movie Theaters	64-67
Movie Palaces	67-69
G. Geographical Data	
The State of Kansas	
H. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods	
(Discuss the methods used in developing the multiple property listing.)	70-72
I. Major Bibliographical References	
(List major written works and primary location of additional documentation: State Historic Preservation Office, other State agency, Federal agency, local government, university, or other, specifying repository.)	73-79

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 120 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section E Page 1

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

**HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC ENTERTAINMENT
IN KANSAS: 1854-1955**

SUMMARY

From 1854, when European-Americans first began settling Kansas Territory, through the mid-twentieth century, Kansans built theater facilities to provide venues for public entertainment. These were business enterprises that also promoted and enhanced the communities that supported them. Kansas theaters and opera houses are significant for their association with the historic context, "Historical Development of Public Entertainment in Kansas, 1854-1955," and are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for the areas of ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION, PERFORMING ARTS, SOCIAL HISTORY, and COMMERCE and under Criterion C for the area of ARCHITECTURE.

In addition to the performing arts, Kansas theaters provided facilities for community gatherings, dances, and lectures, fraternal and political meetings, educational activities, and athletic contests. They housed touring dramatic companies, musical concerts, minstrel shows, variety performances, and local talent productions.

As community institutions and as unique architectural building types, the development of theaters and opera houses directly corresponds to the construction of a statewide railroad transportation network in Kansas after 1864. As such, theaters and opera houses were important to community building in fledgling towns and reflect the historic settlement and development of Kansas.

The period of significance for buildings associated with the context, the Historical Development of Public Entertainment in Kansas, begins in the year 1854 with the opening of the Kansas Territory to settlement. The end date, 1955, acknowledges the fifty-year threshold for general National Register eligibility. The period of significance for each individual theater or opera house will vary to reflect its specific dates of construction and alteration.

Kansas theaters and opera houses associated with this context illustrate the types of buildings erected to house live performances and motion pictures. These functional property types evolved to accommodate changing forms of entertainment and technology. As discussed in greater detail in Section F of this document, five general property types represent the historical architectural development of Kansas

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section E Page 2

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

theaters and opera houses: (1) Community Halls, including second floor spaces in existing buildings; (2) Opera Houses; (3) Conversion Theaters; (4) Movie Theaters; and (5) Movie Palaces. Many communities constructed memorial auditoria after World War I. While these buildings hosted live performances among other civic activities, they are considered an eligible property under this Multiple Property Submission because they were publicly rather than privately funded and have a context that is unique from the commercial theaters built during the same time period.

The three decades following the Civil War that corresponded with the settlement of Kansas witnessed an era of unprecedented and widespread theater building in the United States. According to the estimate by critic William Winter in 1880, "there were approximately five thousand theaters in thirty-five hundred cities and towns across America."¹ Early Kansas communities first built business blocks, hotels, churches, and schools. By the time some leading citizen or group built a permanent facility specifically dedicated to public assembly and entertainment, the town usually included most of the businesses and institutions representative of a settled community. As seen in neighboring states, the earliest entertainment facilities in Kansas were not so much theaters as community halls that supported entertainment and other social activities.² Community halls had multiple functions. Civic leaders and entrepreneurs responded to the need for a space large enough for a popular gathering to enjoy drama and music, but also dances, commencement exercises, community meetings, fraternal lodge meetings, athletic events, and even military drills.

The community hall or town theater was a symbol of community success and permanence. As the types of available public entertainment grew over the years, Kansans constructed community halls, then "opera houses,"³ and later, in the early twentieth century, movie theaters. As Kansas towns developed, community halls served as a venue for live performances and later for movies. Although Kansas towns built second-floor community hall/theater/opera hall facilities throughout the period of significance, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century the trend emerged to build larger and more specialized

¹ Mary C. Henderson, "Scenography, Stagecraft, and Architecture," in *The Cambridge History of American Theatre, Volume II, 1870-1945*, eds. Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 487.

² Tracy A. Cunning, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form "Footlights in Farm Country: Iowa Opera Houses, 1835-1940," 5 March 1993, National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, Washington, DC; D. Layne Ehlers, National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form "Opera House Buildings in Nebraska, 1867-1917", 1988, National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, Washington, DC.

³ In the late nineteenth century the term "opera house" was generic and referred to a theater facility.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section E Page 3

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

facilities to accommodate traveling theatrical troupes, movies, and other entertainment. The larger opera house/theater building began to appear as a distinct entity on the nation's main streets along with retail stores and other commercial enterprises.

The opera house theater building type came from Italy to the United States in the eighteenth century. At this time in the major cities of the western world, the monumental opera house became the architectural symbol of high culture and, even in the nineteenth century, Kansas towns sought the prestige that even highly restrained versions of this building type brought to their communities.⁴ By the late nineteenth century, the term "opera house" enjoyed popularity in usage in preference to the term "theater," as opera was a respected art form rather than mere public entertainment. As early as 1865, theaters had a strong negative moral association with saloons and prostitution. As a result, the term opera house enjoyed universal usage as applied to Main Street entertainment venues in the Middle West (Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and the eastern farming fringe of Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas).⁵

Although touring companies seldom performed grand opera in Kansas except for limited tours in the 1880s, for the newly founded towns of Kansas, the opera house became an important symbol of civic pride, representing the cultural standards of the community in many ways. By the late 1870s, the local opera house conveyed civilization and cultural parity with eastern states and construction of an opera house marked full social and cultural development. On the plains and throughout small-town America, a town's opera house "was viewed as the crowning achievement in the community's social and cultural life, symbolic of civilization in the most exalted sense."⁶

At the end of the nineteenth century, thousands of American towns had some sort of facility with an auditorium to house theatrical performances, enabling acting companies to tour for decades presenting only one play or a limited repertoire. Then, several broad changes in the taste for popular entertainment and technology combined to essentially end live stage performance. Touring variety theater companies presenting specialty acts and musical comedies and revues began competing with drama companies. As a

⁴ Marvin Carlson, "The Theatre as Civic Monument," *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 1 (March 1988) : 24.

⁵ Lewis Atherton, *Main Street on the Middle Border* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), xvi, 136. During the period of significance, "theatre" instead of "theater" was the customary spelling. For consistency, the modern spelling will be used in this nomination statement.

⁶ Ronald L. Davis, "Opera Houses in Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas, 1870-1920," *Great Plains Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (Winter 1989) : 13.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 4

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

result, professional stock companies diminished as the New York Syndicate that financed the touring companies restricted most touring shows to the larger towns on the main railroad routes. With these changes, smaller towns could no longer afford professional entertainment. At the same time, the advent of silent films eroded the interest in live theater. After about 1906, the number of touring companies that performed in a different community every night declined sharply.⁷ The growth of the motion picture industry in the early twentieth century followed by the disruptive effects on the economy caused by the Great Depression of the 1930s effectively ended live stage performance.

Many nineteenth century community halls and opera houses fell into disuse as small towns constructed specialized community or school auditoriums and businessmen erected new motion picture theaters. In the areas of entertainment and recreation as well as social history, three twentieth century technological innovations — the automobile, radio, and movies — changed the available opportunities for public entertainment. Kansans could travel by motor vehicle to larger towns for the latest entertainment, making the local theaters that were dependent on the declining live theater circuit unprofitable. Radio offered nationally popular entertainment at home. Silent and then talking motion pictures offered inexpensive novel and exotic entertainment, producing greater profits for theater owners than live productions.

During the early twentieth century, developments in construction changed theater architecture, including the use of structural steel and reinforced concrete, the improved cantilever, the invention of the elevator, the introduction of the electric light, and the production of flameproof materials. These improvements made the buildings safer and more adaptable.⁸ Two years after the deadly Iroquois Theatre fire of 1903 in Chicago, a 1905 building code set standards for buildings of public assembly. By 1927, building codes for theaters were fairly uniform. Requirements covering the number of exits, the flammability of building and ornamental materials, the provision of easy egress to the street, and built-in firefighting equipment became basic elements of theater design.⁹

By the 1920s, the opera house was no longer an important community symbol or popular entertainment facility in Kansas. In the early decades of the century, owners of many Kansas community hall theaters/opera houses, especially those with ground-floor auditoriums, converted their facilities to movie theaters. Some second-story opera houses became meeting halls for lodges and social organization,

⁷ Gerald Bordman, "Theater," in *The Oxford Companion to United States History*, ed. Paul S. Boyer (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 777.

⁸ Henderson, "Scenography, Stagecraft, and Architecture," 490.

⁹ Henderson, "Scenography, Stagecraft, and Architecture," 492.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 5

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

skating rinks, etcetera. Others returned to their earliest use as a general community hall. In addition to the conversion of existing facilities into movie theaters, new movie houses, stimulated by the "talkies," began to appear in the late 1920s prior to the Great Depression. These modern theaters were developed through the late 1930s and then again after the end of World War II.

While not the only entertainment facilities in Kansas towns, opera houses and movie theaters symbolized a level of civilized development during the evolution of Kansas' communities. Activities in Kansas opera houses and theaters have significant historic associations in at least three areas — entertainment/recreation, the performing arts, and social history. Venues sharing ownership with a group of like resources, such as Lester Crawford's circuit of opera houses or the Dickinson Theater Group's chain of movie theaters, will also have significance in the area of commerce.

NARRATIVE DISCUSSION

THEATER IN KANSAS BEFORE 1870

Popular entertainment, such as theater, was an important part of the culture that the settlers of Kansas envisioned for their communities. In Kansas, the first phase of social activity and public entertainment began around 1854, following the establishment of territorial communities, when entertainers traveling by steamboat, wagon, and stagecoach appeared in the river towns of Leavenworth and Atchison, as well as the inland communities of Topeka and Lawrence. Following the progression of settlement, this phase lasted until about 1870 in the eastern part of Kansas and to about 1890 in the western counties.¹⁰

The evolution of theatrical entertainment in Kansas parallels the evolution of theatrical companies, in terms of their "size, origin, and permanence, the size and composition of [their] repertory, and the nature of [the] physical theatre."¹¹ During the early settlement period, itinerant companies composed of one or two families performed in Kansas communities. These ensembles seldom remained in a region for more

¹⁰ Homer E. Socolofsky and Huber Self, *Historical Atlas of Kansas* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972), 38-41.

¹¹ Douglas McDermott, "The Development of Theatre on the American Frontier, 1750-1890," *Theatre Survey* 19, no. 1 (May 1978) : 64-65. During the 1850s and 1860s, the term "theatre" was applied either to the building or the company of actors who performed there. However, for consistency, the spelling "theater" is used in this context unless citing a direct quote or formal name.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 6

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

than one season and rarely visited the same town twice.¹² The theater companies followed the path of early settlers as they spread across Kansas between 1854 and 1890. For instance, the family of George Burt worked a Kansas River circuit of Leavenworth, Lawrence, Topeka, and Fort Riley, while John Templeton developed a circuit among the Missouri River towns of Kansas City, Leavenworth, Atchison, St. Joseph, Council Bluffs, and Omaha.¹³

Before the development of a railroad network in the late 1860s, traveling companies depended on river transportation and, as a result, theater operated primarily as a summer institution. Because of the use of the river transport, New Orleans played a major role in the evolution of theater in the Midwest. Based on long practice and established personal relations, the theater community originated in New Orleans and followed the Mississippi River north, with major nodes in the established cities of Cincinnati, Ohio and St. Louis, Missouri. Recruitment for the first resident theater companies in Kansas came from these cities.¹⁴ Because river transportation was unreliable, resident theater troupes became established in communities with a population large enough to support the enterprise.

In the pre-railroad settlement period, resident theatrical companies in Leavenworth (the first metropolis of Kansas) as well as the area's other large river cities, including Kansas City and St. Joseph, Missouri, were only partially successful. As a result, these "resident" companies also occasionally traveled to other communities such as Lawrence and Topeka, Kansas to perform.¹⁵

Early Performance Venues

During a region's initial settlement period, each town needed a place of public assembly and used any available room with sufficient space for town meetings as well as performances. The earliest public entertainment facilities in Kansas were not so much theaters as they were community halls, large rooms that often occupied the second or third story of a typical main street commercial building. With a small footprint that was usually less than thirty-six hundred square feet, these open unspecialized spaces were flexible in design. Optional features included a raked floor, fixed seating, and a raised stage with associated proscenium, curtains, and scenery.

¹² McDermott, "The Development of Theatre on the American Frontier, 1750-1890," 64-65.

¹³ McDermott, "The Development of Theatre on the American Frontier, 1750-1890," 74.

¹⁴ James C. Malin, "Theatre in Kansas, 1858-1868: Background for the Coming of the Lord Dramatic Company of Kansas, 1869," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 23, No. 1 (Spring 1957): 200-203.

¹⁵ Malin, "Theatre in Kansas, 1858-1868" 196-197.

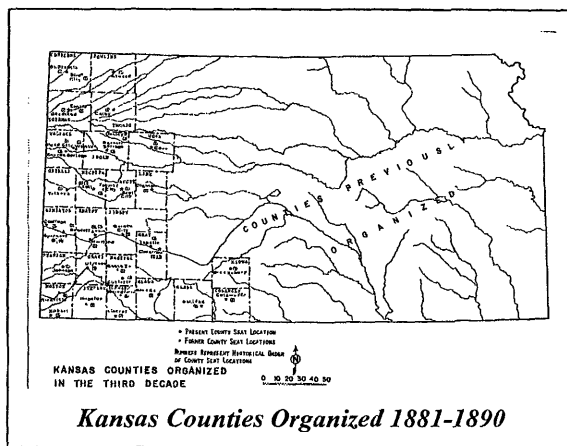
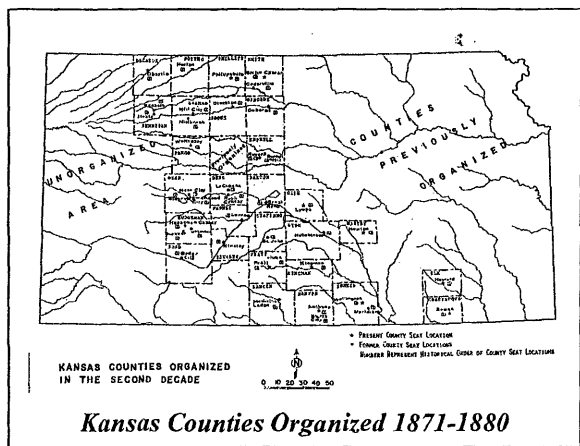
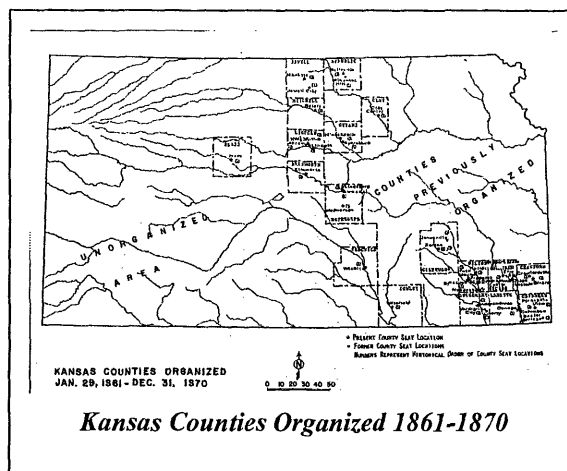
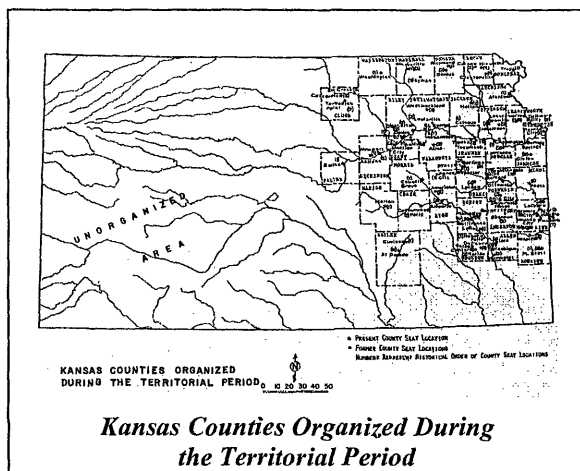
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 7

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

ORGANIZATION OF KANSAS COUNTIES¹⁶



¹⁶ Socolofsky and Self, 38-41.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 8

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

Leavenworth

Leavenworth hosted the first theatrical performances in Kansas. As early as November 29, 1856, the *Kansas Weekly Herald* called for "a TOWN HALL for Concerts, Theatricals, Public Meeting, etc."¹⁷ Between 1858 and 1868, four proprietors led acting companies in the community, each for approximately two years in succession.¹⁸ The four buildings that served as theaters in Leavenworth before 1870 were Burt's Union Theatre, National Theatre, Union Theatre, and New Union Theatre.

In March 1858, H. T. Clark & Company announced that they were "fitting up the large hall on the corner of Delaware and 3rd streets for a theatre" in a design that reflected urban aspirations. "The stage and scenery are in perfect order. The floor is elevated and good seats so arranged that those in the rear can be comfortably seated. About 500 persons can be comfortably seated."¹⁹ George Burt, an actor and scene painter, managed this pioneer theater and is credited as the architect of the Smith Theatre in St. Joseph, Missouri. Fire destroyed Burt's Union Theatre in May 1858.²⁰

An observer visiting Leavenworth in 1858 described a performance in a barn-like building in the heart of town.²¹ "The crowd sat on wooden benches all at the same level and listened to the three or four disreputable musicians who made up the orchestra. The stage and auditorium were lighted with candles; the floor of the stage creaked when the performers walked over it; and the scenery threatened to topple over."²² It was not until 1880 that Leavenworth had a new opera house appropriate for its status as a major Western city.

Atchison

During the territorial period in Atchison, Holthaus Hall and Pomeroy Hall hosted small gatherings. The principal space for early performances was Price Hall, a three-story brick building constructed in 1860 with a public hall on the top floor. Because of structural weaknesses, the owner of Price Hall reconstructed the building beginning in 1865 and, the following year, converted the third floor assembly room into space for theatrical productions. On January 31, the *Champion* reported that

¹⁷ Everett Newfon Dick, *The Sod-House Frontier, 1854-1890: A Social History of the Northern Plains from the Creation of Kansas & Nebraska to the admission of the Dakotas* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979), 71-72.

¹⁸ Malin, "Theatre in Kansas, 1858-1868," 16-17.

¹⁹ Malin, "Theatre in Kansas, 1858-1868," 12.

²⁰ Malin, "Theatre in Kansas, 1858-1868," 12.

²¹ It is unclear if this reference is to Burt's Union Theater or another performance venue in town.

²² Dick, *The Sod-House Frontier 1854-1890*, 71-72.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section E Page 9

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

John Price was "fitting up his splendid hall with scenery, drop curtain, etc., preparatory to the advent here of one of the finest theatrical companies in the West . . . as soon as it can be prepared, a Theatre will be opened in our city and kept up permanently. This news will be received with satisfaction by our people."²³

Although the permanent resident theater lasted only one season, theater in Atchison continued with occasional traveling troupes and other more varied types of entertainment.

Olathe

During the last week in January 1865, S. E. McKee, editor of the *Olathe Mirror*, praised the performances of the first touring company in the town and lobbied for a public hall.

Will not some of our enterprising citizens build a public hall for the coming seasons: there is no doubt that it would prove remunerative to the owner and at the same time confer a lasting benefit to the community. There is not a room in the county that will accommodate comfortably two hundred persons: and it is a crying shame that the citizens of the best county seat in the state have overlooked this matter so long."²⁴

Among the buildings used for entertainment in early Olathe were the Hayes Hotel, the J. B. Mahaffie house, the Presbyterian and Methodist Episcopal church buildings, Francis Hall, the town square, and American Hall. Josiah Hayes built American Hall in 1870. In 1880, he expanded the floor plan and added a story to transform the building into the Hayes Opera House, a three-story brick structure.²⁵

Lawrence

Early Lawrence had a succession of public halls, but neither a real theater facility nor a resident dramatic company. A pro-slavery group burned the first Liberty Hall on May 21, 1856. The replacement brick building burned during the Civil War raid led by William Quantrill on August 21, 1863. The owner rebuilt it for the third time in 1870 to serve as a community hall. Before the Quantrill raid, Miller Hall,

²³ Malin, "Theatre in Kansas, 1858-1868," 192.

²⁴ *Olathe Mirror*, 4 February 1865, quoted in Ricky W. Tyler, "Social Recreational Entertainments in Olathe, McPherson, and Garden City, Kansas from the Introduction of the Railroad to the Building of the First Opera House: A Narrative History" (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1995), 27. Tyler found that opera houses were built as business ventures and that each of the towns had a unique scenario leading to the construction of an opera house. See Tyler, abstract.

²⁵ Tyler, "Social Recreational Entertainments in Olathe," 56.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 10

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

which was on the second floor of a Massachusetts Street business building, was also an important meeting place in Lawrence. Miller rebuilt the hall during the winter of 1863-1864 after Quantrill's forces destroyed almost all of the downtown buildings.

Topeka

Topeka illustrates the dramatic growth of Kansas towns during the 1860s. From a village of less than eight hundred in 1860, it grew into a town of nearly six thousand by 1870. Popular entertainment in Topeka exhibited a cycle typical of Midwestern towns — amateur theatricals presented by local residents or performances by visiting companies of actors that occurred in churches, schools, or any suitable space, but usually second-floor halls in commercial buildings.

The first play offered in Topeka was *The Drunkard*, a morality play presented on April 2, 1858 by the Kansas Philomathic Institute, a society organized in 1855 for the self-improvement of its members through literary composition, music, and dramatic readings. Because of the territorial conflict over admission as a free or slave state and the Civil War, Topeka failed to develop a professional theater before 1869.²⁶

Wichita

Wichita was founded in 1869 and although it was not incorporated until 1872, the town had a theater during its first years of settlement. An early description of Lewellen's Hall reveals that the seats in the theater were "kitchen chairs placed at one end of the room, and a platform with a black draw curtain in front of it was the stage. Kerosene lamps provided illumination, and a blank wall furnished the background for the performances." The performance opened with a minstrel show presented by Hester's Colored Comiques.²⁷

The Proliferation of Touring Companies and Opera Houses After the Civil War

After the Civil War, the expansion of the national railroad network stimulated the construction of theaters and opera houses nationwide and dramatically affected the development of American theater. The westward expansion of railroad lines reoriented the entertainment industries to the cities of the northern

²⁶ William F. Zornow, "The Theatre in Topeka, Kansas, 1858-1883," *Journal of the West* 17 (April 1978) : 64-65.

