

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE:  
**Wisconsin**

COUNTY:  
**Winnebago**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

ENTRY DATE  
**JAN 21 1974**

**1. NAME**

COMMON:  
AND/OR HISTORIC:  
**Oshkosh Grand Opera House**

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**100 High Avenue**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Oshkosh**

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT:  
**Wisconsin 6th**

STATE: **Wisconsin** CODE: **55** COUNTY: **Winnebago** CODE: **139**

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural	<input type="checkbox"/> Government	<input type="checkbox"/> Park	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	<input type="checkbox"/> Comments
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Educational	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Religious		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Scientific		

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

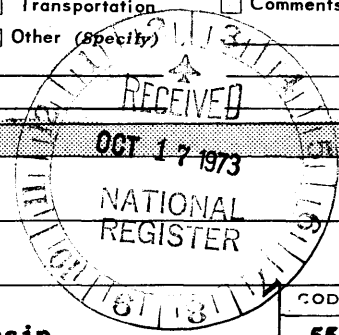
OWNER'S NAME:  
**Francis J. Hauser**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**747 South Commercial Street**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Neenah**

STATE:  
**Wisconsin**

CODE:  
**55**



**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
**Winnebago County Courthouse**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
CITY OR TOWN:  
**Oshkosh**

STATE:  
**Wisconsin**

CODE:  
**55**

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
**Wisconsin Survey of Historic Sites & Buildings**

DATE OF SURVEY: **1972**  Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
**State Historical Society of Wisconsin**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**816 State Street**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Madison**

STATE:  
**Wisconsin**

CODE:  
**55**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: **Wisconsin**

COUNTY: **Winnebago**

ENTRY NUMBER: **JAN 21 1974**

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## 7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

(Check One)

 Excellent     Good     Fair     Deteriorated     Ruins     Unexposed

(Check One)

 Altered     Unaltered

(Check One)

 Moved     Original Site

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (If known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Oshkosh Grand Opera House, built in 1883, is a hip-roofed, two-story mass of cream brick that cannot be classified as belonging to any particular architectural style. It was designed by a local architect, William Waters. One architect is said to have described the Grand "with a touch of affection, as 'sort of Greco-Roman-Gothic-Baroque.' " On the front facade the entryway was three doors wide with an ornate iron-railed balcony above. The entire opening was crowned by a broad, slightly center pointed arch that extended to approximately the  $1\frac{1}{2}$  story height and was glassed in above the level of the balcony. The whole entry facade was brought forward slightly from the main block and terminated in a gabled wall dormer with stone coping and a cylindrical ornament at the apex. Centered above the top of the main entry arch was an arcade of three semicircular windows. Above these the gable end was ornamented by a series of large squares formed by intersecting horizontal and vertical courses of black brick.

Counting the entry facade as a bay, the building is three bays wide, with pilasters at the corners. The sides were divided by brick pilasters into four bays of various widths. Between the first and second story levels was an ornamental course of black brick laid with the stretcher sides vertical. Above and below this were individual stretcher courses of black brick. At this level the pilasters were ornamented with elliptical designs of black brick. There was also a double band of black brick stretchers just above the foundation, another midway from ground to second story level, and a third about even with the sash tops of the second story windows. Under the eaves was a course of small recessed rectangles and below that two corbel tables, the uppermost of which was composed of beveled, pointed-arched, window-like recesses, then a four-course band of brick that was flush with the pilasters, supported by the lower corbel table beveled to the wall level. Fenestration on the sides was sparse, principally amounting to a pair of segmentally arched <sup>double</sup> windows in the second bay and one each in the third and fourth bays at the second story level. On the first floor level was a single, small, rectangular window in the first bay; a pair of arched openings matching those above in the second bay, one containing a double-doored exit and the other a pair of rectangular, small windows; a small, high, rectangular window in the third bay and a large, single, round-arched window in the fourth bay. Originally there were single, segmentally arched windows at the first and second story levels in each of the outermost bays of the front facade.

Exteriorly, the front of the building has been considerably altered. The arcade of windows above the main entry arch has been bricked in, and the windows of the arch itself bricked in above the balcony level except that a wide, rectangular central window opening was built into the later brickwork. The balcony itself was removed, and a brick wall built across the entire front of the building at the first story level, enclosing the old theater entryway, although the original remains hidden behind the brickwork. On the southeast side of the building, all windows in the last three bays were closed with brick as was about the rearmost half of the course of recessed rectangles immediately beneath the eaves. Two small, rectangular window openings were built into the first bay at about the second floor level. An entirely new entry and a marquee were erected on the south corner of the building in 1949, when the opera house was converted to use as a motion picture theater.

S E E I N S T R U C T I O N S

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
Wisconsin	
COUNTY	
Winnebago	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
JAN 21 1974	

(Number all entries)

Oshkosh Grand Opera House

7. At the same time, the old exterior brick walls were painted red.

Interiorly, the opera house was and still is properly termed acoustically perfect, a feature that accounts in part for the former greatness and success of the old Grand in its heyday. "The interior was done in gold, buff, maroon, and olive. The walls were decorated with gold stenciling, and the original seats (some of which still remain) were upholstered in maroon velvet. An army of cherubs populated the ceiling, and William Shakespeare's portrait claimed the place of honor in the center of the proscenium arch...Even today, if the lights on the stage are just right, the gold-stenciled wall patterns and the outlines of Shakespeare's portrait stand out through a later coat of paint.