²⁷ Patricia Ann Mather, "The Theatrical History of Wichita, Kansas, 1872-1920" (M.A. thesis, University of Kansas, 1950), 3. Mather identified three stages of development in Wichita associated with different types of entertainment and buildings: 1872-1890, 1891-1910, and 1911-1920.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section E Page 11

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

and eastern United States, such as Chicago and New York, and away from southern river cities, such as New Orleans.²⁸ The proliferation of theatrical venues across Kansas accompanied the widespread development of towns along the new railroad lines. As illustrated earlier, settlement of the central counties of Kansas did not take place until after 1870 and did not end in the counties in the western one-third of the state until 1890. As counties accumulated a critical mass of development and population, theatrical entertainment followed.

Kansas was predominantly a rural, agricultural state during this period. In 1865, only Leavenworth had a population of over ten thousand. By 1880, only three towns had populations exceeding ten thousand residents. In 1890, that number grew to six towns and by 1900, it grew to nine towns. Competition between towns was keen as agricultural trading centers developed near the expanding railroad network.²⁹

Population of Ten Kansas Towns: 1860-1890³⁰

	1860	1870	1875	1880	1885	1890
Leavenworth	7,429	17,873	15,136	16,546	29,268	19,768
Atchison	2,616	7,054	10,927	15,105	15,599	13,963
Lawrence	1,645	8,320	7,268	8,510	10,625	9,997
Topeka	759	5,790	7,272	15,452	23,499	31,007
Fort Scott	...	4,174	4,572	5,372	7,867	11,946
Emporia	...	2,168	2,294	4,631	7,759	7,551
Junction City	217	...	1,782	2,684	3,555	4,502
Salina	...	918	980	3,111	4,009	6,149
Wichita	2,580	4,911	16,023	23,853
Wyandotte (Kansas City after 1886)	...	2,940	4,093	3,200	12,086	38,316

²⁸ James C. Malin, "Kansas: Some Reflections on Culture Inheritance and Originality [1854-1905]," *Journal of the Central Mississippi Valley American Studies Association* 2 (Fall 1961) : 253.

²⁹ Kansas State Historical Society, Historic Preservation Department, "Kansas Preservation Plan: Study Unit on the Period of Rural/Agricultural Dominance (1865-1900)" (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1990, photocopied), I-27.

³⁰ Malin, "Theatre in Kansas, 1858-1868," 11.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 12

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

Although the Missouri Pacific Railroad reached Kansas City in 1865, there was no continuous rail connection between the Western Missouri and Eastern Kansas from the East until the completion of the Hannibal Bridge across the Missouri River at Kansas City, Missouri in 1869. In 1865, only 71 miles of railroad track crossed Kansas. By 1870, that number jumped to 1,234 miles of railroad track. This network included the Kansas Pacific Railroad, which crossed the state and reached Denver in August 1870, and the Santa Fe Railroad, which reached the western border of Kansas in the Arkansas River valley two years later. An important north-south rail line, the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad reached Denison, Texas in 1872 on a route that eventually linked with the ports of the Gulf Coast. This line connected with the Kansas Pacific Railroad at Junction City in central Kansas. By 1880, the state of Kansas had 3,104 miles of railroad track.³¹

The expansion of the railroad not only created more communities eager for performances, but also enabled the companies to travel during the winter months as well as the summer, creating a year-round entertainment schedule. As the network of railroad tracks crossing the country became denser, towns grew and prospered and theatrical circuits in the state entered a second phase characterized by greater size and stability.³² The companies now featured one to two dozen performers, including principal players with established theatrical careers and actors recruited from the towns in which they played.³³ The theatrical companies had a repertory of at least two plays and sometimes as many as three dozen plays.

This period also marked the introduction of the theater circuit that offered traveling shows to member theaters on a regular basis. Traveling by rail, dramatic troupes now originated from Chicago and New York rather than New Orleans.

The arrival of the James A. Lord Dramatic Company in Leavenworth in December 1869 reflected the reorientation of the region toward the railroad hubs in Chicago and New York. Led by James A. Lord and his wife, this company proved to be one of the most enduring. Active from 1869 to 1890, the Lord's circuit grew as the nation expanded and steadily extended west and south from Kansas into rural Texas.³⁴

³¹ Craig Miner, *Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State, 1854-2000* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 97, 103, 133.

³² Malin, "Kansas: Some Reflections on Culture Inheritance and Originality [1854-1905]," 253.

³³ Malin, "Kansas: Some Reflections on Culture Inheritance and Originality [1854-1905]," 253.

³⁴ McDermott, "The Development of Theatre on the American Frontier, 1750-1890," 74.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 13

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

The Western Star circuit of 1871 visited Leavenworth, Kansas City and St. Joseph, Missouri, and Omaha, Nebraska. J. A. Stevens of Kansas City, Missouri managed a theatrical company as well as a theater circuit. In 1872, he took his company to Topeka for an engagement to test the feasibility of including that town in the circuit. One year later, his Missouri River circuit, including Leavenworth and Topeka, Kansas; Omaha and Lincoln, Nebraska; and Kansas City and St. Joseph, Missouri provided billing for traveling dramatic companies.³⁵

During the post-war period, community halls continued to host theatrical performances, while many established communities began constructing opera houses. As in earlier years, these venues were typically located in two- or three-story wood frame or brick structures with commercial spaces or local government offices on the first floor.³⁶ An upper floor hall specifically designed for performances was the main feature of the building.³⁷ Their seating capacity reflected community needs and ranged from accommodating fairly small audiences to as many as six hundred to nine hundred patrons. Interior and exterior ornamentation reflected the size of the community and its economic circumstances. Opera houses in the larger well-established cities of Kansas were bigger and fancier than the facilities in smaller and newer towns.

Atchison

During the economic boom that followed the Civil War, the Atchison Turnverein, a German athletic club and social group, constructed a Turner Hall that opened in December 1870. The second floor of the two-story brick structure housed the public hall, which measured forty feet by seventy feet and had a sixteen-foot ceiling.

Fort Scott

The influence of the railroad on the expansion of theatrical entertainment across Kansas cannot be underestimated. The early development of theater in Fort Scott reflects the primary role of the railroad in bringing live entertainment to Kansas communities. Arriving in December 1869, the community's first railroad line, the Missouri River, Fort Scott, and Gulf Railroad revolutionized many of the town's activities, particularly public entertainment. Just before the railroad arrived, the owners refurbished McDonald Hall and erected "a fine stage." Leased to the National Theatre, the second-floor hall occupied

³⁵ Malin, "Theatre in Kansas, 1858-1868," 20-21.

³⁶ Malin, "Kansas: Some Reflections on Culture Inheritance and Originality [1854-1905]," 253.

³⁷ McDermott, "The Development of Theatre on the American Frontier, 1750-1890," 67; George Meltzer, "Social Life and Entertainment on the Frontiers of Kansas, 1854-1890" (M.A. thesis, Wichita State University, 1941), 138.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

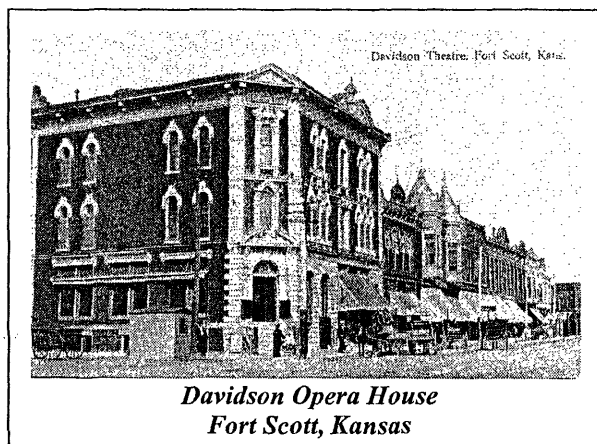
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 14

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

an annex to the Wilder House, Fort Scott's principal hotel and saloon.³⁸ Over the next three years, several traveling companies visited the town and despite the panic of 1873 and a deepening recession, the Davidson Opera House, a rival to McDonald Hall, opened in Fort Scott on January 1, 1875.³⁹

The new Davidson Opera House reflected the grand styling that often typified a community's first building specifically designed to hold a theater. It was a three-story red brick building with stone trim that reflected its late Victorian commercial block styling. A storefront occupied the first floor and an elevated doorway in the canted entrance led to the performance hall. Quoins flanked the doorway, which featured a broken pediment supported by oversized brackets. Ornate fluted pilasters extended up from the quoining to the pedimented gable. A turn-of-the-twentieth-century post card featuring the building reveals that it is not only a full story taller than its neighbors, it is also more ornately appointed.



Topeka

Following the Civil War, a number of new venues offered theatrical performances in Topeka. On November 28, 1869, a fire destroyed Museum Hall, a large community hall on the third floor of the three-story Ritchie Building. Union Hall, a community hall with a stage, occupied the second floor of a building constructed in 1868 on the west side of Kansas Avenue between Sixth and Seventh Streets. The Lord Dramatic Company performed in Union Hall in January 1870, December 1870, and January and February 1871. In the 1870s, investors erected another three-story building, Lukens Opera House, in North Topeka. Costa's Opera House opened in 1871 in an existing building with an evening of home talent entertainment. As a local newspaper reported, "Our bright little Opera House is finished, and the enterprising projector is the toast of our people . . . last night the most intelligent and brilliant audience

³⁸ James C. Malin, "Early Theatre at Fort Scott," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1958) : 32-33.

³⁹ Malin, "Early Theatre at Fort Scott," 55. The first theater at Fort Riley was described in the *Junction City Union*, 19 March 1870 as costing \$6,000 and having 800 seats. Meltzer notes in "Social Life and Entertainment on the Frontiers of Kansas, 1854-1890" (144) that in Hutchinson, the first theater was established in 1873 in a building previously used as a billiard hall.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 15

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

that ever has assembled in our city lent encouragement of their presence."⁴⁰ This hall offered musical performances, dances, and served as a meeting place for the Knights of Templar, the German Turner associations, and Grange meetings.⁴¹

GROWTH AND EXPANSION OF THE PUBLIC ENTERTAINMENT VENUES IN KANSAS: 1880S-1893

During the 1880s, the continued expansion of the railroads sustained the booming Kansas economy. Late in 1887, the Missouri Pacific Railroad completed another line to the western boundary of Kansas that provided an alternative route to Pueblo, Colorado. By 1889, the Rock Island Railroad completed construction of more than one thousand miles of track from the northeast to the northwest and into the southwest portion of the state. In 1888, almost nine thousand miles of track traversed Kansas. A drought that began in 1889 ended this expansion and by 1892, Kansas' population declined.⁴² The national financial panic, which affected Kansas as early as 1890, and ensuing economic recession effectively ended the boom period.

During the 1880s, as new communities sprang up along the railroad lines, the corresponding population growth in Kansas was tremendous. The 1865 census counted fewer than 150,000 residents in the state. In 1875, that number grew to roughly 500,000 residents and, in 1880, the state had a population of nearly one million. The 1885 tally of 1,268,530 Kansans revealed population growth of 900 percent in just twenty years. In 1888, Kansas' population peaked at 1,518,552, a total not reached again until 1904. For a time in the 1880s, Wichita was the fastest growing city in the United States.⁴³

During the same period, the expanding national railroad facilitated the growth of touring and repertoire companies. Besides connecting new settlements to a national network of production and distribution, the railroad brought new ideas and activities, including a higher level of culture represented by newspapers, libraries, and live entertainment, all of which flourished in railroad towns. As settlers claimed the borderlands, they sought tangible evidence of civilization and soon began building theaters and opera houses. In the late 1860s, the development of railroads made Kansas accessible to the professional

⁴⁰ *Topeka Daily Commonwealth*, 13 January 1871, quoted in John W. Ripley, ed., *Town Hall Tonight: A Pictorial History of Topeka's Theaters* (Topeka: Shawnee County Historical Society and Arts Center of Topeka, 1988), 8-10, 14, 16.

⁴¹ William F. Zornow, "The Theatre in Topeka, Kansas, 1858-1883," *Journal of the West* 17 (April 1978) : 64-65.

⁴² Miner, *Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State, 1854-2000*, 147-149.

⁴³ Miner, *Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State, 1854-2000*, 146.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 16

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

troupes that toured nationally and, by 1873, connected all the major towns in eastern Kansas. The number of traveling entertainers and theater companies grew to meet the audience demand, taking advantage of the new railroad access to far-flung communities.

Touring Theatrical Companies

Touring theatrical companies could make travel connections efficiently and economically. Initially, these companies performed light opera, minstrel shows, variety programs, music, and drama. The rapid expansion of the railroad network also stimulated the rise of the so-called combination system in which a single acting company (usually led by a star actor or actress) prepared one play and performed it around the country. This system first appeared in the 1860s and replaced the resident stock companies of larger American cities by 1880.⁴⁴

By the early 1880s, specialized one-act play combination companies competed with traveling dramatic companies that played a different town each night for a week or ten days. Because the specialized one-act play company could not afford one-night stands in small towns, its circuit usually included only the cities large enough to present a play more than once. The multiple-play traveling companies faced stiff competition from the combination companies in larger towns but not in smaller towns.

Railroad transportation enabled both traveling repertory and combination companies to reach larger audiences. Kansas towns along the major east-west transcontinental railroad lines attracted more traveling shows than towns on less direct routes. However, railroad transportation costs declined in the 1880s and early 1890s, enabling touring companies and other entertainers to visit Kansas' small towns as well.⁴⁵ In Kansas, the organization of theater circuits maximized box office receipts and minimized travel expenses for the specialized company.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ The combination system was so named because for the first time, the play, performers, scenery, and stage effects were "combined" into one traveling production.

⁴⁵ Cunning, "Footlights in Farm Country: Iowa Opera Houses, 1835-1940," E-5.

⁴⁶ Malin, "Kansas: Some Reflections on Culture Inheritance and Originality [1854-1905]," quoted in James C. Malin with Robert P. Swierenga, *History and Ecology: Studies of the Grassland* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 252-254.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 17

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

Grand Opera in Kansas: 1869-1890

During the 1880s, professional grand opera companies played a prominent role in the cultural life of the larger eastern Kansas towns. Not only was opera a popular form of entertainment, the ability to host an opera company was testament to the cultural amenities of a community. Most opera productions presented in Kansas at this time were operettas rather than grand opera. Initially, they featured a reduced chorus; small orchestras, perhaps only piano; and minimal sets. Later, they presented scenes or entire acts with sets and costumes, but rarely a complete opera.⁴⁷

Two kinds of professional traveling companies offered opera in Kansas — concert companies and full-fledged opera companies. From the 1870s to the 1890s, it was the custom for a prima donna — leading woman soloists such as Emma Abbott, Adelina Patti, and Clara Louise Kellogg — who had achieved stardom with a large company to ally herself with an impresario and form her own troupe or concert company, which toured not only the large cities but also the smaller towns that could not attract the large opera companies. Nearly all of the small opera and concert companies that toured Kansas in the late nineteenth century were in this category.⁴⁸

Concert companies presented individual acts featuring arias, duets, or other ensembles in concert style with piano accompaniment, sometimes performing entire scenes or acts with costumes, scenery, and staging. A typical troupe had three or four singers of different voice ranges and a pianist.

In the first opera performance in Kansas, a company headed by Italian tenor Pasquale Brignoli performed *Don Pasquale* in Italian at Frazer's Hall in Lawrence on May 29, 1869 and at the Leavenworth Opera House two days later. The company returned in the fall and performed in Lawrence on November 8 and in Leavenworth on November 9 and 10. Brignoli made several more appearances in Kansas over the next thirteen years. As the *Leavenworth Times and Conservative* reported on November 10, 1869, "Leavenworth appreciates a good opera troupe. . . . The taste for opera is as strong here as in New York."

Following a nearly four-year period without grand opera performances in Kansas, the English soprano Anna Bishop performed in June 1873 as part of a farewell tour across America. She gave concerts at

⁴⁷ Davis, "Opera Houses in Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas, 1870-1920," 18-19.

⁴⁸ Harlan F. Jennings, "Grand Opera in Kansas in the 19th Century," *Kansas History* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1980) : 69.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 18

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

Lang's Hall in Leavenworth, Corinthian Hall in Atchison, Costa's Opera House in Topeka, and Liberty Hall in Lawrence. Other opera companies toured Kansas during the 1870s.

Although several so-called opera companies performed in Kansas in the 1880s, only two of these troupes actually presented grand opera — the Emma Abbott Grand English Opera Company and Her Majesty's Opera Company managed by the British impresario James Henry Mapleson. Both of these companies traveled with chorus, orchestra, principals, and baggage to mount several full-length grand operas. During the 1880s, the following operas received at least one complete performance in the state of Kansas: *Carmen*, *Faust*, *Linda di Chamounix*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Mignon*, *Rigoletto*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *La sonnambula*, and *Il trovatore*. In addition, concert companies presented scenes from these operas as well as arias and scenes from several other operas.⁴⁹

During this decade, the large companies that presented complete productions of grand opera appeared in Kansas almost every year. Five cities were the center of opera activity — Atchison, Lawrence, Leavenworth, Topeka, and Wichita. Topeka was noted as the most active venue for opera and for all types of theater in Kansas. The Emma Abbott Company made appearances every year except 1881 and 1888. Her Majesty's Opera Company visited Kansas in 1885 and 1886. Their visit to Topeka on February 18, 1885 was a highlight of the decade for the community since it was the most illustrious opera company then on tour.⁵⁰

The popularity of opera was relatively brief. From 1887 through 1889, the frequency of opera performances diminished. In the 1890s, although Kansas theaters were as busy as ever, visits by professional grand opera troupes declined in proportion to other types of entertainment. There were opera performances in 1890, 1896, 1897, and 1899, but audiences did not fill the houses.

There were several reasons for the decline in public demand for opera in Kansas. The state experienced economic slumps following the brutal winter of 1886-1887 that destroyed stock herds in the West and the drought and crop failures that occurred in the early 1890s. A national economic recession from 1893 to 1896 exacerbated local conditions. Railroad construction in Kansas also peaked and declined during this period. More directly, in April 1887, the railroads substantially increased railroad freight and passenger rates. This resulted in the cancellation of many tours and even forced some opera companies to disband.

⁴⁹ Jennings, "Grand Opera in Kansas in the 19th Century," 70.

⁵⁰ Jennings, "Grand Opera in Kansas in the 19th Century," 76-77.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 19

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

In addition, low attendance figures indicate that public interest in opera declined. Opera, "that most expensive form of entertainment," still enjoyed support as far west as Kansas City, Missouri, but the heyday of grand opera in Kansas lasted only from 1880-1886.⁵¹ After 1890, opera singers occasionally performed concerts in Kansas through the end of the nineteenth century.⁵²

The Opera House

In the late nineteenth century, in an effort to lend the performing arts an air of respectability, the term "opera house" became a common euphemism for theaters and community halls used for various kinds of entertainment. This was important to the Victorian values emerging in communities across the country.⁵³ It was not uncommon for the buildings that housed performance venues and meeting halls to house saloons as well. Theater managers attempted to disassociate their theater from the saloon, promising as one Leavenworth manager did, "order and decorum" in their performances and attesting to the respectability of the acting personnel.⁵⁴ Even so, theater attendance was primarily composed of male patrons.⁵⁵

In addition, some churches were skeptical about plays presented by traveling troupes.⁵⁶ Across the nation, some ministers argued that theater corrupted its performers as well as its audience. In 1875, the Reverend James Monroe Buckley, a Methodist minister who edited the *New York Christian Advocate*, claimed that with the exception of Episcopalians, all Protestant sects in America officially condemned play going. The three most powerful denominations — Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian — officially disapproved of theater.⁵⁷ The most sweeping statement came from the Methodist Episcopal Church, which reflected small-town, middle-class values. In 1877, the church newspaper stated that a member could be reprovved or even expelled for patronizing certain amusements, including the theater.⁵⁸

⁵¹ Jennings, "Grand Opera in Kansas in the 19th Century," 98.

⁵² Davis, "Opera Houses in Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas, 1870-1920," 20.

⁵³ Jennings, "Grand Opera in Kansas in the 19th Century," 68.

⁵⁴ Malin, "Theatre in Kansas, 1858-1868," 52.

⁵⁵ Malin, "Theatre in Kansas, 1858-1868," 52.

⁵⁶ Lester M. Crawford, interview by George Meltzer, 29 July 1940, "Social Life and Entertainment on the Frontiers of Kansas, 1854-1890," 161.

⁵⁷ Claudia D. Johnson, "The Theatre's Qualified Victory in an Old War," *Theatre Survey* 25, no. 2 (November 1984), 194.

⁵⁸ Benjamin McArthur, *Actors and American Culture, 1880-1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 129-130.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section E Page 20

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

Despite this antagonism toward dramatic productions, there was great popular interest in Shakespeare and Kansans formed local clubs that presented plays and readings of his works. Moreover, in the 1880s, professional companies toured and usually presented three Shakespearean performances in one season. It was common "for an entire community to work together to stage a play. Everybody participated in one form or another — making scenery, serving as stage hands, directing, acting, and performing."⁵⁹

By the end of the century, the image of the entire acting profession markedly improved.⁶⁰ Performances by professional theater companies were often the most remembered performances and promoted an exchange of ideas with surrounding towns and other states as the traveling companies brought news, manners, and the latest fashions in speech and dress.⁶¹

The opera houses of the Great Plains staged far more drama and comedy than grand opera. In larger towns, a traveling stock company might appear several times a year, giving a different play every night for a week. Managers booked road shows traveling to or from Denver or the West Coast that included musical performances performed by orchestras, Shakespeare's plays, melodramas, comedies, classical theater, minstrel shows, and variety acts. Opera houses also served as community centers for dances, local talent shows, musical performances, drama club productions, recitals, Lyceum courses and lectures, political and religious meetings, graduation exercises, trials, wrestling matches, and traveling Chautauqua shows.⁶²

The largest number of companies on the road consisted of troupes of actors who took a single play out for a year's run across the country (combination system). Larger cities attracted actors and plays with a national reputation for runs of three or four days. Some smaller communities with strategic locations on rail lines between major cities such as Kansas City, Missouri; Omaha, Nebraska; and Denver, Colorado attracted these troupes for one or two days.⁶³ Even smaller cities such as Wichita hosted some of the most famous names in theater.

⁵⁹ Lester M. Crawford, interview by George Meltzer, July 29, 1940, "Social Life and Entertainment on the Frontiers of Kansas, 1854-1890," 162.

⁶⁰ Johnson, "The Theatre's Qualified Victory in an Old War," 206.

⁶¹ Meltzer, "Social Life and Entertainment on the Frontiers of Kansas, 1854-1890," 174-175.

⁶² Davis, "Opera Houses in Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas, 1870-1920," 22-23; Cunning, "Opera House Buildings in Nebraska, 1867-1917," E-6.

⁶³ Cunning, "Opera House Buildings in Nebraska, 1867-1917," E-12.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 21

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

As Kansas towns grew, residents demanded more professional and cultured entertainment similar to that which was available in the East or in regional cities such as Kansas City, Missouri. By the 1880s, theatrical touring companies traveling by rail visited Kansas towns of all sizes. Because professional companies required a performance venue large enough to hold a profitable percentage of the town's population, growing towns constructed such specialized facilities.



Often, business leaders pressed for the construction of an opera house because they believed that the facility would enrich the local economy and attract desirable settlers. They formed stock companies to finance the building when they determined that the community could support an opera house in addition to the churches, schools, post office, hotel, and newspaper.⁶⁴ In larger communities, wealthy individuals often financed construction of the opera house. In smaller communities, groups of citizens with subscribed shares might finance an opera house.⁶⁵

In the smallest, most rural communities, local governments helped finance and build community halls that hosted live performances and often included government offices as well. The opera houses/community halls built in Cuba, Cawker City, Kincaid, Waterville, and Oketo reveal that this trend continued in the rural parts of Kansas until World War I.

For example, in north central Kansas, Concordia prospered as the nexus of four railroads — the Union Pacific, Missouri Pacific, Santa Fe, and Burlington lines. In 1877, Joseph and Frederick LaRocque built a second-floor community hall; however, by December 15, 1881, the *Concordia Expositor* insisted:

Concordia wants and must have an opera house. Every town of any size has one and there is no reason why Concordia does not. Our rapid growth demands a large enough hall. Clay Center, Kansas, and Beloit, Kansas, have opera houses. We ought to be able

⁶⁴ Atherton, *Main Street on the Middle Border*, 137.

⁶⁵ Kansas State Historical Society, Historic Preservation Department, "Kansas Preservation Plan: Study Unit on the Period of Rural/Agricultural Dominance (1865-1900)," I-29.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section E Page 22

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

*to build one if they are, and we certainly have more use for one. We must wake-up or fall behind.*⁶⁶

Opera houses built in the last two decades of the nineteenth century continued to be important assets in the town-building process. They typically occupied the second or third floor of commercial buildings, often in one of the community's most imposing business blocks.⁶⁷ Generally, these were two- or three-story buildings of wood, brick, or stone construction that featured decorative wood trim, plate glass windows, and, often, entire cast-iron storefronts in popular architectural styles. Examples from this time period include the opera blocks in Mound City, Marquette, Moundridge, and Smith Center, as well as the Davidson Opera House in Fort Scott discussed earlier.



Communities of more than five thousand residents might have an opera house equipped specifically for performing arts. Communities such as Emporia, Garden City, McPherson, and Waterville had opera houses with permanent seats for one thousand to fifteen hundred patrons and stage sets designed to accommodate a variety of theatrical and musical productions.⁶⁸ However, these were exceptions. Most small-town opera houses offered seating for an average capacity of about five hundred and were little

⁶⁶ Peggy Doyen, "History of Theater, 1878-1925, in Concordia, Kansas" (M.A. thesis, Kansas State University, 1969), 1, 3.

⁶⁷ Kansas State Historical Society, Historic Preservation Department, "Kansas Preservation Plan: Study Unit on the Period of Rural/Agricultural Dominance (1865-1900)," I-29; Davis, "Opera Houses in Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas, 1870-1920," 13.

⁶⁸ McDermott, "The Development of Theatre on the American Frontier, 1750-1890," 67; Meltzer, "Social Life and Entertainment on the Frontiers of Kansas, 1854-1890," 138.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section E Page 23

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

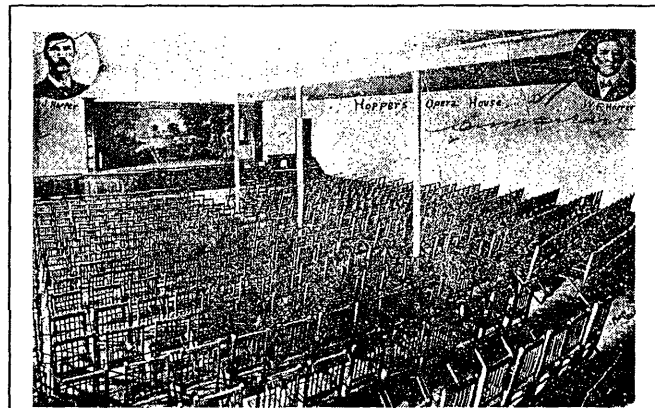
more than large rooms with a stage at one end and movable seating that could be re-arranged for different purposes and served a variety of community needs.⁶⁹

Until the mid-1880s when electricity became available, gas or kerosene lamps lit opera houses and limelight illuminated the characters on stage. Kansas opera houses were not necessarily comfortable at this time. The theatrical season began the first week of September and ran until late May or early June and basement furnaces provided steam or hot-water heat, causing frequent complaints about the heat or the lack thereof.

Interior design and furnishings varied greatly. Some contained one or two balconies, box seats, raked auditorium floors, permanent seating, and ornate walls and lighting fixtures. Others, such as Hopper's Opera House in Cimarron, had plain walls of painted plaster and straight wooden chairs. Only the larger houses provided dressing room spaces. Most opera houses in Kansas did not have fly lofts for scenery, but used roll drops and sliding wings for scene changes.⁷⁰ The form of the building revealed the sophistication of its scenery-changing system. The raised block at the rear of the Opera House in Mankato suggests the presence of a fly loft, while the flat roof of the Powhattan Opera Block suggests that this theater employed a simpler system.



*Opera House
Waterville, Kansas*



*Hopper's Opera House
Cimarron, Kansas*

⁶⁹ Cuning, "Opera House Buildings in Nebraska, 1867-1917," E-13.

⁷⁰ Jennings, "Grand Opera in Kansas in the 19th Century," 67-69.

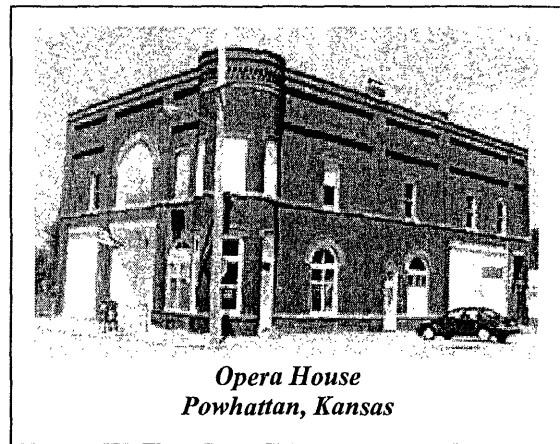
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section E Page 24

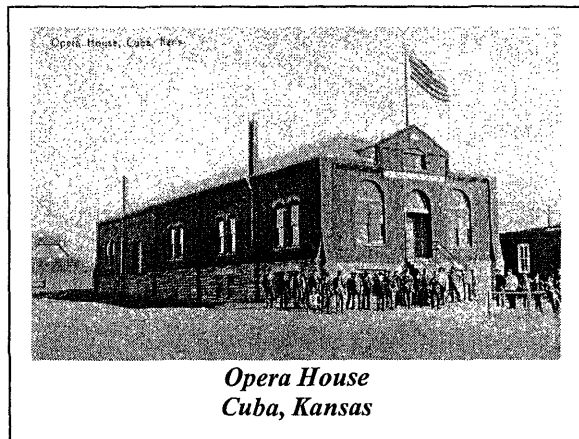
Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

Fire was the greatest hazard to opera houses and many burned during the years from 1870 to 1920. The frequency of these events rebutted the claims of having the latest fireproof construction and fireproof scenery.⁷¹



Cuba

The circa 1884 Cuba Opera House is an excellent example of a stand-alone theater building constructed by a local government as a community hall at the end of the nineteenth century. The form of the building resembles a contemporaneous schoolhouse and features a rectangular plan with a central entrance in the



symmetrical front facade and a hipped roof with a gabled dormer rising above the front slope. The building has a raised limestone foundation and red brick walls and features a subtle corbelled cornice on the front and side walls. Pilasters and chimney flues divide the sidewalls into bays, each containing a pair of arched window openings. Fenestration on the front of the building features pairs of one-over-one light double-hung sash windows topped by a single three-pane fanlight. A similar fanlight is above the doorway. The substantial construction attests to the community's investment in the building.

⁷¹ Davis, "Opera Houses in Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas, 1870-1920," 15, 17.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section E Page 25

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

Emporia

Emporia was a medium-size town strategically located on the Missouri, Kansas, and Texas Railroad and branches of the Santa Fe Railroad in the 1880s. In April 1881, a group of citizens met to discuss forming a stock company and building an opera house. They selected Colonel H. C. Whitley as president and purchased a site for the theater. Whitley came to Emporia after the Civil War and bought the hotel known as the Coolidge House. He prospered as a well known hotel keeper, and donated most of the \$35,000 necessary to construct the Whitley Opera House at the northeast corner of Sixth Avenue and Merchant Street.⁷² E. F. Sprague was the general contractor. Noted Kansas architect C. W. Squires designed the theater to attract a regional audience. It had a capacity of nine hundred seats and offered four proscenium boxes. The stage measured thirty-six feet by sixty feet.⁷³ Initially, the building also housed three businesses on the first floor, including a barbershop, the Farmers' Cooperative store, and Vrooman's Meat Market.⁷⁴

When the Whitley Opera House opened on January 30, 1882, the local newspaper called it the "most imposing [opera house] yet erected by private parties in the state . . . its exterior is only surpassed in beauty and elegance by its own interior."⁷⁵ Three days later, the *Emporia Daily Republican* reported,

The elite of Burlington to the number of about fifty of her most intelligent men and best looking women came to Emporia on yesterday for the purpose of attending the splendid entertainment at the Whitley Opera House last evening. The central section of the parquette was reserved by Col. Whitley for the special accommodation.

The article described the fire protection in detail.

The precautions taken for protection against fire are ample, there having been a full sized street main introduced into the auditorium with fifty feet of two inch hose attached. There is also a water main behind the drop curtain on the stage with sufficient hose attached to reach over the flies. The scenery is sized with fireproof sizing and cannot be

⁷² *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 26 January 1882, quoted in James D. Kemmerling, "A History of the Whitley Opera House in Emporia, Kansas: 1881-1913" (M.A. thesis, Emporia State University, 1967), 6.; *The Emporia Gazette* 16 October 1919, quoted in Kemmerling, "A History of the Whitley Opera House," 6.

⁷³ *Emporia Daily Republican*, 1 January 1884, quoted in Kemmerling, "A History of the Whitley Opera House," 14.

⁷⁴ *The Emporia Gazette*, 19 June 1913, quoted in Kemmerling, "A History of the Whitley Opera House," 6.

⁷⁵ *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 26 January 1882, quoted in Kemmerling, "A History of the Whitley Opera House," 9.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 26

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

*kindled into a blaze The means of exit from the auditorium and balcony are well provided for.*⁷⁶

The Whitley Opera House provided a venue for public receptions, fraternal meetings, band concerts, local and professional minstrel shows, Shakespearean plays, and commencement exercises.⁷⁷ Railroads made the opera house easily accessible to touring dramatic companies and it belonged to the Crawford Circuit until about 1900 when the Amusement Syndicate leased the facility.⁷⁸

In 1902, Colonel Whitley proposed "tear[ing] out the whole interior of the house and rebuild[ing] it, making the auditorium on the ground floor." This renovation would increase the house's capacity by approximately 25 percent and Whitley hoped the alteration would attract companies "that now go by because of the condition and size of our opera house." Despite Whitley's proposal, the eventual remodeling was mostly cosmetic.⁷⁹

The Whitley Opera House burned on June 18, 1913 in "one of the most destructive fires in the history of Emporia." The local newspaper attributed the cause to defective electrical wiring in the first-floor ceiling. The shock of this loss caused the Emporia City Commission to organize a paid fire department.⁸⁰

Garden City

As in other communities, before constructing an opera house, the residents of Garden City utilized a number of different facilities for public entertainment. In 1885, in addition to various halls and churches, Garden City boasted a skating rink. Measuring fifty feet by one hundred feet, this building was "built in the best possible manner" with hardwood floors, offices, skate room, and every convenience. The owners "converted [it] into an opera house after the manner of the rink at Dodge [City]. It is to be sealed and plastered, a stage erected at the rear end, which will be well equipped with scenery and stage effects."⁸¹

⁷⁶ *The Emporia Gazette*, 27 August 1910, quoted in Kemmerling, "A History of the Whitley Opera House," 10-11; *Emporia Weekly Republican*, 26 January 1882, quoted in Kemmerling, "A History of the Whitley Opera House," 10-11

⁷⁷ Kemmerling, "A History of the Whitley Opera House," 18.

⁷⁸ Kemmerling, "A History of the Whitley Opera House," 71.

⁷⁹ *Emporia Daily Republican*, 8 April 1902, quoted in Kemmerling, "A History of the Whitley Opera House," 16; *Emporia Daily Republican*, 9 July 1902, quoted in Kemmerling, "A History of the Whitley Opera House," 16. By 1910 the theater had electric lighting.

⁸⁰ Kemmerling, "A History of the Whitley Opera House," 19-20.

⁸¹ *Garden City Irrigator*, 10 October 1885, quoted in Tyler, "Social Recreational Entertainments in Olathe," 199.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E. Page 27

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

Despite this change, local demand for a grand opera house prompted an announcement by J. A. Stevens that he planned to build "an elegant building." Stevens contracted an architect in November 1885 and construction of the Stevens Opera House began the following March. As described in the *Irrigator*, it was a three-story brick block trimmed with stone measuring 116 feet long and 50 feet wide. The building housed two business establishments on the first floor in addition to the opera house on the second and third floor. The theater had an orchestra level with 370 seats on the second floor, a gallery with 120 seats on the third floor, and four private boxes each with chairs for 8. After the October 6, 1886 grand opening, the *Irrigator* reported the following on October 18, 1886:

*The twenty-two foot proscenium opening was fitted with an act curtain and a drop containing advertisements of local merchants. The thirty-five foot deep stage was lit by both a row of gas footlights and an array of overhead gas lights. Twelve complete settings of new scenery made the opera house one of the best equipped theatres in the state.*⁸²

Shortly after opening, the manager of the Stevens Opera House, Will Burgess, announced that he and the managers of thirteen other opera houses in the southern part of Kansas had formed a Southern Western Theatrical Association. The object was to secure better attractions for the houses . . . which [had] never received just recognition at the hands of the former circuit managers."⁸³ The Stevens Opera House suffered from the economic recession that hurt the western Great Plains between 1887 and 1893. By 1896, J. A. Stevens lost all his business property except the opera house and some farmlands. Before the end of 1897, bankruptcy forced him to sell the opera house.

Lawrence

Frazer's Hall and Liberty Hall in Lawrence continued in use until the Bowersock Opera House, built on the Liberty Hall site, opened on September 18, 1882.⁸⁴ One of Lawrence's leading citizens, J. D. Bowersock, used the existing foundation and added two more stories for the new opera house. Like many others across Kansas, the Bowersock Opera House featured home talent productions, Lawrence High School events, presentations by the University of Kansas Dramatic Club, and meetings of various lodges, church groups, and political organizations.⁸⁵

⁸² Tyler, "Social Recreational Entertainments in Olathe," 202, 206.

⁸³ *Garden City Sentinel*, 17 November 1886, quoted in Tyler, "Social Recreational Entertainments in Olathe," 208; *Garden City Sentinel*, 1 December 1886, quoted in Tyler, "Social Recreational Entertainments in Olathe," 208.

⁸⁴ Jennings, "Grand Opera in Kansas in the 19th Century," 70-71.

⁸⁵ Emory Frank Scott, *One Hundred Years of Lawrence Theatres* (Lawrence, KS: House of Usher, 1979), 11.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section E Page 28

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

McPherson

Before the construction of an opera house in McPherson, the community hosted public entertainment events in the Town Company building, dining rooms of various hotels, township schoolhouses, a skating rink, private homes, and the Baptist, Congregational, Methodist Episcopal, and Presbyterian Churches.⁸⁶ Later, the community congregated in Hughes Hall and McCann's Hall, second-floor rooms in existing commercial blocks.

The second-floor "Opera Hall" built by investors in 1880 was typical of those built during this period. The first floor housed two businesses and a banking room along with a large office occupied by the county clerk and county treasurer. In addition to several more offices, the second floor held "the finest Opera House in this section of the country. It will seat 600 persons comfortably and provides a good stage, scenery, dressing rooms, etc. This building would be considered first class in a city of 20,000 inhabitants."⁸⁷

However, this opera house was not enough for the ambitious leaders of McPherson. In conjunction with a determined but unsuccessful effort to win the state capital for their town, members of the community formed the McPherson Opera House Company on November 12, 1886. Construction began on a new theater building in April 1888 and the McPherson Opera House opened on January 28, 1889. A special pictorial edition of the *Republican* published in March 1901 described this community landmark. This three-story building held

*one of the finest equipped theatres in Kansas . . . a modern and elegant structure. It was built . . . at a cost of \$42,000, and had a seating capacity of 900. The auditorium has on the ground floor parquet and dress circle, above which is a balcony circle and gallery. Each of the three floors are reached by separate stairways and in case of emergency the house can be cleared in a few minutes time.*⁸⁸

The county rented separate space on the upper two floors for offices and a courtroom.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Tyler, "Social Recreational Entertainments in Olathe," 132.

⁸⁷ *McPherson Republican*, 29 December 1880, quoted in Tyler, "Social Recreational Entertainments in Olathe," 133.

⁸⁸ Tyler, "Social Recreational Entertainments in Olathe," 133-134, 138, 144.

⁸⁹ Tyler, "Social Recreational Entertainments in Olathe," 133-134, 138, 144.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 29

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

Topeka

On April 1, 1880, Lester M. Crawford purchased Costa's Opera House, remodeled it, and renamed it Crawford's Opera House. Only three months later, fire destroyed the building. Crawford opened a new Opera House on September 9, 1881 and operated the facility until fire destroyed it on September 24, 1906.⁹⁰ The major rival to Crawford was the Topeka Grand Opera House built in 1882. With fifteen hundred seats, it was one of the largest theaters in the West.⁹¹ The Topeka Grand Opera House lost money until Crawford took over its management on December 9, 1889.⁹²

Wichita

Lester Crawford also played an instrumental role in the early history of theater in Wichita. He took control of Turner Hall in 1879, remodeled it, and reopened it in 1886. The following year, he announced plans for the construction of a new opera house. The design included one thousands seats and six private boxes, fourteen sets of scenery, an ornamental front curtain, gas fixtures, incandescent lights along the sides of the stage, and carbon arcs in front. The estimated cost of the theater was about \$100,000. As reported by the *Wichita Eagle*, "It will be built from stone, brick, and iron harmoniously mingled together. . . . The front on Topeka Avenue will be massive and very noticeable with its large two story windows, its round projecting tower, its large gable."⁹³ Crawford proclaimed that this would be a "special effort to give the Queen City 'the opera house' of the West, allowing Wichita to stand at the head in theatre as she does in so many things."⁹⁴

The design of the Crawford Opera House featured an oval auditorium with a curtain opening thirty-eight feet wide and twenty-eight feet tall. The parquet level seated 500, the balcony seated 450, and the gallery seated 600. An account describing the proposed theater noted, "The parquette [sic] will be seated with the latest improved opera chairs upholstered in plush. The balcony will have similar seats upholstered in leather. The gallery will have good seats. . . . Every effort will be made to have a very complete set of sceneries and everything to allow any play of modern times to be produced. The size of this house and stage will be larger than two-thirds of the theatres of Chicago." After the opening in February 1888, the *Eagle* boasted, "In the opening of the Crawford Opera House occurred the most important event in the amusement annals of Wichita. This magnificent dramatic temple erected by the enterprise of Wichita

⁹⁰ Ripley, *Town Hall Tonight: A Pictorial History of Topeka's Theaters*, 18.

⁹¹ Jennings, "Grand Opera in Kansas in the 19th Century," 82.

⁹² Ripley, *Town Hall Tonight: A Pictorial History of Topeka's Theaters*, 22.

⁹³ *Wichita Eagle*, 24 February 1887, quoted in Mather, "Theatrical History of Wichita, Kansas," 7-8.

⁹⁴ *Wichita Eagle*, 24 February 1887, quoted in Mather, "Theatrical History of Wichita, Kansas," 9.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section E Page 30

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

citizens is not yet entirely completed, but what is now done gives an idea of the ultimate beauty and grandeur." The Crawford Opera House featured only the presentation of legitimate drama until it burned on April 1, 1913.⁹⁵

Lester M. Crawford — Kansas Opera House Entrepreneur

Few Kansans made the management of theaters and opera houses an exclusive occupation. In smaller towns, the builders and early managers of opera houses practiced a variety of local occupations. Typically, most theater owners or managers were merchants who ran a retail store on the ground floor level of the opera house commercial block. By the early twentieth century, they were more frequently operators of a number of public entertainment facilities. However, during the late nineteenth century, Kansas had at least one prominent opera house entrepreneur.