"The seats were arranged in the traditional opera-house style...Best of all, of course, were the balcony seats, very nearly onstage...But the most distant seat in the balcony is only seventy-six feet from the stage, within easy earshot of a whisper or the elegant tinkle of crystal. There are no bad seats in the Grand.

"The huge, ornately carved pillars that flanked the stage, although partly covered by a modern wall in 1949, are still there...The delicate plaster-work on the balcony needs only a cleaning...as does the embossed, metal wainscoting on the Grand's staircase...Of course some things have been lost. The boxes are gone, and so is the fancy, gold-painted wooden railing for the balcony...The stars' dressing rooms fell victim to fire exits. The stage has been cut back eight feet...But the structure is still sound..."

There are obvious limits to the amount of restoration that could be accomplished, but exteriorly most of the alterations could be reversed, especially on the front facade where the original exterior still stands relatively intact behind the brick covering. Interior restoration could return to the old Grand Opera House most of its original splendor, and of course nothing would need to be done to restore the acoustics.



**SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian |  16th Century |  18th Century |  20th Century  
 15th Century |  17th Century |  19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1883

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |   |   |  |  |
|---|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal     | <input type="checkbox"/> Education              | <input type="checkbox"/> Political           | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric    | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering            | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic       | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry               | <input type="checkbox"/> Science             | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture    | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention              | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture           | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture   | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art            | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature             | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Theater  | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce       | <input type="checkbox"/> Military               | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation      | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                  |  | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation   |   |  | _____                                    |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Like most of the good old opera houses, the Grand was built to be a musical instrument in itself, enhancing the sounds within it. The acoustics are perfect--a great boon to both musical performances and the legitimate theater. It was ranked as the largest and finest in the state outside of Milwaukee.

As a theater, the Opera House played host to all the greats of the golden age of American theater. It was the principal stop between Chicago and Minneapolis because Milwaukee was too close to Chicago to make for convenient travel times. Torreyson writes, "In the height of its time, from the year of its erection and formal opening in 1883, to the period of the decline of the 'one-night stands' and traveling stock companies, this particular theater was a great center of culture and drawing card for dramatic and comedy shows. In these, most of the greatest actors and actresses of the legitimate stage of the period performed. Famous stage folk played to delighted audiences made up of the people of Oshkosh and a large surrounding territory."

The Grand opened August 9, 1883 with a performance of "Bohemian Girl," with Abbie Carrington as the star. Over the ensuing years, Enrico Caruso, Maude Adams, Amelita Galli-Curci, Madame Ernestine Schumann-Heink, the Barrymores, the Drews, George M. Cohan, John Philip Sousa, James Whitcomb Riley, Anna Held, John McCormack, Harry Lauder, Jenny Lind, Clara Bow, and many others played here.

"On another circuit, Oshkosh was the starting place. Mark Twain was one who once launched a tour here at the Grand. When Hal Holbrook re-created him, he did likewise."

"...today the Grand Opera House, with its big stage and handsome drop curtain, is much as it was in its prime, and well preserved as a theatrical shrine and memorial of days that are gone forever." Interested Oshkosh citizens hope to acquire the old Grand as a city property, restore it, and convert the area in which it stands into a small "old town" to contrast with a modern shopping plaza a block away. The buildings in the immediate area of the theater are mostly of the same period, i.e., contemporaneous with the Grand.

The Oshkosh Grand Opera House was the 10th historic property to be designated a Wisconsin Registered Landmark (1965).

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Alderson, Jo Bartels, "The Grand Old Grand," Wisconsin Trails 12(3):25-27, Autumn 1971.

Morton, Terry Brust, "Town Hall Tonight," Historic Preservation, 18(1):16-17, Jan.-Feb., 1966.

Torreyson, Louis H., "Erection of Opera House Major Event in Oshkosh," and four sequential articles under various titles, Oshkosh Daily Northwestern, March 22-26, 1965.

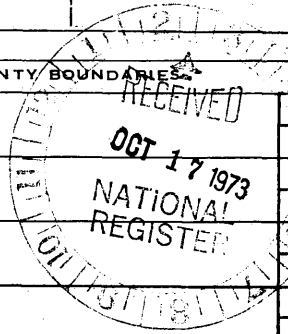
**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	° ' "	° ' "		N 44	01	03
NE	° ' "	° ' "		W 88	32	18
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **Less than 1.0**

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES:

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
**Donald N. Anderson, Assistant Director, Historic Sites & Markers Division**

ORGANIZATION: **State Historical Society of Wisconsin** DATE: **August 20, 1973**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**816 State Street**

CITY OR TOWN: **Madison** STATE: **Wisconsin** CODE: **55**

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National  State  Local

Name James Morton Smith  
**James Morton Smith**

Title Director, State Historical Society of Wisconsin

Date October 10, 1973

**NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

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

A. P. Montrose  
Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date 1/21/74

ATTEST:  
Ronald M. Greenberg  
Keeper of The National Register

Date 1/16/74