After the Civil War, Lester M. Crawford brought the first real theater to Topeka and after expanding to Wichita, he organized a regional theater circuit. Crawford eventually operated a chain of more than one hundred theaters in locations from Kansas to California, making him the most prominent opera house entrepreneur in Kansas.⁹⁶ He was known as a tough and expert businessman who had a reputation for presenting clean family shows and for censoring each production to eliminate anything he considered unfit for his patrons.

Crawford came to Topeka in 1858. His first theater venture was Costa's Opera House, which he remodeled and opened as Crawford's Music Hall on September 8, 1880. Unfortunately, fire destroyed the building just a few months later. As he recalled, "I came back at once [from Abilene] and my heart was in my boots." The next day, the *Topeka State Journal* reported that "the city was thrown into deep grief over the loss of all amusement being unceremoniously cut off."⁹⁷ Crawford announced that he intended to rebuild and solicited funds. On September 5, 1881, his new opera house opened on the old site. It became Topeka's first, first-class theater with a seating capacity of over one thousand. In addition to its own company, which gave regular performances, the Crawford Opera House hosted the finest road shows that visited the area.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Mather, "The Theatrical History of Wichita, Kansas, 1862-1920," 9-11.

⁹⁶ Jennings, "Grand Opera in Kansas in the 19th Century," 94.

⁹⁷ Meltzer, "Social Life and Entertainment on the Frontiers of Kansas, 1854-1890," 142.

⁹⁸ Zornow, "The Theatre in Topeka, Kansas, 1858-1883," 65, 67.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 31

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

Investors expressed confidence in Topeka's growth by forming another corporation on November 30, 1881 to raise funds to build a second theater. This group constructed the Topeka [Grand] Opera House, a more expensive and impressive building than the Crawford Opera House. This theater offered approximately fifteen hundred seats and a stage measuring sixty feet by sixty-seven feet. At the time of its construction, historian A. T. Andreas described it as "the finest theatre in the state." Still Lester Crawford continued to attract better shows to his theater and used his resident stock company to complete the schedule. After twelve years, the directors of the Topeka Grand Opera House sold their business to Crawford, making him the dominant theater entrepreneur in Topeka and the region.⁹⁹

In 1887, the *Topeka Lance* initiated a feud with Crawford, accusing him of holding a virtual monopoly of theatrical houses in eastern Kansas. Noting that Crawford operated a circuit of opera houses in Atchison, Leavenworth, Lawrence, Topeka, Emporia, and Wichita, the paper stated, "[Crawford] dictates whether or not companies shall come to Topeka — tells them that they must come to his house or be shut of the circuit controlled by him. Rather than submit to this, the better companies refuse to visit Kansas, and therefore we are deprived of nearly everything of merit."¹⁰⁰ This criticism continued intermittently until September 1892 when new editors took over the newspaper.¹⁰¹

THE OPERA HOUSE AND THE VAUDEVILLE ERA: 1896-1930

In the late nineteenth century, virtually every county in the Central Plains boasted at least one opera house and some counties had two or three. "Opera houses represented traditional culture, wisdom, refinement, and permanence, as well as an aggressive community spirit and a dedication to progress. They were both a monument to past accomplishments and a symbol of the dazzling future civic boosters envisioned for their town as the vanishing frontier yielded to civilization."¹⁰²

By the turn of the twentieth century, the number of touring companies declined as transportation costs increased following the 1893-1896 recession. In the 1890s, it became more difficult even for small opera

⁹⁹ Zornow, "The Theatre in Topeka, Kansas, 1858-1883," 67-69. Crawford's Opera House burned again in 1906 and he abandoned the site. He then reopened the Majestic Theatre on Eighth Street. Crawford eventually closed the Topeka Grand Opera House and control passed to the Theatrical Syndicate, which reopened it in 1924. It was remodeled in 1930. See Zornow, notes 25 and 30.

¹⁰⁰ Jennings, "Grand Opera in Kansas in the 19th Century," 94.

¹⁰¹ Zornow, "The Theatre in Topeka, Kansas, 1858-1883," 70.

¹⁰² Davis, "Opera Houses in Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas, 1870-1920," 25.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section E, Page 32

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

houses on railroad lines to book many leading attractions. Compounding the impact of the economic realities faced by local theater managers to secure bookings, New York promoters formed a trust in 1896 known as the Theatrical Syndicate to control the shows produced as well as the accessibility of major theatrical venues to these shows. The Theatrical Syndicate promoted combination companies — productions of successful Broadway plays assembled to tour on the road. This system of one company performing one hit play across the country generated greater profits than sending out a stock company performing several different plays. Since the Theatrical Syndicate and the Shubert Brothers (their major competitors) did not support stock companies, individual producers could not generate enough bookings to mount independent productions to be presented in the opera houses across the country.¹⁰³

Around this time, and perhaps in response to the organization of the Theatrical Syndicate, a number of stock companies in an effort to promote cooperative efforts began producing guides to theaters around the country. The guides publicized the locations, statistics, and amenities offered by theaters around the country. As the introduction to one 1914-1915 theater directory stated,

*It is the purpose of the publishers to place at the disposal of theatrical men in every branch of the profession, such definite and concise information that they will be enabled to transact their business with a greater degree of intelligence than ever before, thereby minimizing the risk and loss.*¹⁰⁴

Directory information was comprehensive. It included everything from the population of the town and the name of the theater and house manager to ticket prices, seating capacity, physical dimensions of the stage, and an inventory of theatrical equipment and capacities. It also included information about the town's local newspapers, bill posting sites, hotels, and railroads. Some guides were general such as *Julius Cahn's Official Theatrical Guide* published in 1896.¹⁰⁵ Others were more specific such as the directory for *Theatres and Opera Houses on the Santa Fe*. Published by the railroad company in 1907, this guide includes a map showing the branch lines of the Santa Fe railroad and its stations across the

¹⁰³ Cunning, "Opera House Buildings in Nebraska, 1867-1917," E15-E16.

¹⁰⁴ Hill's National Theatrical Directory, Inc., *Gus Hill's National Theatrical Directory* (New York: Hill's National Theatrical Directory, Inc., 1914-1915), 3.

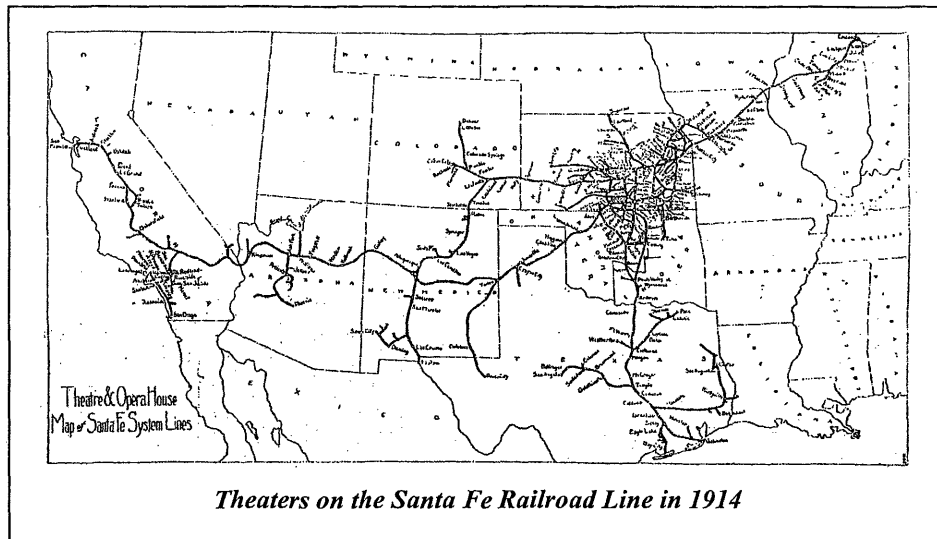
¹⁰⁵ Julius Cahn, *Julius Cahn's Official Theatrical Guide* (New York: Empire Theater Building, 1896).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section E Page 33

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas



southwestern United States.¹⁰⁶ It is interesting to note that Kansas is the most heavily traversed state on the map.

In addition to the changes spawned by the Theatrical Syndicate, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the nature of theater was changing. Vaudeville¹⁰⁷

shows and musical revues became more popular than the earlier melodramas. Touring companies began performing more musical comedies.¹⁰⁸ Vaudeville fared best in the emerging downtowns of America's major cities and by 1900, the combination of singing, dancing, comedy skits, and novelty acts was America's most popular form of entertainment. Vaudeville shows often included dramatic performances to attract broader audiences. Vaudeville, which evolved from the coarse variety shows held in beer halls for a primarily male audience, consisted of ten to fifteen unrelated acts featuring magicians, acrobats, comedians, trained animals, singers, and dancers. In 1881, Tony Pastor established a successful "clean variety show" at his New York City theater and influenced other managers to follow suit. By 1900, chains of vaudeville theaters provided entertainment throughout the country.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad, *Theatrical Directory: Theatres and Opera Houses on the Santa Fe* (n.p.: 1907), Archives, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.

¹⁰⁷ The term vaudeville is of French derivation and refers to a light, often comic, theatrical piece frequently combining pantomime, dialogue, dancing, and song and which evolved into American stage entertainment consisting of various acts. The term specifically references light entertainment popular in the United States from the mid-1890s until the early 1930s.

¹⁰⁸ Cunning, "Opera House Buildings in Nebraska, 1867-1917," E-12.

¹⁰⁹ "Vaudeville," *Britannica Concise Encyclopedia* [online]; available from Encyclopedia Britannica Premium Service at <http://www.britannica.com/ebc/article?eu=407136&query=vaudeville&ct=>; Internet; accessed 5 July 2004.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section E Page 34

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas



Because smaller towns could not afford the major syndicate productions or full-scale vaudeville, for a time, lyceum bureaus organized affordable programs that replaced touring companies.¹¹⁰ Very soon, two broader trends in technology affected the entertainment provided in opera house — the introduction of motion pictures and the mobility offered by the automobile.

Between 1895 and 1930, existing opera houses or newly designed theaters hosted vaudeville productions. The newly constructed opera houses often featured highly ornamented treatments

executed in the popular architectural styles to attract an audience that would associate them with high-class entertainment. Two prominent examples illustrate the last generation of buildings specifically constructed for live performances in Kansas — the Brown Grand Opera House in Concordia and the Bowersock Opera House in Lawrence.

Concordia

In the late nineteenth century, Concordia, a market town in north-central Kansas, prospered as the nexus of four railroad lines — the Union Pacific, Missouri Pacific, Santa Fe, and Burlington. By the turn of the century, Concordia's existing community hall, LaRocque Hall, was inadequate for contemporary theatrical productions and it was not possible to satisfactorily renovate the existing building. Furthermore, the public was quite conscious of fire safety and LaRocque Hall had only one stairway. On November 2, 1905, Napoleon Bonaparte Brown, one of Concordia's most prominent citizens, announced his decision to build a new opera house for the town. A few months later, his son and daughter in-law visited Brookfield, Missouri and the Kansas communities of Parsons, Pittsburg, Galena, and Columbus to inspect opera houses as part of the design process. In March 1906, Brown hired noted theater architect Carl Boller of Kansas City, Missouri to design what became known as the Brown Grand Opera House.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Cuning, "Opera House Buildings in Nebraska, 1867-1917," E-16.

¹¹¹ The Brown Grand Theater National Register Nomination Form names Carl Boller as the building architect. Later that year, Robert Boller joined his brother Carl in practice and the firm was renamed Boller Brothers.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

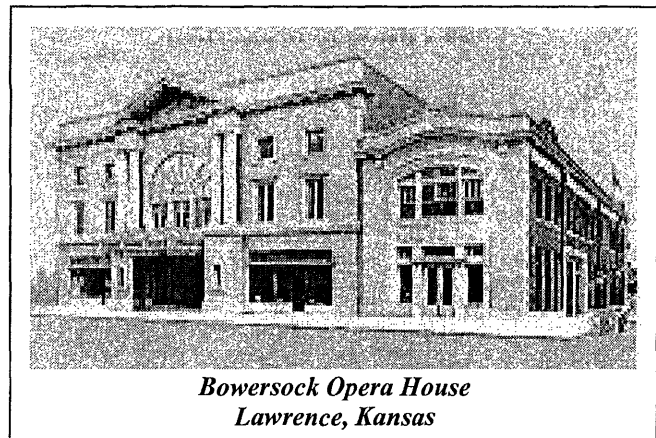
Section E Page 35

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

Receiving no construction bids, Brown hired local laborers and served as the project's construction superintendent. He boasted that all the workmen were Concordians and the materials were made or bought in Concordia. Constructed in the Renaissance Revival style, the building was approximately 60 feet wide and 120 feet long. Local stone quarried south of town formed the foundation and the first floor. The upper walls were locally manufactured brick. The pressed brick with stone trim on the front of the opera house was from a quarry in Cottonwood Falls, Kansas. The building seated approximately one thousand people and cost about \$40,000 to build. The Brown Grand Opera House formally opened September 17, 1907.¹¹²

Lawrence

In Lawrence, a February 18, 1911 fire destroyed the original Bowersock Opera House along with the adjacent office of the *Lawrence Journal*. J. D. Bowersock, one of Lawrence's most prominent citizens, planned and built a new opera house that opened to much acclaim on January 22, 1912. Samuel B. Tarbet and Company of Kansas City, Missouri with F. G. Cudworth as associate engineer designed the impressive new building.¹¹³ During the years



from 1918 to 1926, the Bowersock Opera House presented performances by famous actors and plays brought to Lawrence by the Schubert and Orpheum circuits. That changed early in 1927 when Glen W. Dickinson, the new owner, renovated the building to exhibit the first talking pictures in Lawrence. Dickinson went on to manage a large chain of Midwestern movie houses.¹¹⁴

THE ONSET OF THE MOVING PICTURE ERA: 1900-1915

The introduction of moving pictures as popular entertainment marked the beginning of the end to live, professional dramatic and musical productions, as well as the end of the opera house era in most Kansas towns.

¹¹² Doyen, "History of Theater, 1878-1925, in Concordia," 8, 24-31. The Brown Grand Opera House is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

¹¹³ Scott, *One Hundred Years of Lawrence Theatres*, 13-18.

¹¹⁴ Scott, *One Hundred Years of Lawrence Theatres*, 21, 24-25.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section E Page 36

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

Thomas Edison invented the moving picture machine in 1892 and demonstrated the concept in a vertical feed Kinetoscope designed to be shown to individual customers. Edison opened the first Kinetoscope parlor on April 14, 1894 in New York City. During the next two years, Edison exhibited his Vitascope projection system, which also utilized a direct projection method on a blank surface, in Portland, Maine and Lexington, Kentucky. During the same time period, a theater model developed in 1895 by the Lumiere brothers of Paris that placed the crowd into a hall and projected motion pictures onto a special surface enjoyed great success. The Lumiere brothers brought their *Cinematographe* device to the United States and had their premiere show in Washington, D.C. on January 1, 1897. Motion pictures quickly joined other new entertainment attractions such as amusement parks and vaudeville theater.¹¹⁵

It is believed that a touring opera company brought the first moving pictures to Kansas. On the evening of January 28, 1897, Rosabel Morrison sang a performance of *Carmen* at the Topeka Grand Opera House. In the final act when Carmen, confronted Don Jose outside the bullring, they projected footage of an "authentic Spanish bull fight" on a canvas stretched across the stage, giving the Kansas capital not only its first movie, but its first mixed-media presentation as well.¹¹⁶

Presentation of motion pictures in theaters that also hosted the vaudeville circuit made them part of mass entertainment. After the turn of the century, practically every vaudeville performance in the Great Plains incorporated moving pictures. In just a few years, venues that exclusively showed motion pictures became common.¹¹⁷

Moving picture theaters enjoyed a remarkable rise in popularity. Almost unknown in 1903, there were an estimated five-to-ten thousand moving picture theaters in the United States by 1910, with annual receipts that reached into the millions of dollars. A strong national economy and a rapidly growing population supported the popular entertainment business. By 1908, what became known as the nickelodeon served as the primary outlet for motion pictures, while vaudeville performances, traveling exhibitors, and amusement parks continued to show movies as part of their regular entertainment. Many small-town

¹¹⁵ Douglas Gomery, *A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 5-8.

¹¹⁶ John W. Ripley, "Two Dozen Nickelodeons," *Bulletin of Shawnee County Historical Society* 43 (December 1966) : 38, quoted in Davis, "Opera Houses in Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas, 1870-1920," 24.

¹¹⁷ Davis, "Opera Houses in Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas, 1870-1920," 24-25.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section E Page 37

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

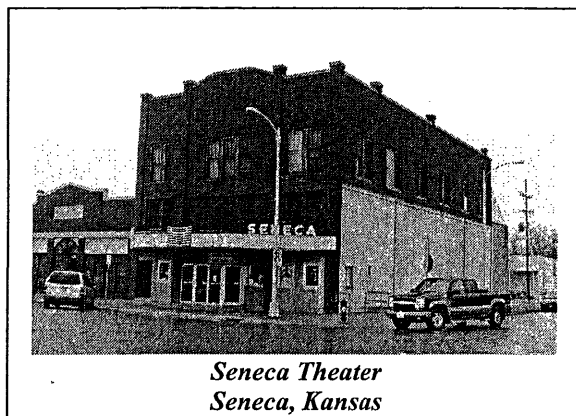
entrepreneurs entered the moving picture exhibition business so that nearly all American communities of any size had a permanent schedule of movie shows by 1910.

Early film and projectors posed distinct safety hazards. Many states, including Kansas, soon passed fire safety laws that required a separate booth to house the potentially explosive nitrate film and projector.¹¹⁸ Together, the new building codes and the conversion of small opera house auditoriums to specialized facilities for showing movies improved both safety conditions and public image of the movies. Building codes passed before the start of World War I required that movie theaters occupy ground-floor spaces. This made second-floor opera halls, common in towns throughout Kansas, unsuitable for movie shows and hastened their obsolescence.

The first feature-length motion picture, "The Great Train Robbery" debuted in 1903. By 1916, audiences throughout Kansas viewed feature films like D. W. Griffiths' "The Birth of a Nation" at their local movie house. By 1920, moving pictures were big business and films with mechanical sound reinforced the trend after 1927. The introduction of talking pictures was the final blow to public entertainment presented by traveling stock companies and itinerant opera troupes.

During the first decades of the twentieth century, the owners of many Kansas opera houses attempted to salvage their investment by converting their performance halls to movie houses. In an effort to accommodate motion picture as well as live performances, they outfitted their existing auditorium spaces with screens at the back of the stage and installed a projection booth in the balcony. By the beginning of World War I, moving pictures were the major attraction at most small-town opera houses.¹¹⁹

Among the Kansas opera houses that converted into movie theaters was the Brown Grand Opera House in Concordia. In Wichita a substantial number of theater buildings designed to house moving pictures presented both vaudeville and motion pictures.¹²⁰ Other theaters



*Seneca Theater
Seneca, Kansas*

¹¹⁸ Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, 18-19.

¹¹⁹ Mather, "The Theatrical History of Wichita, Kansas 1862-1920," 37.

¹²⁰ Mather, "The Theatrical History of Wichita, Kansas 1862-1920," 37.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 38

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

that offered both live performances and motion pictures were the Seneca Theater in Seneca (1910), as well as the following theaters designed by the Boller Brothers: the McGhee Theater in Columbus (1904); the Auditorium Theater in Norton (1906); and the Wareham Theater in Manhattan (1910).¹²¹

Early Movie Theaters

Like opera houses, existing commercial blocks often housed early movie theaters. Itinerant film exhibitors equipped with portable machines traveled through the small towns and rural hinterland. They rented vacant stores and set up folding chairs, hung a sheet on the back wall, and sold tickets from a box out front.

The Nickelodeon

Soon, enterprising local residents followed suit, establishing the nickel theater or nickelodeon, which was named for the five-cent admission price. The first nickelodeon was a storefront theater established by John and Harry Davis in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Following the tradition of continuous vaudeville, they provided a continuous program of movies from eight in the morning until midnight.¹²² By 1910, *Variety* estimated there were almost ten thousand nickelodeons in cities from New York to San Francisco.

Initially, the nickelodeon provided a small and uncomfortable theater, most often a converted cigar store,



pawnshop, restaurant, or skating rink renovated to look like a vaudeville theater.¹²³ They attempted to imitate the appearance of legitimate theaters, with a minimum of expense. Like opera houses, the front of the nickelodeon displayed a prominent name accompanied by colorful advertising posters, electric signs, and loud phonographs playing to attract passersby. The interior was more modest than a vaudeville theater. Usually, standard commercial space transformed into a long, narrow, and darkly lit screening room. Anywhere from fifty to three hundred simple wooden chairs or benches provided

¹²¹ Robert Boller designed a second extensive remodeling of the Auditorium Theater in 1947.

¹²² Maggie Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theater, Starring S. Charles Lee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 22-23.

¹²³ Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, 18.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section E Page 39

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

seating. A simple platform formed the stage and a nine-by-twelve-foot screen attached directly to the building's back wall. A piano player provided live accompaniment to the movies. The projection booth was at the wall opposite from the stage.¹²⁴

The 1903 Patee Theater in Lawrence illustrates the early days of the motion picture business in Kansas. One writer described the Patee Theater as "the home of the first motion picture theatre in the western half of the United States."¹²⁵ In 1903, when Mrs. Vivian Patee returned to Lawrence from Jersey City, New Jersey to care for her sick father, her husband Clair M. Patee sent some projection equipment and suggested that she open a theater. The Patee Theater began in a storefront at 708 Massachusetts Street that year. In a later interview, Mrs. Patee recalled:

When I made up my mind to stay in Lawrence, I went downtown at night to note the trend of traffic, so I could choose the best location, as there were several empty buildings. Not a soul could I see on the streets and only an occasional gas light. Streets muddy, no paving except the crossing. I was surely discouraged and went back home almost convinced that Lawrence was not a place for a picture show. The very next day, however, I found a building the right length. It had been a printing office and the floor and ceilings were very badly wrecked taking the machinery out; no front, and the walls unplastered the same as the mason had left them. To secure the building I had to make repairs, as the owner would not spend a cent on it. I closed the deal, and the workmen began building the first moving picture house the next morning.¹²⁶

After Mr. Patee arrived in Lawrence, the couple installed the floor and seats and developed a private electrical plant since there was no municipal electricity available at the time.

The films were sent out from New York and when the lights were turned on the arch for the first time and doors opened — presto! Hundreds of people came downtown that night. Merchants began to light their windows and move into new and larger quarters. Electric signs began to wink at the public; the streets were paved and lighted, and a building boom started. I do not say the moving pictures did everything, but surely there was very little doing before they arrived.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, 18-19.

¹²⁵ Scott, *One Hundred Years of Lawrence Theatres*, 64-65.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 40

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

After moving to 838 Massachusetts Street in 1913, the Patee Theater continued operating until fire destroyed it on February 28, 1955.

The Air Dome

Another innovation was the air dome or open-air theater consisting of four walls without a roof and seats directly on the ground between a projector coop and a simple screen. This low-cost operation provided popular summertime entertainment for many Kansans. Among the air domes constructed in Kansas were theaters in Manhattan, Newton, and Coffeyville. The owner of the Midland Theater constructed two air domes in Coffeyville — one for white patrons and one for black patrons.

THE MOVIE BUSINESS: 1915-1935

Although local entrepreneurs initially showed movies in existing community halls and opera houses, as well as converted commercial spaces, smaller ground-floor venues designed specifically for motion pictures soon appeared in cities and small towns. The combination of novelty, advertising, and more comfortable, modern facilities attracted patrons to the new motion picture theaters. Movies also offered a variety of film genres, including comedy, melodrama, cartoons, newsreels, and adventure serials. With admission to movies often costing half the price of an opera house ticket, motion pictures were much more economical for the consumer and more profitable to the owner than live entertainment.¹²⁸

Other factors influenced the popularity of movies in Kansas. By World War I, the popularity and affordability of the automobile coupled with improved rural roads enabled rural and small town residents to travel thirty miles in one hour. This encouraged travel to nearby towns to see the latest picture show. Small opera houses that converted to movie houses often lost their audiences to the more-modern facilities in larger towns.

In the early twentieth century, Kansans also made significant investments in community municipal and school facilities, many of which included a modern auditorium.¹²⁹ These municipally funded facilities hosted many of the social functions previously served by the commercial opera house. Since the

¹²⁸ Cuning, "Opera House Buildings in Nebraska, 1867-1917," E-16-17.

¹²⁹ Daniel D. Holt and Kansas State Historical Society, Historic Preservation Department, "Kansas Preservation Plan: Study Unit on A Time of Contrasts: Progress, Prosperity, and the Great Depression, 1900-1940" (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1990, photocopied), 23.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section E Page 41

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

auditoriums were constructed and maintained at public expense, they did not need to be profitable. This further weakened the opera house's position as a community entertainment venue.¹³⁰

As architect Arthur Meloy noted in his manual *Theaters and Picture Houses*, published in 1916, "The greatest demand at present is for the motion picture theater." Meloy estimated that there were about twenty-five thousand picture houses in the United States. He observed that "the growth has been phenomenal and unprecedented. The larger theatres are being converted to its use in many of the large cities." The reason for this trend was that "pictures offer one of the best kinds of entertainment today." At that time, the average seating capacity for large movie houses ranged from twelve hundred to eighteen hundred, and for small houses it ranged from four hundred to one thousand. Although Meloy stressed the importance of fireproof brick or concrete construction, he argued that there was "more danger in a theatre from panic than from fire." In 1916, Kansas was one of just six states that had building regulations for theaters.¹³¹

Movie theater owners marketed their businesses to the emerging American middle class and by doing so created the most profitable mass entertainment industry in United States history. During this period, increasingly beautiful theaters showed movies in nicer parts of town and successfully competed with nickelodeons, even though movies shown in more spacious and handsome theaters often charged an admission of ten cents or more.¹³²

A sharp decrease in movie ticket sales reflected the decline in purchasing power during the Great Depression. Financially strapped families found cheaper substitutes for entertainment such as radio. As movie theaters cut services and reduced costs, they became smaller and more efficient. The Great Depression also pushed movie exhibitors to seek new sources of revenue and they began by selling candy, then later soft drinks and popcorn. Nearby confectionary stores and soda fountains previously offered these concessions. This marketing trend reversed a cultural bias against selling food in theaters, a practice associated with lower-class entertainment.

¹³⁰ Atherton, *Main Street on the Middle Border*, 142. Because Municipal Auditoriums were publicly funded, they have a distinct context from privately financed theaters, and have not been included as an eligible property type in this Multiple Property Documentation Form.

¹³¹ Arthur S. Meloy, *Theatres and Motion Picture Houses: A Practical Treatise on the Proper Planning and Construction of Such Buildings, and Containing Useful Suggestions, Rules and Data for the Benefit of Architects, Prospective Owners, etc.* (New York: Architects' Supply and Publishing Company, 1916), 1, 4, 8, 70, 73. Other states with theater regulations were Pennsylvania, Mississippi, Illinois, California, and Ohio.

¹³² Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, 20-23, 30-32.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 42

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

Movie Chains

After the end of World War I, movie exhibition replaced vaudeville as the mass entertainment form preferred by Americans.¹³³ Industry leaders soon figured out how to capitalize on national markets and during the 1920s, big business successfully monopolized the motion picture industry. In an effort to dominate the movie houses in cities, to increase their profits every year, and to become giants in the new movie industry, the Hollywood studios that produced movies formed powerful, regionally based chains of movie houses that controlled the exhibition of movies. This integration was not unusual for the time, following a trend set by department stores and grocery chains.

Entrepreneurs Abe Balaban and Sam Katz operated a successful early chain.¹³⁴ This partnership began in Chicago in 1908 with a single nickelodeon. Then, in 1917, they built the innovative Central Park Theatre, an early movie palace. After building three more theaters, Balaban and Katz's business produced so much revenue that the profits financed their rapid expansion in the surrounding states. Balaban and Katz made the buildings attractions in themselves. The chain differentiated their product through location, theater buildings, service, stage shows, and air conditioning. With the assistance of theater designers George and C. W. Rapp, the chain established a style that helped define the industry.¹³⁵ Later, the Hollywood studio Paramount acquired the Balaban and Katz theaters.

Mergers in the late 1920s created the core holdings of each major theater chain. When centralization of the movie business wound down during the 1930s, five Hollywood companies controlled the major regional chains. By owning and operating the most profitable theaters in the United States, Paramount; Loew's, Inc. (owner of the Metro-Goldwyn-Meyer studio); Warner Brothers; Twentieth-Century Fox; and Radio-Keith-Orpheum (RKO) dominated the American film industry. They all produced, distributed, and exhibited films; however, as Marcus Loew stated, their goal was to "sell tickets to theaters, not movies."¹³⁶ The Hollywood studios did not have to own all the movie theaters to exercise effective control of the industry — just the two thousand most important theaters located in higher-income, outlying shopping districts or in the downtowns of the largest cities.¹³⁷ Although there were relatively

¹³³ Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, 36.

¹³⁴ Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, 33-34.

¹³⁵ Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, 41-48.

¹³⁶ Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, 55-57; David Naylor, *Great American Movie Theater (Great American Places Series) (Washington, DC: Preservation Press, 1987)*, 18.

¹³⁷ Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, 59.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section E Page 43

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

few theaters in the United States that could seat two thousand customers or more during the 1930s and 1940s, the theaters owned by the Hollywood studios seated more patrons than all the smaller theaters (five hundred seats or less) in the nation. The Big Five movie chains controlled the vast majority of all first-run movie palaces in the ninety-two largest cities in the United States — those with populations exceeding 100,000 — and thus dictated where, for how long, at what price movies could be shown throughout the nation. They manipulated arrangements to reduce risk, to ensure the continuity of operation, and to guarantee regular profits.¹³⁸

From the 1920s to the 1940s, federal agencies sought to end the movie monopoly, which was an example of "vertical integration" in which the Big Five controlled all aspects of the industry's operations. By 1948, the major companies operated more than 80 percent of the nation's theaters and controlled access to movies through their distribution operations. This system was deeply frustrating to the small independent theater operators who supported the federal effort to break the monopoly. In May 1948, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the government's contention that major companies operated an illegal monopoly by controlling metropolitan first-run theaters.¹³⁹

After losing the antitrust suit, the Big Five began selling their theater chains. This provided new opportunities and competition in the movie exhibition business. Ticket prices increased by 50 percent from 1949 to 1952. Films were now distributed according to competitive rates that rose quickly. The major studios began producing fewer films per year for higher fees.¹⁴⁰

The victory of the independent theater owners was short-lived because attendance at movie theaters declined sharply throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The old movie distribution system became obsolete. In the 1980s, major movie production companies again acquired theaters, but these were in modern shopping centers and malls rather than the central business district or residential neighborhoods.

¹³⁸ Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, 60, 67.

¹³⁹ Michael Putnam, *Silent Screens: The Decline and Transformation of the American Movie Theater (Creating the North American Landscape)* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 4-6, 11.

¹⁴⁰ Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theater*, 164.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 44

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

The Big Five Movie Chains in Kansas

Two of the Big Five chains operated theaters in Kansas. In the mid-1920s, William Fox organized the chain that became Twentieth-Century Fox. With the advent of talking pictures, Fox Film began distributing talking newsreels to medium-sized theaters that could no longer afford live attractions.¹⁴¹ Fox set the goal of owning a movie palace in every major city. He built an impressive collection of movie palaces, including the Fox Watson Theater in Salina and the Fox Theater in Hutchinson, but this ambition crashed during the Great Depression. The company went into receivership in 1933 and reorganized after 1935 as National Theatres and later Twentieth Century-Fox. By World War II, it reemerged as a prosperous chain that stretched from Denver to Los Angeles, including theaters in San Francisco and the Pacific Northwest, as well as in Kansas, western Nebraska, Missouri, and Wisconsin. Later, Twentieth Century Fox acquired additional existing theaters in Kansas, renaming them with a hybrid of their original name. Among these were the Fox-Granada Theater in Emporia, the Colonial-Fox Theater in Pittsburg, and the Fox Midland Theater in Coffeyville.

Radio-Keith-Orpheum (RKO), the smallest of the major chains, began with some well-placed vaudeville theaters. When the company reorganized in 1933, it held a few properties in Kansas.¹⁴²

Dickinson Theater Group

Glen Wood Dickinson, founder of the Dickinson Theater Group, pioneered the chain concept in movie theater development in the Midwest. In 1920, Glen Dickinson quit his job at his family's Ford dealership in Brookfield, Missouri and opened his first theater in Manhattan, Kansas — the Dickinson Marshall Theater. He expanded quickly, opening theaters in the central and eastern Kansas communities of Lawrence, Junction City, Ellsworth, Beloit, and Great Bend, as well as in Springfield, Missouri. By 1931, Dickinson owned twenty-six theaters and relocated the chain's headquarters to Lawrence.¹⁴³ In 1937, Dickinson sold most of his theaters to Griffith Theaters of Oklahoma City for \$1.5 million.¹⁴⁴ During the 1940s, the Dickinson theater circuit grew substantially. In 1943, Glen Wood Dickinson, Jr. joined the family business and helped secure acres of farmland at the future intersection of 95th Street and Metcalf Avenue in Johnson County, Kansas. In the 1960s, this became an important site for the company when they developed the Glenwood Manor Motor Hotel and Convention Center and the Glenwood

¹⁴¹ Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, 18-221,

¹⁴² Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, 60-66

¹⁴³ Dickinson Theatres, Inc., "84 Years of Excellence," [article online]; available from <http://www.dtmovies.com/about.htm>; Internet; accessed 29 June 2004.

¹⁴⁴ "The Rio Gala Opening," Program, 30 June 2000, Johnson County Museums, Shawnee Mission, Kansas.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 45

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

Theater at this location.¹⁴⁵ The Dickinson Theater Group still operates twenty-eight theaters in seven states and maintains its corporate offices in Overland Park, Kansas.

Commonwealth Theaters, Inc.

O. K. Mason, a Wichita theater owner, founded the Commonwealth Amusement Corporation in the late 1920s. This company grew to control theaters across the Midwest through the mid-twentieth century. The first theaters the group acquired in Kansas were in Kinsley, Great Bend, Lawrence, Hoisington, Norton, and Goodland; in Missouri, they were in Warrensburg, Columbia, and suburban areas of Kansas City. By 1950, the company, now known as Commonwealth Theatres, operated seventy indoor theaters and fifteen outdoor theaters in Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, Missouri, Iowa, and Arkansas. Their largest theater at that time was the Ashland Theater in Kansas City, Missouri, which had thirteen hundred seats. Their second largest theater was the Crest Theater in Great Bend, Kansas.¹⁴⁶

EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY MOVIE THEATER DESIGN

Technological Innovations

The first major technological change in the history of film occurred in the 1920s and was the introduction of mechanical sound, which began a continual process of innovation. By 1925, moving picture exhibition was a big business in the United States, with some twenty thousand movie houses in operation. Of these, 75 percent were in small towns. The talking moving picture initiated by Warner Brothers and Fox Film quickly became a substitute for stage shows in medium-sized theaters that could not afford live attractions. Fox Film began with talking newsreels and then built an impressive chain of movie palaces. By the end of 1930, the industry successfully converted to movies with sound¹⁴⁷

Other indirect technological innovations affected movie houses. Before 1917, summer heat forced theaters across the United States to use extensive systems of fans or simply close their doors during the summer months. Abe Balaban and Sam Katz became the first theater owners to offer "air-cooled" comfort in their Central Park Theater by adapting refrigeration technology developed for Chicago's meat

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ *Great Bend Daily Tribune*, 8 November 1950, Barton County Historical Society, Great Bend, Kansas.

¹⁴⁷ Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, 18-221,

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 46

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

markets.¹⁴⁸ By 1925, air conditioned theaters, especially in Chicago, were the talk of the industry, but only movie palaces with two thousand or more seats could afford such installations.

Air conditioning became more available in the 1930s when Willis Carrier produced a compact, less expensive system that cost between \$10,000 and \$50,000. Carrier exhibited its equipment at the 1933 World's Fair and when the movie business revived a few years later, many theater operators, especially in the South and West, installed air conditioning equipment.¹⁴⁹ There were record sales of \$50 million for air conditioning equipment in 1936; this figure doubled to \$100 million by 1941. This innovation made going to movies a year-round treat and up until the mid-1950s, movie theaters were one of the few public institutions in the United States where middle- and working-class citizens could enjoy a cool comfortable environment. While few theaters received new air conditioning equipment during World War II, after the war ended, movie exhibitors adapted the technological advances developed to meet military needs and nearly 75 percent of movie theaters had air conditioning.¹⁵⁰

By the early 1930s, theater design, just like other commercial building design, began responding to the impact of the automobile. Changes ranged from the shape and size of the marquee to parking lot accommodations. The auto-oriented marquee extended from the theater façade so that the building stood out physically and aesthetically from all other buildings on the street. Prior to this time and up to the 1920s, the front wall of a movie theater was dark, flat, and detailed. In the 1930s, bright (often moving) lights boldly outlined and accentuated the building form.¹⁵¹

Two-Part Commercial Block Theaters

It was during this period that the movie theater became a separate architectural type, distinguished from a traditional live-performance theater by program, emphasis, imagery, and history. At this time, the widespread production of feature-length films coincided with the development of full-fledged motion picture theaters. Design focused on the individual comfort of the audience, particularly providing an unobstructed view. Interaction among the members of the audience with the theater environment itself shaped the movie-going experience. The mechanical needs of motion picture projection and the

¹⁴⁸ John Margolies and Emily Gwathmey, *Ticket to Paradise: American Movie Theatres and How We Had Fun* (Boston and London: Bulfinch Press, 1991), 18.

¹⁴⁹ Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, 75.

¹⁵⁰ Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, 76.

¹⁵¹ Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theater*, 97.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

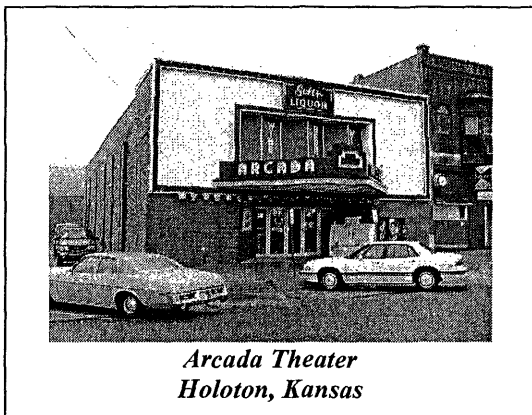
Section E Page 47

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

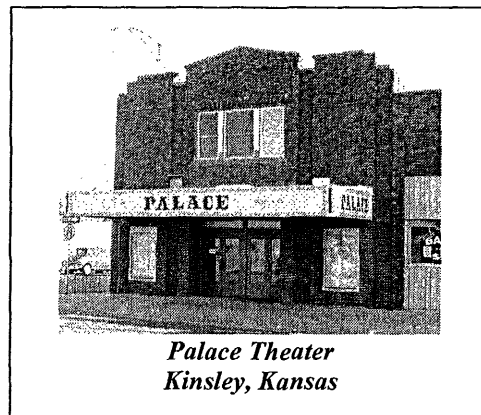
economic forces that shaped theater ownership dictated the physical structure.¹⁵² Movie theater design placed a continual emphasis on the new and the modern.

From the late nineteenth century well into the twentieth century, the two-part commercial block building dominated commercial districts in large and small communities throughout Kansas. This functional building type featured masonry or wood frame construction with a brick or stone veneer. One or more commercial storefronts occupied the ground-floor level while businesses or residences occupied the upper floors. These buildings might or might not be designed by an architect. Architectural embellishments might include terra cotta or cast stone elements that reflect one or more of the styles popular at the time. Spanish Revival, Colonial Revival, and Classical Revival design were common as was a combination of patterned and textured brick known as Tapestry Brick.

The Empress Theater in Fort Scott is an early example of a movie theater building adapted from an existing two-part commercial block building originally built in 1890. In 1913, the Boller Brothers, prolific Kansas City-based theater designers, retrofitted the building to accommodate moving pictures. The Liberty Theater in Oswego is another two-part commercial block building that was originally built as a furniture store. In 1918, they renovated the building into a "picture theater" that was in operation for two years before being converted into a bank. Surviving examples of theaters constructed using the Main Street commercial block form include the Palace Theater in Kinsley (1917) and the Perkins (later Arcada) Theater in Holton (1907), which illustrates the adaptation of the enframed wall commercial block form.



*Arcada Theater
Holton, Kansas*



*Palace Theater
Kinsley, Kansas*

¹⁵² This interpretation is based on information found in Maggie Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An*

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 48

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

The first generation of buildings specifically constructed as movie theaters in Kansas' commercial districts borrowed heavily from the massing, form, and architectural styling of their neighboring commercial blocks and the two-part commercial block adapted easily to the needs of the early movie theaters. The first-story commercial space became the dominant part of the building, while the upper part offered a blank wall for ornamentation and signage. To attract patrons, theaters incorporated a wide variety of motifs, ranging from Classical to Art Deco.¹⁵³ A large vertical marquee and/or horizontal canopy, often lighted, distinguished the movie theater from other commercial buildings. Movie theaters also adopted the enframed wall and vault building forms. In both of these instances, the widened main façade acknowledged the lobby on the interior and accommodated the flow of customers through the building.¹⁵⁴

Movie Palaces

As the success of movies continued to grow, entrepreneurs looked for ways to turn even greater profits. This led to the development of increasingly extravagant theaters, culminating in the movie palace. The movie palace represented the apex of movie theater design. It was a unique building type strongly influenced by the design of the opera houses and music halls built in Europe and the United States during the late nineteenth century. Yet, no building type was more representative of twentieth-century American architecture and culture. The movie palace first appeared about 1915 and, although the property type culminated nationally with the construction of New York City's Radio City Music Hall in 1932, movie palaces continued to be built in Kansas as late 1950.

The golden age of movie palaces began in 1913 with the opening of New York City's Regent Theater, the first American movie palace. Like the movies themselves, the architecture of the movie palace created illusion. As architect Thomas Lamb, the designer of the Regent, explained, the goal was to make "our audience receptive and interested, we must cut them off from the rest of city life and take them into a rich and self-contained auditorium, where their minds are freed from their usual occupations and freed from their customary thought."¹⁵⁵

Architectural History of the Movie Theater, 3-5.

¹⁵³ Richard Longstreth, *The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture* (Washington, DC: The Preservation Press, 1982), 51.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 75, 110.

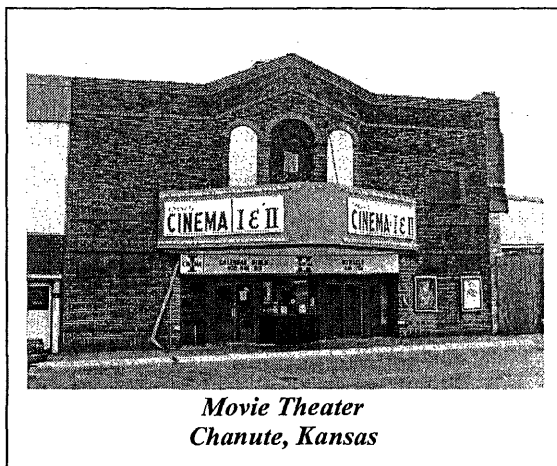
¹⁵⁵ Margolies and Gwathmey, *Ticket to Paradise: American Movie Theatres and How We Had Fun*, 9-10.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 49

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas



Lamb designed more than three hundred theaters, including the Midland Theater in Kansas City, Missouri, which in 1927 became the first in the United States to have an integrated cooling, heating, and ventilating system.¹⁵⁶

Yet even many small towns could boast of a regal movie house, often designed by the same architects who built big-city movie palaces. Small Kansas towns such as Kingman, Ellsworth, Chanute, Iola, and Girard had theaters representing a cusp between the Movie Theater and the Movie Palace property types. Theater owners in

medium-sized communities such as Chanute hired the Boller Brothers to design their theaters, providing the main street movie theater with added design panache.

These innovative theaters incorporated a complex building plan. A broad canopy, a vertical marquee, and elaborate and colorful electric lighting attracted the attention of passersby and drew patrons to the box office. Elaborate lobbies, playrooms, and lounges provided both dramatic effect and comfort. Carefully planned circulation patterns efficiently and safely moved crowds in and out of the building.¹⁵⁷ Their design perfected the intertwined relationship between the movie and the film-watching experience, in a way that affected the building form by allowing the building to impact the customer's experience. Even the design and ornamentation of the movie palace was closely related to changes within the film industry and evolved separately from traditional theater design.

The purpose of the design of the movie palace was wholly economic — to attract the public to the theater. To achieve this purpose, architects designed fanciful exterior façades that stood out from the surrounding commercial landscape. Broad marquees and vertical signs presented the name of the theater. Lights illuminated, outlined, and drew attention to the façade. As patrons moved inside, they saw grandiose treatments that included multi-level auditoriums and grand staircases. Initially, all of the surfaces featured heavy ornamentation, often along an architectural theme. Because movie palaces were typically

¹⁵⁶ Margolies and Gwathmey, *Ticket to Paradise: American Movie Theatres and How We Had Fun*, 17; Naylor, *American Picture Palaces: The Architecture of Fantasy* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1981), 40. The Midland Theater is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

¹⁵⁷ Naylor, *American Picture Palaces*, 17, 32.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

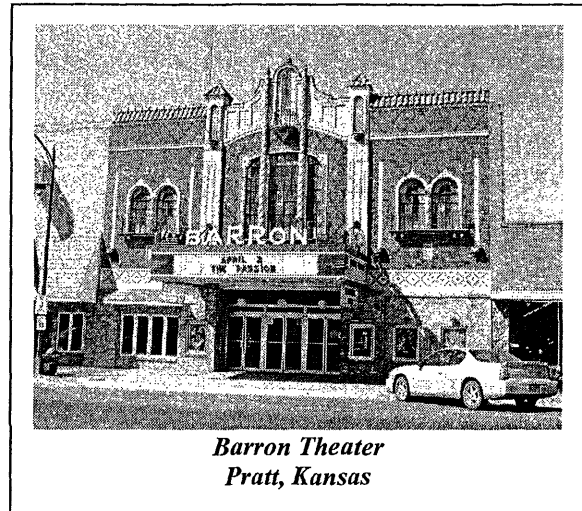
Section E Page 50

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

designed with a stage for live performances, they also held dressing rooms, asbestos curtains at the proscenium, and all the necessary rigging and lighting. An organ sat in the orchestra pit and ornamental side walls camouflaged the pipes. In addition to the requisite foyer, lobby, and auditorium, movie palaces often featured accessory spaces such as lounges, smoking rooms, cry rooms, and play rooms.¹⁵⁸

While architects applied Classical motifs and Victorian themes to nineteenth century opera houses, movie palaces appeared in a wide arrange of architectural styles that frequently focused on the exotic and the whimsical. The early movie palace architects, such as Thomas Lamb, were European trained and drew from classically inspired European opera houses. In the 1920s, as the number of movie palaces exploded and competition between the chains intensified, theater design became increasingly fanciful. Archaeological discoveries in Egypt in 1922 spurred a trend toward more exotic designs. Soon, motifs ranging from Spanish Colonial to Mayan, Egyptian, Chinese, and Art Deco joined the more traditional French Second Empire and Italian Baroque movie palaces.¹⁵⁹

Investors erected a number of fanciful, architect-designed movie palaces in Kansas. The largest and most whimsical theaters were in the larger cities. Early examples of movie palaces in Kansas include the Boller Brothers designs for the Barron Theater in Pratt (1915); the Stella Theater in Council Grove (1918); and the Sunflower Theater in Peabody (1919). Several Kansas movie palaces physically linked with adjoining commercial structures. John Eberson's Orpheum Theater (1922) in Wichita connected to an office building and the Jayhawk Theater (1926) in Topeka designed by Thomas Williamson adjoined a hotel. Southwest and Spanish Revival motifs were common. There were also several Art Deco movie palaces such as the Fox Watson in Salina, the Booth Theater in Independence, and the Granada Theater in Emporia.



¹⁵⁸ Naylor, *Great American Movie Theaters*, 20-22.

¹⁵⁹ Naylor, *Great American Movie Theaters*, 23-24.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

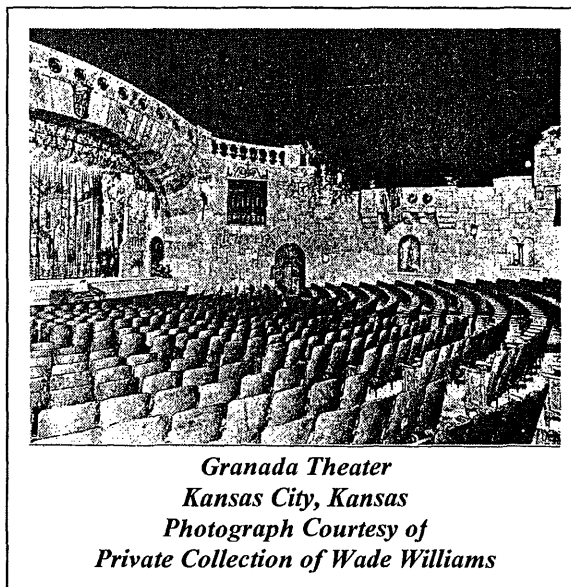
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 51

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

The Atmospheric Theater

A variation on the Movie Palace was the atmospheric theater. Developed by architect John Eberson in 1923, the atmospheric theater simulated the environment of an exotic, romantic outdoor courtyard that complemented the fantasies on the screen. The ornament of the auditoriums included windows, rooftops, and doors; and plaster walls were embellished to suggest stone. From conventional auditorium seats, patrons could look “skyward” to a ceiling painted dark blue and pierced with hundreds of pinpoint lights that simulated stars. Projectors placed high on the theater walls showed animated clouds across the ceiling.¹⁶⁰ There were a tremendous variety of atmospheric theaters including exotic Egyptian, Aztec, and Mayan theaters such as the Plaza Theater



built in 1929 at the Country Club Plaza, Kansas City, Missouri.¹⁶¹ Although Eberson developed the concept, other architects, including Thomas Lamb and the Rapp Brothers, also designed atmospheric theaters. The Boller Brothers designed at least one atmospheric theater in Kansas, the Granada Theater erected in Kansas City, Kansas in 1929. Like many Boller Brothers designs, the Granada has Spanish/Mission Revival styling throughout. The auditorium resembled a Spanish courtyard at dusk, complete with simulated stars and projected “clouds.”

Influence of the Boller Brothers Architectural Firm

An elite group of architects designed movie palaces for the major movie chains. Thomas Lamb, John Eberson, George and C. W. Rapp, and the Boller Brothers were among the most prolific. From offices in Kansas City, Missouri, the Boller Brothers distinctly influenced the landscape of Kansas movie theaters. During the first half of the twentieth century, their commissions included more than ninety designs for new theaters across the state as well as remodeling and renovating numerous existing theaters.

¹⁶⁰ David Naylor, *Great American Movie Theaters*, 23; Joseph M. Valerio, Daniel Friedman, and Nancy Morison Ambler, *Movie Palaces: Renaissance and Reuse* (New York: Educational Facilities Laboratories Division, Academy for Educational Development, 1982), 33.

¹⁶¹ Naylor, *American Picture Palaces, The Architecture of Fantasy*, 47-107.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

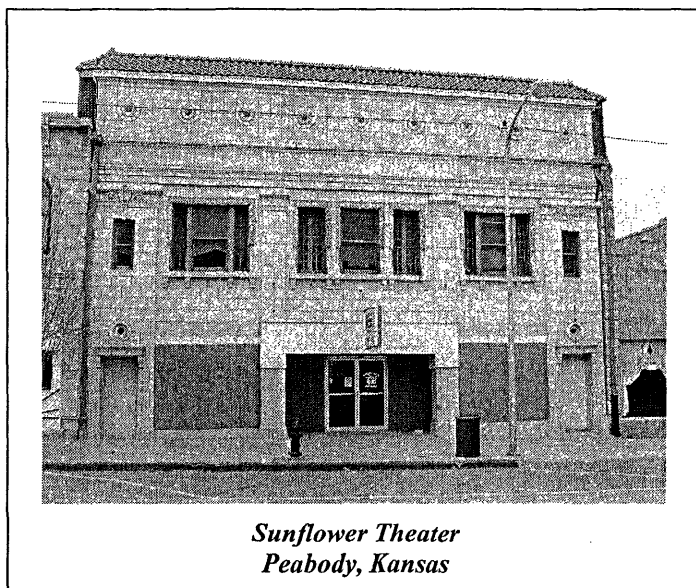
Section E Page 52

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

Around 1902, Carl Boller established a business designing vaudeville theaters, including many for the Lester M. Crawford circuit. In 1905, he opened an office in Kansas City, Missouri. The following year his brother Robert joined him, forming the company of Carl Boller and Brother. The brothers quickly gained recognition as expert theater designers. In 1907, they received commissions for several theaters in gold rush boomtowns in Nevada. Robert traveled to California in 1911 to design projects for the Sullivan and Considine movie theater group.

In 1917, Carl Boller was the president of the Kansas City Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. After serving in the United States Army Corps of Engineers in 1918-1919, Robert Boller returned to Kansas City to work with his brother. The new firm name, Boller Brothers, reflects his status as a full partner. By the 1920s, the Boller Brothers designed movie palaces in many states, most of which were west of the Mississippi River. In 1920, Robert opened a branch office in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma to supervise work in the area, but returned to Kansas City within a year. Shortly thereafter, Carl moved to Los Angeles where he remained for the rest of his career. It can thus be assumed that most of the Boller Brothers work in the Midwest after 1921 was the design of Robert Boller.

By 1931, the Boller Brothers had designed and/or remodeled more than three hundred theaters in twenty-four states. A list of their work from the archives at the University of Missouri – Kansas City includes ninety-two projects throughout the State of Kansas.



*Sunflower Theater
Peabody, Kansas*

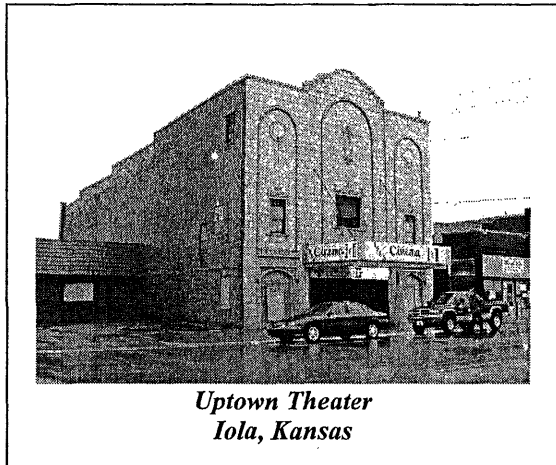
They designed theaters of many sizes and in many different styles, although they regularly adopted exotic and regional themes, such as the sunflower motif of the Sunflower Theater in Peabody (1919). Many of their Kansas theaters exhibited a strong Spanish/Mission Revival influence. Among their most notable projects were the Babylonian themed Missouri Theater in St. Joseph, Missouri (1937, demolished) and the

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section E Page 53

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas



*Uptown Theater
Iola, Kansas*

very western Pueblo Deco KiMo Theater in Albuquerque, New Mexico (1927).¹⁶²

Some sources indicate that the firm dissolved in 1931. Robert Boller continued to design theaters in Kansas, as a sole practitioner and in partnership with Dietz Lusk, until at least 1950. He continued to work throughout Kansas and Missouri as well as in Iowa, Oklahoma, and Nebraska. During this final period of his career, Robert Boller prepared plans for the Uptown Theater in Iola, the Dream Theater (renovation) and the Mecca Theater in Russell, the Granada Theater in Lawrence, the Fox

Strand Theater in Salina, the Hollywood Theater in Leavenworth, the Paramount Theater in La Crosse, the Overland (Rio) Theater in Overland Park, the Civic Theater in Sabetha, the State Theater in Larned, the Rusada Theater in Hugoton, and the Augusta Theater in Augusta. Boller's last known commissions in Kansas were the Crest Theater in Great Bend and an unnamed theater in Goodland, both designed in 1950.

Carl Boller died on October 31, 1946, survived by his brother Robert, who passed away on November 24, 1962.

MOVIE THEATERS BUSINESS: 1935 -1955

Rise of Neighborhood Theaters

In the 1920s, movie houses were beginning to move away from urban centers and toward the growing suburbs, especially in larger cities such as Chicago and Los Angeles.¹⁶³ By 1932, the downtown movie palace boom was largely over and new smaller neighborhood theaters constructed in outlying urban neighborhoods, newly developing suburban communities, and in the newer commercial districts of small towns were competing with the downtown movie palaces and older picture houses.

¹⁶² David Naylor, *Great American Movie Theaters*, 23.

¹⁶³ Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theater*, 88, 92.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section E Page 54

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

After 1935, movie attendance began to recover from the effect of the Great Depression. Because of the shortage of materials and labor during World War II, very few theaters were built in the period between 1935 and 1945. The 1942 War Production Board curtailed theater construction and designated all sound and projection equipment for use in military training. However, President Franklin D. Roosevelt recognized the necessity of keeping theaters open to maintain public morale, provide public information, sell war bonds, and show propaganda films.¹⁶⁴ Roosevelt's policy proved to be effective. The years between 1941 and 1945 were to be the golden age of cinema, boasting the highest attendance to date. Box office revenues peaked in the spring of 1946 with ninety million weekly patrons.¹⁶⁵

The end of World War II brought an end to this era and movie attendance subsequently declined. As servicemen returned from the war, middle-class Americans moved to the suburbs and abandoned many of the residential neighborhoods near the urban matrix of downtown and neighborhood movie theaters. With the baby boom, Americans concentrated on raising their families and looked for entertainment that could be enjoyed at home, turning first to radio and later to television.¹⁶⁶ In 1949, the number of movie patrons plummeted by twenty million per week and by 1950 it dropped another ten million.

Although these drops occurred before television was widely accessible, the new technology quickly proved to be a sustained blow to the movie industry. By 1952, two thousand television stations across the nation were broadcasting television programs. The following year, theater attendance dropped to under forty-six million patrons per week, a nearly 50 percent drop from the peak audience of ninety million in 1946-1948. Faced with this decline in demand, the movie business attempted to compete with television by introducing new technologies such as 3-D and Cinerama.¹⁶⁷

Post-war Movie Theater Architecture

In the late 1930s through the 1950s, the movie studios produced films that were more serious and ornate architecture treatments and plans disappeared from the buildings. In contrast with earlier movie houses, the neighborhood theater generally featured a small entrance lobby which housed a concession stand. The auditorium had no balcony or mezzanine and the interior floor of the auditorium sloped toward the stage to maximize patrons' view of the screen. Although often simpler in form and appearance, these theaters

¹⁶⁴ Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theater*, 128-129.

¹⁶⁵ Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, 82.

¹⁶⁶ Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, 83-88.

¹⁶⁷ Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theater*, 165.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section E Page 55

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

incorporated the most modern technology, including distributed air ventilation and innovations in acoustics and projection.¹⁶⁸

The architectural treatment reflected changes in American commercial architectural design. Only a few hundred theaters were built between the end of the movie palace era around 1932 and when television became common in 1954. Generally, the design featured a stripped-down version of the International style, at a cost far less per square foot than a 1920s movie palace.¹⁶⁹ Architectural treatments borrowed predominantly from industrial design, automobiles, trains, and airplanes and the new visually dynamic aesthetic attracted attention. Swooping lines, horizontal emphasis, and smooth surfaces projected a powerful image of modernism. This streamlined styling provided a break with the past and an optimistic expression of faith in the future.¹⁷⁰

The beginning of this change in theater design occurred in restrained, simple designs, reflecting the influence of commercial Art Deco and the Modern movement that challenged historical motifs.

By the time streamlined design reached its peak during the middle and late 1930s, the movie palace era had passed.¹⁷¹ The style thus appears only on a few hundred neighborhood theaters built in the 1930s and a small number built in the decade after World War II.¹⁷²

In Kansas, many older movie theaters underwent renovation during this period and received new interior and exterior treatments befitting the modern age. Architects and owners applied pastel-colored structural glass tiles, glass block, and new streamlined marquees to the old-fashioned façades of their movie houses. On the interior, they added concession stands and updated the décor. It was common to install a small partition below the balcony to create a small foyer or passageway that served as an anteroom for the auditorium.

By the time theater construction resumed in the late 1940s, the buildings were simpler and cleaner in line and form than the Art Deco works of the late 1930s.¹⁷³ Movie theater auditoriums featured bold lines and

¹⁶⁸ Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theater*, 108-109.

¹⁶⁹ Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, 73.

¹⁷⁰ Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theater*, 110.

¹⁷¹ Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theater*, 88, 92.

¹⁷² Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*, 74.

¹⁷³ Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theater*, 161.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

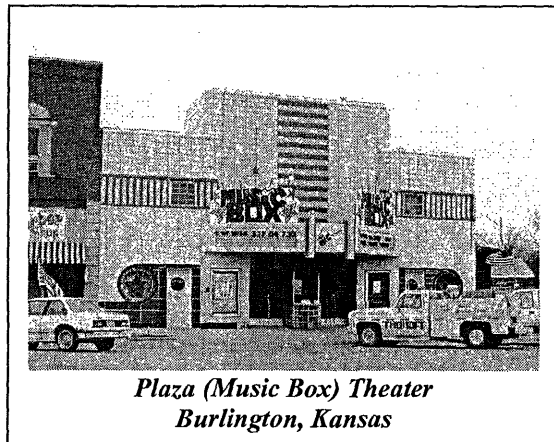
**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section E Page 56

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

a proscenium framed by large graphics. Recessed lighting, neon, and black-light effects in continuous coves also became popular. Automobiles affected exterior theater design even more drastically after World War II, affecting location, lot coverage, style, and graphics.¹⁷⁴

The recently renovated Overland (Rio) Theater in Overland Park is an excellent example of the post-war neighborhood theater, while the 1942 Plaza (Music Box) Theater in Burlington illustrates a design constructed in a small town.



¹⁷⁴ Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theater*, 159. The installation of wide screens in the 1950s often destroyed these distinctive features.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section F Page 57

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

ASSOCIATED PROPERTY TYPES

There are five property types associated with the historic context “the Historical Development of Public Entertainment in Kansas, 1854-1955.” Two property types have associations with live performing arts, three have associations with motion pictures, and one has associations with both forms of entertainment. These property types are (1) Community Halls, including second floor spaces in existing buildings; (2) Opera Houses; (3) Conversion Theaters; (4) Movie Theaters; and (5) Movie Palaces.¹⁷⁵

Kansas theaters and opera houses are significant for their association with the historic context “Historical Development of Public Entertainment in Kansas, 1854-1954,” and are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under National Register Criterion A for the areas of ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION, PERFORMING ARTS, SOCIAL HISTORY, and COMMERCE and under Criterion C for the area of ARCHITECTURE.

COMMUNITY HALLS

Description

In Kansas, the construction of community halls generally began prior to the Civil War and continued through circa 1921, corresponding with the establishment of settlements across the state. Community halls performed a wide variety of functions, including serving as venues for theatrical and musical performances, town meetings, fraternal and social organizations, commencement ceremonies, and athletic and military demonstrations. They were large open rooms with movable seating that could be arranged to suit a specific event. Additional features might include a raised stage, dressing rooms, a raked floor, and fixed seating. Most often, the community hall occupied space on the second or third floor of a commercial block building in the heart of the downtown area, sharing space with retail businesses, professional offices, and government offices. Some communities erected one-story stand-alone buildings to serve as community halls. In the smallest, most rural communities, local governments helped finance and build community halls that hosted live performances and often included government offices as well.

¹⁷⁵ As mentioned in Section E, memorial auditoria constructed after World War I are not among the property types considered eligible for listing on the National Register through this multiple property context.

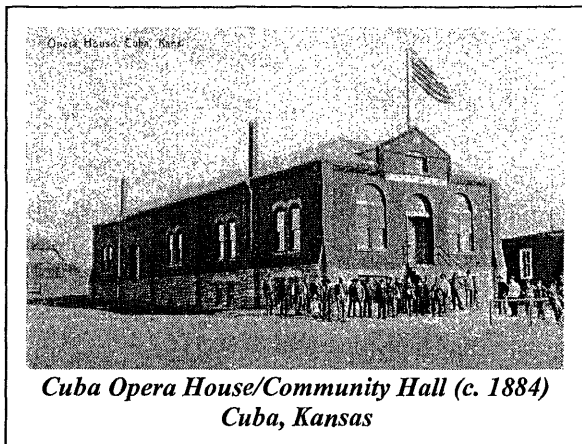
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section F Page 58

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

Community halls occupied vernacular wood frame, brick, or stone buildings. Ornamentation was simple and reflected the popular commercial styles of the day. For instance, a brick two-part commercial block building that housed a community hall might feature elements of Italianate, Late Victorian, Romanesque Revival, or Colonial Revival architecture. Ornamental wood or cast iron storefronts and cornices,



ornamental window surrounds, arched windows, and decorative parapets were among the common exterior features of these buildings. Because limestone occurs naturally in parts of Kansas, many community halls were distinguished by full masonry construction, limestone façades, or stone accents on brick façades. Stand-alone community halls, such as the **Cuba Opera House/Community Hall**, often mimicked the form and configuration of nineteenth century rural schoolhouses, but had more substantial masonry construction.



Some community halls occupied more than one story of a commercial block and stand-alone halls occasionally featured a full or partial second story, indicating the presence of a raked floor to facilitate patron viewing or a balcony with an upper level hall or anteroom.

The interior of the community hall usually featured simple treatments such as plaster walls and ceilings and wood floors. The absence of ornate finishes and fixtures distinguishes them from opera houses.

Significance

Community halls are reflect the historic context outlined in Section E of this multiple property documentation form for their significance under National Register Criterion A for the areas of ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION, PERFORMING ARTS, and SOCIAL HISTORY. They reflect the expansion of settlement across the Kansas frontier and the establishment of permanent communities with

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section F Page 59

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

sufficient means to address non-essential needs, such as popular entertainment. These buildings were an important symbol of community building that expressed optimism and faith in the future.

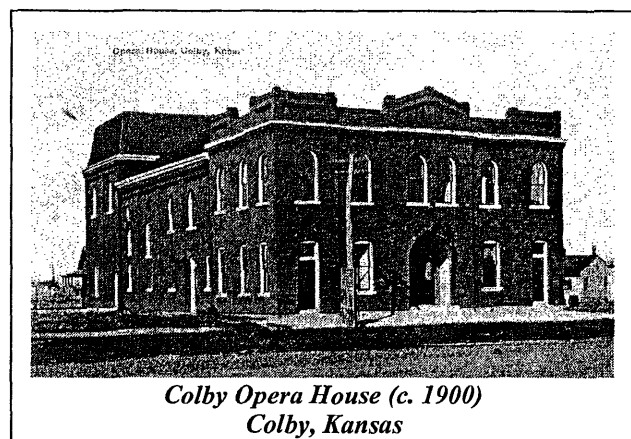
Registration Requirements

To be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, the characteristics and qualities described above must be sufficiently illustrated and retain a sufficient quality of integrity to support the significance of the building within the historic context. Generally, this requires that the community hall's interior space remain undivided and that its original exterior architectural features remain intact. If a raised stage was originally present, this should also remain intact. Community halls often did not have permanent seating; however, if this feature was part of the original design it is not critical that it survives. Many community halls had a separate entrance for the theater and this should remain intact and distinct. Properties with replacement windows are acceptable for listing if the windows do not play a significant role in the interpretation of the façade and when they are compatible with the original windows. Where original windows exist, replacing windows is not recommended. While the exterior architecture of the commercial block buildings that housed community halls should retain a high degree of integrity, the building can only be nominated for its significance under this context if the community hall itself remains intact. If the hall is no longer intact, the building may still be eligible for register listing under another context, for instance as an example of historic commercial architecture in its community or as a reflection of historic trends in commerce and development.

OPERA HOUSES

Description

A more complex arrangement of interior spaces and higher quality finishes and fixtures distinguish opera houses from community halls. Opera houses were larger and more ornate venues built primarily for hosting a variety of theatrical and musical productions. Interior design and furnishings varied greatly. Some contained one or two balconies, box seats, raked auditorium floors, permanent seating, and ornate walls and lighting fixtures. Others had plain walls of painted plaster and straight wooden chairs. Only the larger houses provided dressing room spaces. Most opera houses in

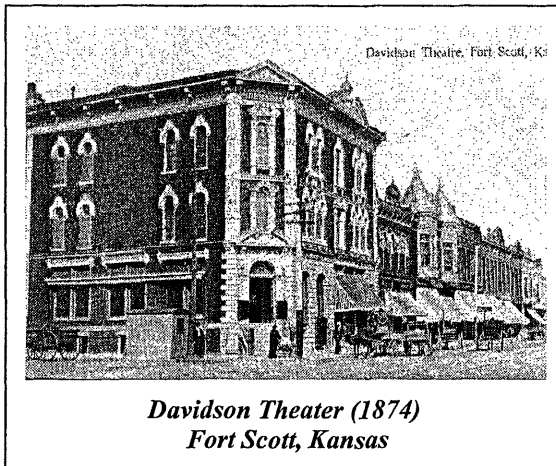


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section F Page 60

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas



Kansas did not have fly lofts for scenery, but used roll drops and sliding wings for scene changes.¹⁷⁶ The form of the building revealed the sophistication of its scenery-changing system.



The raised block at the rear of the **Colby Opera House** suggests the presence of a fly loft, while a flat roof suggests that a theater employed a simpler system. Opera houses built between circa 1870 and circa 1890 typically featured a deep stage, proscenium boxes, and a horseshoe-shaped auditorium. By the end of the opera house era, from circa 1890 into the early twentieth century, smaller fan-shaped auditoriums featuring a shallow picture-frame stage and box seats on the side walls and above the orchestra were common in opera houses.



Like community halls, opera houses often occupied the upper stories of a commercial block in the heart of downtown. Retail store, professional offices, or government offices occupied the remainder of the building. Private citizens, either individually or as a group, erected opera house blocks to elevate the status of their community. Locations with better access to the railroad network were generally more prosperous than towns with little or no railroad access, and the opera houses reflected the community's economic vitality.

While the form of theater buildings continued to adapt the two-part commercial block form typical of nineteenth century main street construction, special attention was given to both the interior and exterior design of opera houses. The exterior treatments

¹⁷⁶ Jennings, "Grand Opera in Kansas in the 19th Century," 67-69.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

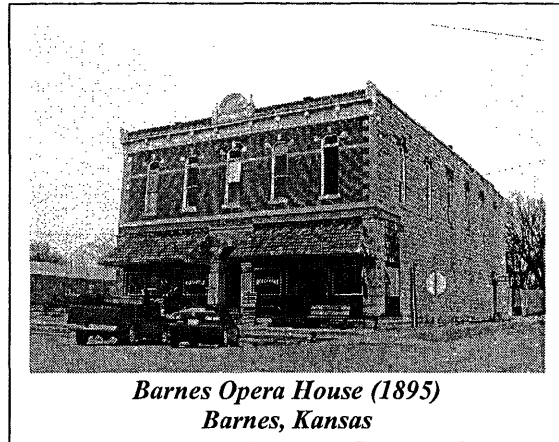
Section F Page 61

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

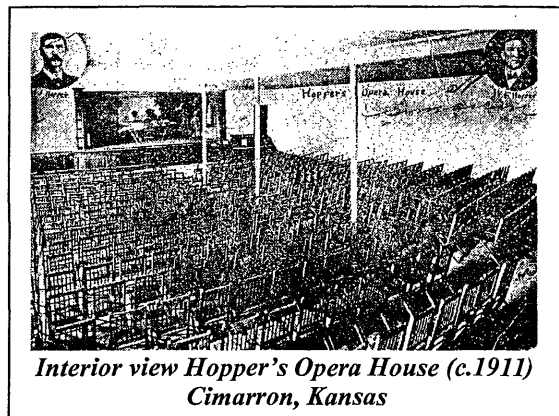
expressed the Late Victorian idioms popular at the time and ranged from the Italianate detailing of the **Davidson Theatre** in Fort Scott to the Romanesque Revival massing and stone construction of the **Fifth Avenue Opera House** in Arkansas City to the refined Renaissance Revival façade of the **Brown Grand Opera House** in Concordia.

More commonly, the builders of Kansas opera houses adapted simpler variations of these architectural styles and applied them to vernacular commercial block forms, as the exterior of the **Barnes Opera House** demonstrates. Ornate window hoods, molded cornices, corbelled brickwork, and arched windows and doorways were among the common treatments. Because limestone occurs naturally in parts of Kansas, many opera houses incorporated full-masonry construction, limestone façades, or stone accents on brick façades.

The interior appearance of opera houses varied greatly. Some were exquisitely elegant, with fancy plaster moldings, rich woodwork, plush seats, box seats, and ornate light fixtures that complemented the Victorian design of the exterior. However, typical opera house finishes were much simpler. The interior view of **Hopper's Opera House** in Cimarron shows plain plaster walls and ceiling, moveable wood chairs, and a small stage with a painted proscenium.¹⁷⁷



*Barnes Opera House (1895)
Barnes, Kansas*



*Interior view Hopper's Opera House (c.1911)
Cimarron, Kansas*

Significance

Opera houses are significant to the historic context outlined in Section E of this multiple property documentation form for their significance under National Register Criterion A for the areas of ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION, PERFORMING ARTS, and SOCIAL HISTORY. They reflect the continued expansion of settlement across the Kansas frontier and the growth of a population with

¹⁷⁷ Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theater*, 22.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section F Page 62

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

discretionary spending and the means to construct buildings for non-essential needs. Opera houses also continued to be important symbols of community building that expressed optimism and faith in the future. Opera houses may also be significant under Criterion C for the area of ARCHITECTURE for their design by an identified architect, as a representative example of a defined architectural style, and/or for the illustration of craftsmanship expressed in their construction.

Registration Requirements

To be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, the characteristics and qualities described above must remain sufficiently intact and retain a sufficient quality of integrity to support the significance of the building within the historic context. Most importantly, the original configuration of spaces, including auditorium, stage, proscenium, balcony, foyer, and lobby must remain unaltered. These features communicate the unique feeling of the theater as a distinct property type. Other elements that communicate the historic function of the opera house might include one or more separate entrances to the theater space and a fly loft that rises as a block above the rear of the auditorium.

While the amount and type of architectural ornament varied depending on the size and location of the opera house, both the exterior and the interior of the building must retain its integrity of design, materials, and workmanship to communicate its feelings and associations with its historic function. If the building has remained in continuous use, storefront alterations are expected and accepted as long as the original configuration of openings remains legible and the changes have achieved historic significance in their own right. Properties with replacement windows are acceptable for listing if the windows do not play a significant role in the interpretation of the façade and when they are compatible with the original windows. Where original windows exist, replacing windows is not recommended.

While the exterior integrity of opera houses is essential for register eligibility, the building can only be nominated for its significance under this context if the theater space itself remains intact. If the elements described above are no longer intact, the building may still be eligible for listing in the National Register under another context: for instance, as an example of historic commercial architecture in its community; for its reflections of historic trends in commerce; or for community planning and development.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

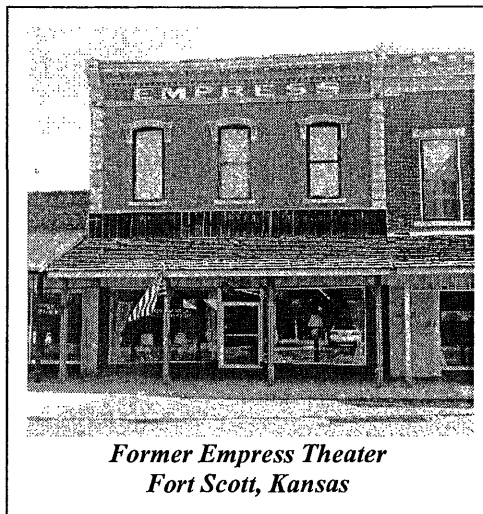
Section F Page 63.

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

CONVERSION THEATERS

Description

As the name implies, conversion theaters were venues established in commercial spaces not specifically designed to serve entertainment functions. They were typically located in main street commercial



*Former Empress Theater
Fort Scott, Kansas*

buildings from approximately 1900 to 1915. An open interior room with movable seats and a screen attached to one wall formed the auditorium. Other than exterior signage, there was little about the outside of the building to distinguish it from any other commercial building space. Usually the first movie theater in a community, the conversion theater was often set up by itinerant film exhibitors equipped with portable machines traveling through small towns and the rural hinterland. They rented vacant stores and set up folding chairs, hung a sheet on the back wall, and sold tickets from a box out front. Like the early community halls, these conversion theaters were very utilitarian spaces with standard finishes, such as plaster walls, plaster or pressed metal ceilings, and wood floors.

The **Empress Theater** in Fort Scott is an early example of a conversion theater. In 1913, the Boller Brothers, prolific Kansas City-based theater designers, retrofitted the existing 1890 two-part commercial block building to accommodate moving pictures.

Significance

Conversion theaters are significant to the historic context outlined in Section E of this multiple property documentation form for their significance under Criterion A for the area of ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION as the earliest commercial spaces used for viewing motion pictures. Initially, only the signage on the building's front elevation distinguished these properties from other main street commercial block buildings. While a few conversion theaters operated for more than a couple years, all of those surveyed in Kansas had reverted to other commercial uses.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section F Page 64

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

Registration Requirements

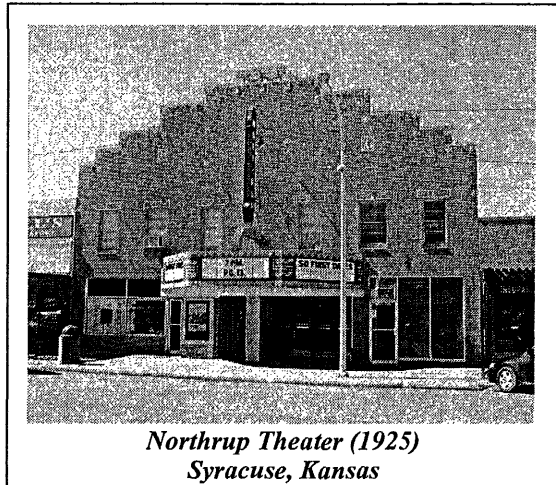
To be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under this context, a building would need to retain intact its configuration of interior spaces and the exterior appearance of the storefront from its use as a conversion theater. Properties with replacement windows are acceptable for listing if the windows do not play a significant role in the interpretation of the façade and when they are compatible with the original windows. Where original windows exist, replacing windows is not recommended. While the survey of Kansas theaters completed as part of the survey identified several conversion theaters, none of them continue to function as entertainment venues. Because this specialized use occurred only for a very limited period of time, it is unlikely that any buildings survive that retain their significance specifically for this association. Additional research of individual commercial buildings may reveal which ones functioned briefly as motion picture theaters during the first decade of the twentieth century.

MOVIE THEATERS

Description

The movie theater was a building constructed in a small town or neighborhood commercial district between circa 1915 and 1955 specifically for the showing of motion pictures. The form of the movie theater was typically a two-part commercial block building that matched the massing of the surrounding commercial structures. To facilitate the movement of patrons through the building, they adapted enframed wall or vault commercial block forms to the movie theater building. To protect against the dangers of fire common to early movie projection systems, advances in building technology were quickly adopted by builders. These trends included steel truss and concrete structural systems and masonry façades, all of which were fireproof.

As with earlier generations of theaters, the primary façades of movie theaters expressed the popular architecture of their day. Augmenting the brick commercial block building's façade were terra cotta, stone, or cast stone architectural elements reflecting one or more of the styles popular at the time,



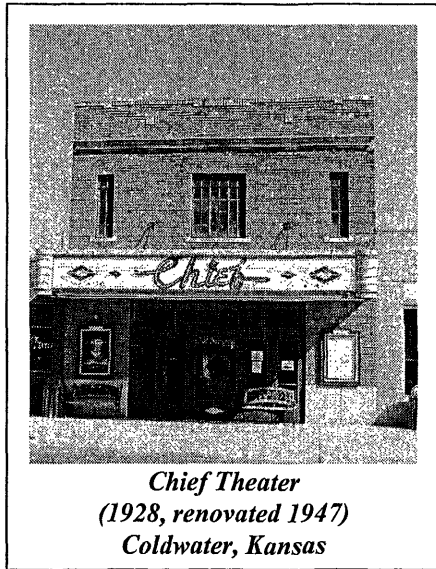
*Northrup Theater (1925)
Syracuse, Kansas*

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section F Page 65

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas



*Chief Theater
(1928, renovated 1947)
Coldwater, Kansas*

including Classical Revival and Spanish/Mission Revival. The use of subtly patterned and textured brick known as Tapestry Brick was also common.

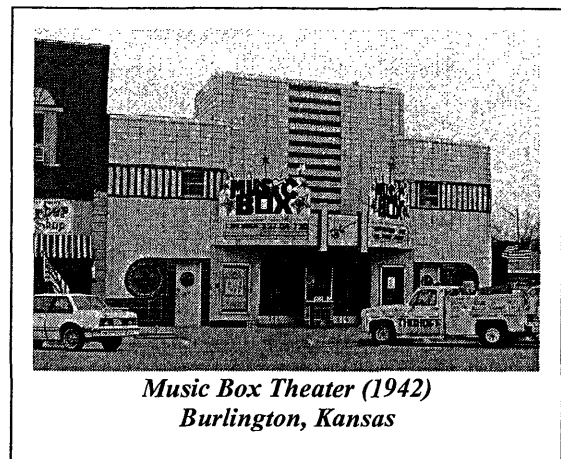
By the 1930s and 1940s, geometric Art Deco and streamlined Moderne motifs were popular for movie theater designs. To enhance the effect of these designs, new materials were incorporated into theater façades, including pastel-colored structural glass and ceramic tiles, glass block, chrome, and neon.

Distinguishing the exterior of the movie theater from other commercial block buildings and Conversion Theaters was the movie theater's entrance, which occupied the ground-floor level of the building. Before World War II, the entrance was often

recessed and the floor, walls, and ceiling of this space often had ceramic tile, wood paneling, or pressed metal ornamentation. Two or more entrances symmetrically flank the theater's ticket booth, which usually projects from the center of the building wall.

Through the entrance doors patrons entered a small lobby. Another set of doors at the rear of the lobby led to the auditorium. Stairs on either end of the lobby provided access to the movie theater's balcony if it had one. The elevated projection booth was at the rear of the auditorium. In some early movie theaters, the projection booth was built outside the auditorium walls to provide additional protection from fire.

The auditorium was a large open space featuring a raked floor, rows of permanent seats affixed to the floor, and a screen above the stage. Because theaters constructed before the age of talking pictures often featured vaudeville acts and other live performances, as well as movies, the stages were often equipped with curtains and rigging for scenery as well as an orchestra pit. Even after 1929, it was not uncommon to find a small stage in a movie theater's auditorium.



*Music Box Theater (1942)
Burlington, Kansas*

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

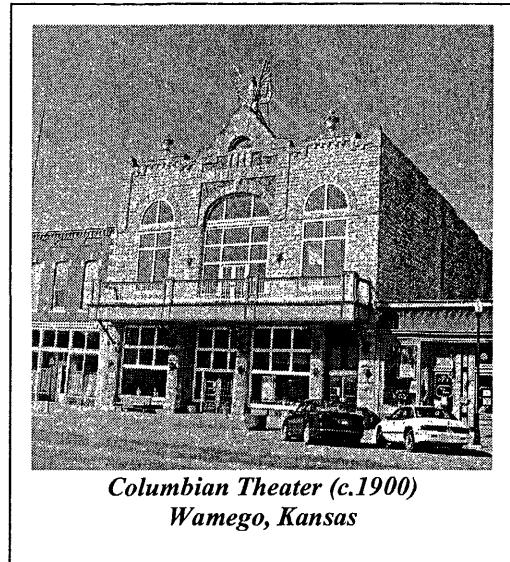
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section F Page 66

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

As the motion picture industry prospered and competition increased, movie theater owners updated their theaters to stay current with design trends. After the advent of talking pictures in 1927 and again in the 1940s, there was a pattern of renovation among Kansas movie theaters. Common changes included adding a partition wall below the balcony to create a secondary foyer at the rear of the auditorium; adding a concession stand to the lobby; redecorating the interior of the auditorium and/or lobby; installing a new marquee on the front elevation; enclosing the recessed entry; and redesigning the theater entrance. Many of these changes adapted elements of the popular Art Déco or streamlined Moderne architectural styles, described above.

After the advent of motion pictures, it was not uncommon for the owners of opera houses to attempt to adapt their venues to show movies as well as host live performances. The addition of a screen on which to project the films was usually the only change required. Early film technology was highly combustible and by World War I, most states, including Kansas, passed laws limiting movie viewing to ground-floor spaces. However, some opera houses, such as the **Columbian Theater** in Wamego, were successfully converted to movie theaters and often received a substantial makeover once the transition proved successful.



Significance

Movie theaters are significant to the historic context outlined in Section E of this multiple property documentation form for their significance under National Register Criterion A for the areas of ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION and SOCIAL HISTORY. They reflect the evolution of popular entertainment and advances in technology. A movie theater may also be significant under Criterion C for ARCHITECTURE as an example of an architectural style, as a vernacular adaptation of an architectural style to a distinct property type, or as a design by a recognized identified architect.

Registration Requirements

To be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, the characteristics and qualities described above must remain sufficiently intact and retain a sufficient quality of integrity to support the significance of the building to the historic context. Most importantly, the form of the lobby, auditorium,

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section F Page 67

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

stage, proscenium, and balcony (if originally present) must remain unaltered. These features communicate the unique feeling of the theater as a distinct space. Other elements that distinctly communicate the historic function of the movie theater might include the marquee or other exterior wall sign, the concession stand, and one or more lounges or other secondary spaces. Both the interior and the exterior of the building must retain integrity of design, materials, and workmanship to communicate its feelings and associations with its historic function. Properties with replacement windows are acceptable for listing if the windows do not play a significant role in the interpretation of the façade and when they are compatible with the original windows. Where original windows exist, replacing windows is not recommended.

Because movie theaters were especially prone to renovation over time, exterior and interior modifications that reflect the continued use of the theater should be considered historic if they were completed during the period of significance.

While the exterior integrity of the movie theater is essential for register eligibility, the building can only be nominated for its significance under this context if the historic configuration of the auditorium, balcony, and lobby remain intact. If these elements no longer retain their historic integrity, the building may still be eligible for listing in the National Register as a contributing element to a historic district under another context, for instance as an example of historic commercial architecture in its community; for its reflections of historic trends in commerce; community planning and development; or as a contributing element.

MOVIE PALACES

Description

The movie palace represented the apex of movie theater design. While it was a unique building type strongly influenced by the design of the opera houses and music halls built in Europe and the United States during the late nineteenth century, no building type was more representative of twentieth-century American architecture and culture. While the design of movie palaces in Kansas ranged from Classical Revival to Tudor/Jacobethan Revival to Art Deco and Moderne, the use of Mission/Spanish Revival was the most common.

Mainly built in larger cities, movie palaces were the largest and grandest motion picture theaters. In an effort by the large movie conglomerates to increase ticket sales, movie palaces were built nationally from

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

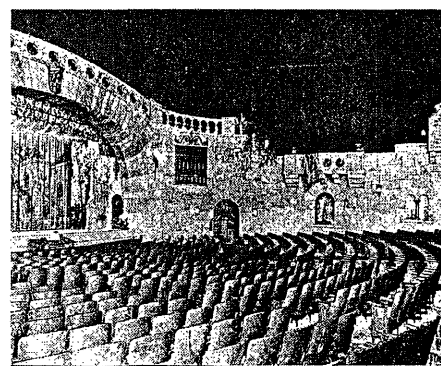
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section F Page 68

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

1913 until the early 1930s. Movie palaces were built in Kansas through 1950, most notably by the Fox Corporation as well as by the Dickinson Theater Group. Movie palaces were always architect-designed and often were the work of a nationally recognized firm, such as the Boller Brothers.

Heavily ornamented on the interior and exterior, movie palace designs featured whimsical, often exotic imagery. To attract more customers to the theater, movie palaces had fanciful exterior façades that distinguished them from the surrounding commercial properties. Lights illuminated, outlined, and drew attention to the façade and broad marquees and vertical signs presented the name of the theater. The interior of the movie palace featured extravagant treatments with multi-level balconies and grand staircases and surfaces with heavy ornamentation, often along an architectural theme. Often, movie palaces featured accessory spaces such as lounges, smoking rooms, cry rooms, and play rooms. Because Movie Palaces were typically designed and equipped for live performances as well as motion pictures, they also held dressing rooms, asbestos curtains at the proscenium, all the necessary rigging and lighting, and often a fly loft. An organ sat in the orchestra pit and ornamental side walls camouflaged the pipes



*Granada Theater(1930)
Kansas City, Kansas
Photograph Courtesy of
Private Collection of Wade Williams*

At least two Kansas movie palaces incorporated the atmospheric theater formula. John Eberson, inventor of the atmospheric style, designed the National Register-listed Orpheum Theater and Office Building in Wichita. The Boller Brothers designed the Granada Theater in Kansas City to simulate a Spanish courtyard at dusk, complete with simulated stars in the ceiling and projected clouds on the walls.

Significance

Movie palaces are significant to the historic context outlined in Section E of this multiple property documentation form for their significance under Criterion C for the area of ARCHITECTURE and are primarily eligible for listing in the National Register for their architectural design. Movie palaces may also be significant under Criterion A for the areas of ENTERTAINMENT/ RECREATION, PERFORMING ARTS, and COMMERCE for their illustration of the evolution of the movie industry and the competition between the movie chains to increase patronage and profits.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section F Page 69

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

Registration Requirements

To be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, the characteristics and qualities described above must remain sufficiently intact and retain a sufficient quality of integrity to support the significance of the building to the historic context. While they share the same essential form and configuration of spaces, the movie palace is distinguished from the movie theater by its unique, exotic architecture and large size. The interior and exterior design, materials, and workmanship convey the design theme, historic appearance, and function of the movie palace. Integrity of these features is critical to maintaining the historic feeling and associations of the resource. In addition, the form of the lobby, auditorium, stage, proscenium, and balcony must remain unaltered. These features communicate the unique feelings of the theater as a distinct space. Other elements that communicate the historic function of the movie palace will include the marquee or other exterior signage and the arrangement of secondary spaces, including the lobby, lounge areas, and the staircases. Properties with replacement windows are acceptable for listing if the windows do not play a significant role in the interpretation of the façade and when they are compatible with the original windows. Where original windows exist, replacing windows is not recommended.

Although, renovations to the Movie Theater property type may be considered contributing to the significance of the property when they reflect a continuation of the original function, the same is not true of the Movie Palace. The period of significance for a Movie Palace is limited to the year of its construction. If the historic décor has been altered the theater is ineligible for listing in the National Register as a movie palace, even if renovations occurred more than fifty years ago and the theater remained in continuous use. However, if the property remained a movie theater at the time of renovation, it may be possible to list the property as an example of a movie theater whose appearance and function evolved over a period of time.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section H Page 70

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

SUMMARY OF IDENTIFICATION AND EVALUATION METHODS

The Kansas State Historical Society (KSHS) contracted with Historic Preservation Services, LLC (HPS) to survey historic theaters and opera houses throughout the state of Kansas. The Kansas State Historical Society identified a list of potential resources by contacting the Kansas Historic Theater Association and local historical societies and by reviewing survey, state register, and National Register records already on file. Historic Preservation Services identified additional potential resources using Internet Web sites www.cinematour.com and www.cinematreasures.org and from a document at the Western Historical Manuscript Collection at the University of Missouri–Kansas City listing theaters designed by the Boller Brothers architectural firm.

From these sources, HPS and KSHS prepared a list of 103 theaters and opera houses to survey. A conversation with Jane Rhoads, who studied Kansas opera houses in preparation for her forthcoming book on the subject, identified 9 additional opera houses. During the field survey, HPS located 18 additional resources, bringing the total number of resources surveyed to approximately 130 theaters and opera houses.

HPS conducted the survey in two phases. The first phase occurred during March 2004; the second phase occurred during late May and early June 2004 and included the buildings identified by Jane Rhoads. The list of resources HPS surveyed included exact street addresses for some resources and only a town name for other resources. In these cases, HPS met with local residents to verify the location of the theater building or opera house. Historic Preservation Services took digital photographs of all resources, including buildings in ruins and vacant lots formerly occupied by a theater or opera house, and performed a brief visual inspection of each resource to ascertain its style, period of construction, materials, and condition. At this time, HPS did not have access to the interiors of a majority of the resources. Historic Preservation Services staff entered all survey information into a Microsoft Access database, which they delivered to the KSHS for integration into the state survey database.

On the Kansas Historic Resources Inventory Reconnaissance Form, HPS recorded a resource's construction date as "documented" if the local historical society provided a resource's construction date in their e-mail to the KSHS; if a previous Kansas Historic Resources Inventory Reconnaissance form provided a resource's construction date; if the www.cinematreasures.com Web site listed a resource's construction date; if the document at the Western Historical Manuscript Collection at the University of Missouri–Kansas City listing theaters designed by the Boller Brothers architectural firm provided a resource's construction date; if the local appraiser's office provided a resource's construction date; or if

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section H Page 71

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

the construction date was on the building. In all other cases, HPS recorded the construction date as “estimated.” When there was no information documenting the date of construction, HPS estimated a date of construction based on Sanborn Fire Insurance Company maps and known dates of construction of other buildings with similar architectural treatments in the area. Historic Preservation Services also used Sanborn Fire Insurance Company maps to resolve discrepancies in theater addresses and to confirm theater locations.

Historic Preservation Services reviewed their survey findings with KSHS staff and together identified a list of properties eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Historic Preservation Services contacted the property owners by phone and mail to determine their interest in having their property listed in the National Register. Property owners who chose to nominate their properties returned a signed letter to HPS stating their wishes to do so. While very few of the opera houses surveyed retained sufficient integrity to merit listing in the National Register, the owners of the opera houses identified as eligible for listing in the National Register declined to have their properties nominated. In conjunction with this Multiple Property Documentation Form, HPS nominated eight movie theaters constructed between 1917 and 1950 to the National Register of Historic Places.

During consultation, the KSHS and HPS determined that the resources nominated to the National Register in conjunction with the Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas survey would be those venues constructed as private ventures. This excluded lodge halls, which were often used for live performances and/or public meetings, as well as auditoriums and halls constructed as civic buildings.

In late May and early June 2004, HPS conducted the second phase of the survey. At this time, HPS staff met with property owners, took black-and-white photographs of the exterior and interior of each resource, and conducted archival research at local repositories, such as libraries and county historical societies. Historic Preservation Services then prepared National Register nominations for the eight selected resources.

Concurrent with the survey work, Dr. Dale Nimz, PhD conducted research and compiled the historic context. Dr. Nimz began by reviewing survey information provided by the Kansas Historic Preservation Office, conducting research at the Kansas State Historical Society Archives, and completing a comprehensive search of secondary literature on American theater history, theater history in Kansas and the Midwest, and Kansas history. *Kansas History: An Annotated Bibliography*, compiled by Homer E. Socolofsky and Virgil W. Dean, was an essential reference. *Theatre and Cinema Architecture: A Guide to Information Sources (Performing arts information guide series; v.5)* by Richard Stoddard provided

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section H Page 72

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

supplemental information. While there are relatively few primary sources on the subject of Kansas' historic theaters and opera houses, the unpublished theses and dissertation listed in the major bibliographical references provided valuable detailed studies.

Although three of the contemporary theatrical directories did not appear to be comprehensive, the *Theatrical Guide and Moving Picture Directory* by Julius Cahn and Gus Hill; *Theatres and Opera Houses on the Santa Fe* by the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad; and the *National Theatrical Directory* by Gus Hill provided an overview of Kansas theaters and opera houses during the middle of the established period of significance. National Register Multiple Property Documentation Forms for theaters and opera houses in Iowa, Nebraska, Idaho, and Washington proved to be valuable models and provided comparative studies.

There are many published books and articles on the development of opera houses and movie theaters in the United States. In developing the historic context for Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas and identifying specific property types, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States (Wisconsin Studies in Film)* by Douglas Gomery and *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theater, Starring S. Charles Lee* by Maggie Valentine were particularly helpful.

In addition, the interpretation of popular entertainment and the development of Kansas' historic theaters and opera houses emphasized social history and the development of communities and social groups. The historic context contributes to the understanding of popular entertainment in the Midwest by relating Kansas' historic theaters and opera houses to broader patterns of settlement and development, as well as economic and transportation history. Evidence that popular entertainment occurred in Kansas soon after its opening as a territory in 1854 and the fifty-year threshold for National Register eligibility determined the beginning and ending dates for the period of significance covered by the historic context "Historical Development of Public Entertainment in Kansas: 1854-1955."

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section I Page 73

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad. *Theatrical Directory: Theatres and Opera Houses on the Santa Fe*. N.P., 1907. Archives. Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.

Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad. "Theatrical Directory: Theatres and Opera Houses on the Santa Fe," 1907. Archives. Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.

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

Bordman, Gerald. *The Oxford Companion to American Theatre*, 2d ed. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1992.

_____. "Theater." In *The Oxford Companion to United States History*, ed. Paul S. Boyer, 777. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Cahn, Julius. *Julius Cahn's Official Theatrical Guide*. New York: Empire Theater Building, 1896.

Carlson, Marvin. "The Theatre as Civic Monument." *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 1 (March 1988) : 12-32.

Crawford, Lester M. Interview by George Meltzer (29 July 1940). "Social Life and Entertainment on the Frontiers of Kansas, 1854-1890." M.A. thesis, Wichita State University, 1941.

Cunning, Tracy A. National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form "Footlights in Farm Country: Iowa Opera Houses, 1835-1940," 5 March 1993. National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, Washington, DC.

Davis, Ronald L. "Opera Houses in Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas, 1870-1920." *Great Plains Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (Winter 1989) : 13-26.

Dick, Everett Newfon. *The Sod-House Frontier 1854-1890: A Social History of the Northern Plains from the Creation of Kansas and Nebraska to the Admission of the Dakotas*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1979.

Dickinson Theatres, Inc. "84 Years of Excellence." Article online. Available from <http://www.dtmovies.com/about.htm>; Internet; accessed 29 June 2004.

Doyen, Peggy. "History of Theater, 1878-1925, in Concordia, Kansas." M.A. thesis, Kansas State University, 1969.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section I Page 74

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

Ehlers, D. Layne. National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form "Opera House Buildings in Nebraska, 1867-1917," 1988. National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, Washington, DC.

Federal Writers Project. *Kansas: A Guide to the Sunflower State (American Guide Series)*. New York: Viking Press, 1939.

Fowler, Larry. "History of the Stevens Opera House, Garden City, Kansas, 1886-1929." M.S. thesis, Emporia State University, 1969.

Frick, John W. and Carlton Ward, eds. *Directory of Historic American Theatres*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987).

Garden City Irrigator, 10 October 1885. Quoted in Ricky W. Tyler, "Social Recreational Entertainments in Olathe, McPherson, and Garden City, Kansas from the Introduction of the Railroad to the Building of the First Opera House: A Narrative History," 199, n. 81. Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1995.

Garden City Sentinel, 17 November 1886. Quoted in Ricky W. Tyler, "Social Recreational Entertainments in Olathe, McPherson, and Garden City, Kansas from the Introduction of the Railroad to the Building of the First Opera House: A Narrative History," 208, n. 83. Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1995.

Garden City Sentinel, 1 December 1886. Quoted in Ricky W. Tyler, "Social Recreational Entertainments in Olathe, McPherson, and Garden City, Kansas from the Introduction of the Railroad to the Building of the First Opera House: A Narrative History," 208, n. 83. Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1995.

Glenn, George D. and Richard L. Poole. *The Opera Houses of Iowa*. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1993.

Gomery, Douglas. *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992.

Henderson, Mary C. "Scenography, Stagecraft, and Architecture." In *The Cambridge History of American Theatre, Volume II, 1870-1945*, eds. Don B. Wilmet and Christopher Bigsby, 487, 490, 492. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Henderson, Mary C. *Theater in America: 250 Years of Plays, Players, and Productions*, updated ed. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1996.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section I Page 75

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

- Herzog, Charlotte. "The Archaeology of Cinema Architecture: The Origins of the Movie Theater." *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 9, no. 1 (Winter 1984) : 11-32.
- Hill's National Theatrical Directory, Inc. *Gus Hill's National Theatrical Directory*. New York: Hill's National Theatrical Directory, Inc., 1914-1915), 3.
- Holt, Daniel D. and Kansas State Historical Society, Historic Preservation Department. "Kansas Preservation Plan: Study Unit on A Time of Contrasts: Progress, Prosperity, and the Great Depression, 1900-1940." Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1990. Photocopied.
- Kansas State Historical Society, Historic Preservation Department. "Kansas Preservation Plan: Study Unit on the Period of Rural/Agricultural Dominance (1865-1900)." Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1984. Photocopied.
- Homan, Delmar C. "Shakespearean Festivals in Western Kansas." *Heritage of the Great Plains* 21 (Spring 1988) : 1-20.
- Hornblow, Arthur. *A History of the Theatre in America*. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1919. Reprint, New York: B. Blom, 1965.
- Jennings, Harlan F. "Grand Opera in Kansas in the 19th Century." *Kansas History* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1980) : 67-98.
- Johnson, Claudia D. "The Theatre's Qualified Victory in an Old War." *Theatre Survey* 25, no. 2 (November 1984) : 193-209.
- Jonason, Marvin G. "A History of the Junction City Opera House in Junction City, Kansas: 1880-1919." M.S. thesis, Emporia State University, 1970.
- Kemmerling, James. "A History of the Whitley Opera House in Emporia, Kansas: 1881-1913." M.S. thesis, Emporia State University, 1967.
- L. H. Everts & Co. *The Official Atlas of Kansas*. Philadelphia, PA: L. H. Everts & Company, 1887.
- Larson, Carl F. W., comp. *American Regional Theatre History to 1900: A Bibliography*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1979.
- Levine, Lawrence W. *Highbrow / Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University of Press, 1988.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section I Page 76

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

Longstreth, Richard. *The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture*.
Washington, DC: The Preservation Press, 1982.

Malin, James C. "Early Theatre at Fort Scott." *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1958) : 31-56.

Malin, James C. "Kansas: Some Reflections on Culture Inheritance and Originality [1854-1905],"
Journal of the Central Mississippi Valley American Studies Association 2 (Fall 1961) : 253.

_____. "Kansas: Some Reflections on Culture Inheritance and Originality [1854-1905]." Quoted in
James C. Malin with Robert P. Swierenga, *History and Ecology: Studies of the Grassland*, 252-254, n, 46. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984.

_____. "James A. and Louie Lord: Theatrical Team: Their Personal Story, 1869-1889." *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 22 (Autumn 1956) : 242-275.

_____. "Theatre in Kansas, 1858-1868: Background for the Coming of the Lord Dramatic Company of Kansas, 1869." *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1957) : 10-53.

_____. "Theatre in Kansas, 1858-1868: Background for the Coming of the Lord Dramatic Company to Kansas, 1869 — Concluded." *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (Summer 1957) : 191-203.

_____. "Traveling Theatre in Kansas: The James A. Lord Chicago Dramatic Company, 1869-1871." *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (Autumn 1957) : 298-323.

Maloney, Martin J. "The Frontier Theatre." *Players Magazine* 15 (July-August 1939) : 6.

_____. "The Frontier Theatre." *Players Magazine* 16 (October, 1939) : 6.

_____. "The Frontier Theatre." *Players Magazine* 17 (November, 1939) : 6.

_____. "The Frontier Theatre." *Players Magazine* 18 (December, 1939) : 6, 20.

Margolies, John and Emily Gwathmey. *Ticket to Paradise: American Movie Theaters and How We Had Fun*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991.

Mather, Patricia Ann. "The Theatrical History of Wichita, Kansas, 1862-1920." M.A. thesis, University of Kansas, 1950.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section I Page 77

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

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

_____. "Theater." In *The Reader's Companion to American History*, eds. Eric Foner and John A. Garraty. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1991.

McConachie, Bruce A. *Melodramatic Formations, American Theatre and Society, 1820-1870*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992.

McDermott, Douglas. "The Development of Theatre on the American Frontier, 1750-1890." *Theatre Survey* 19, no. 1 (May 1978) : 63-78.

McPherson Republican, 29 December 1880. Quoted in Ricky W. Tyler, "Social Recreational Entertainments in Olathe, McPherson, and Garden City, Kansas from the Introduction of the Railroad to the Building of the First Opera House: A Narrative History," 133, n. 87. Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1995.

Meloy, Arthur S. *Theatres and Motion Picture Houses: A Practical Treatise on the Proper Planning and Construction of Such Buildings, and Containing Useful Suggestions, rules and data for the benefit of Architects, Prospective owners, etc.* New York: Architects' Supply and Publishing Co., 1916.

Meltzer, George. "Social Life and Entertainment on the Frontiers of Kansas, 1854-1890." M.A. thesis, Wichita State University, 1941.

Mickel, Jere C. *Footlights on the Prairie: The Story of Repertory Tent Players in the Midwest*. St. Cloud, MN: North Star Press, 1974.

Miner, Craig. *Kansas: The History of the Sunflower State, 1854-2000*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002.

Naylor, David. *American Picture Palaces: The Architecture of Fantasy*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1981.

Naylor, David. *Great American Movie Theaters (Great American Places Series)*. Washington, DC: Preservation Press, 1987.

Olathe Mirror, 4 February 1865. Quoted in Ricky W. Tyler, "Social Recreational Entertainments in Olathe, McPherson, and Garden City, Kansas from the Introduction of the Railroad to the Building of the First Opera House: A Narrative History," 27, n. 24. Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1995.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section I Page 78

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

- Poggi, Jack. *Theater in America: the Impact of Economic Forces, 1870-1967*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968.
- Putnam, Michael. *Silent Screens: The Decline and Transformation of the American Movie Theater (Creating the North American Landscape)*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.
- Ripley, John W. "Two Dozen Nickelodeons," *Bulletin of Shawnee County Historical Society* 43 (December 1966) : 38. Quoted in Ronald L. Davis, "Opera Houses in Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas, 1870-1920," 24, n. 113. *Great Plains Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (Winter 1989) : 13-26.
- Ripley, John W. *Town Hall Tonight: A Pictorial History of Topeka's Theaters*. Topeka, KS: Shawnee County Historical Society and Arts Center of Topeka, 1988.
- Sachs, David H. and George Ehrlich. *Guide to Kansas Architecture*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1996.
- Scott, Emory Frank. *One Hundred Years of Lawrence Theatres*. Lawrence, KS: House of Usher, 1979.
- Slout, William L. *Theatre in a Tent: The Development of a Provincial Entertainment*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1972.
- Socolofsky, Homer E. and Huber Self. *Historical Atlas of Kansas*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972.
- Socolofsky, Homer E. and Virgil W. Dean, comp. *Kansas History: An Annotated Bibliography*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1992.
- Stoddard, Richard. *Theatre and Cinema Architecture: A Guide to Information Sources*. Detroit, MI: Gale Research Co. 1978).
- Stones, Barbara. *America Goes to the Movies: 100 Years of Motion Picture Exhibition*. North Hollywood, CA: National Association of Theatre Owners, 1993.
- "The Rio Gala Opening." Program, 30 June 2000. Johnson County Museums, Shawnee Mission, Kansas.
- Toll, Robert C. *The Entertainment Machine: American Show Business in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section I Page 79

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas

_____. *On With the Show!: The First Century of Show Business in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.

Topeka Daily Commonwealth, 13 January 1871. Quoted in John W. Ripley, ed., *Town Hall Tonight: A Pictorial History of Topeka's Theaters*, 8-10, 14, 16, n. 40. Topeka: Shawnee County Historical Society and Arts Center of Topeka, 1988.

Tyler, Ricky W. "Social Recreational Entertainments in Olathe, McPherson, and Garden City, Kansas from the Introduction of the Railroad to the Building of the First Opera House: A Narrative History." Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1995.

Valentine, Maggie. *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theater, Starring S. Charles Lee*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.

Valerio, Joseph M., Daniel Friedman, and Nancy Morison Ambler. *Movie Palaces: Renaissance and Reuse*. New York: Educational Facilities Laboratories Division, Academy for Educational Development, 1982.

"Vaudeville." *Britannica Concise Encyclopedia*. Online. Available from Encyclopedia Britannica Premium Service at <http://www.britannica.com/ebc/article?eu=407136&query=vaudeville&ct=>; Internet; accessed 5 July 2004.

Wichita Eagle, 24 February 1887. Quoted in Patricia Ann Mather, "The Theatrical History of Wichita, Kansas, 1862-1920," 7-9. M.A. thesis, University of Kansas, 1950.

Woman's Kansas Day Club, comp. "Opera Houses and Entertainment, pre-1950," 1986. Archives. Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka.

Zivanovic, Judith. "Touring Melodramas and Midwest Frontier Values." *Heritage of the Great Plains* 23, no. 2 (Spring 1990) : 18-25.

Zornow, William F. "The Theater in Topeka, Kansas, 1858-1883." *Journal of the West* 17 (April 1978) : 63-71.