

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Illinois	
COUNTY: McHenry	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

1. NAME

COMMON:  
The Woodstock Opera House

AND/OR HISTORIC:  
The Woodstock City Hall

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:  
119 Van Buren Street

CITY OR TOWN:  
Woodstock

STATE: Illinois CODE: COUNTY: McHenry CODE:

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both 	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress 	Yes: <input type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No 
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Entertainment 	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum 	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific 	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ _____ 

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:  
The City of Woodstock

STREET AND NUMBER:  
106 Dean Street

CITY OR TOWN: Woodstock STATE: Illinois CODE:

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
McHenry County Courthouse

STREET AND NUMBER:  
101 North Johnson

CITY OR TOWN: Woodstock STATE: Illinois CODE:

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
Illinois Historic Structures Survey

DATE OF SURVEY: October 1972  Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
Survey Office

STREET AND NUMBER:  
1800 South Prairie Avenue

CITY OR TOWN: Chicago STATE: Illinois CODE:

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: ILLINOIS  
COUNTY: McHENRY  
ENTRY NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
FOR NPS USE ONLY

**7. DESCRIPTION**

<b>CONDITION</b>	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unaltered		<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site	

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (If known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

**DESCRIPTION**

The Woodstock Opera House is constructed with exterior masonry bearing walls, iron interior columns, wood floor joists and wood roof structure. All floors are wood. The auditorium is served on the north by a main stairway of wood, with all newels, balusters, rails and trim in original condition. At the second floor two stairs go up to the balcony. There are some good-to-excellent colored glass panels in the many windows.

A concrete block fire wall was built to separate the stage area from the auditorium in order to bring the theater section up to current fire codes. At the same time dressing rooms and toilets for the performers were built below the stage; formerly the dressing rooms were located at either side of the stage. The new area has a concrete floor. The auditorium seats were replaced with upholstered chairs from the Great Northern Theater, torn down to make way for the Federal Building in Chicago. The original ventilating system air openings are still visible, but changes have been introduced at the southwest corner of the auditorium where there are many new registers--evidently the theater is very uncomfortable in hot weather since there is no air conditioning. Radiators provide heating. Some of the original light fixtures are still being used; some antique chandeliers have been installed in the auditorium. A "horseshoe" of bare lightbulbs on the face of the balcony has evidently been abandoned, although it could be restored. In its place some 12" square recessed ceiling fixtures were installed under the balcony.

The exterior was <sup>at one time painted</sup> white with red trim. It has been sandblasted to reveal the original buff brick and sandstone trim. The interior is painted in tones of warm grey. Sight lines are excellent and the theater has a very intimate feeling. Modern stage lighting has been added.

The building is presently occupied by the City of Woodstock Manager, building inspector, engineer, clerk and Controller. They are located on the first floor in space recently partially remodeled. The police station is located in the old fire department quarters.

**HISTORY**

On June 1, 1838, Alderman W.W. Cook proposed to the City Council that it purchase the John Bunker lot at the corner of Dean and Van Buren Streets as the site for a new City Hall. This lot, which is located on the south side of the public square, had been vacant since 1871, when a large section of the business district was destroyed by fire.

The motion, however, met with opposition, with the Council vote ending in a tie. Thus Mayor Joslyn had to vote--his being in the affirmative and resulting in the purchase of the lot for \$2,000. The Council then accepted plans submitted by architect Smith Hoag, of Elgin, Illinois, and ordered the brick from the McHenry Brick Company.

Smith Hoag was an architect, builder and contractor of good reputation for high quality of work. He was born in Batavia, New York, in 1837, where he lived until the 1860's when he moved to Geneva. During his years here (1864-69), he erected some of the best residences in the area. In 1869 he moved to Elgin, feeling that as a city it offered him a larger field for his work. He was so much in demand that he often employed up to fifty men, including carpenters, masons and painters, to execute a project from beginning to end. Among his works in the Elgin area were the First Baptist Church,

see continuation sheet

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

FIRST CONTINUATION SHEET (1 of 2)

Form 10-300a  
(July 1969)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

STATE	
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(Number all entries)

7. HISTORY, continued.

Martin's and Hubbard's Blocks, the I.C. Towner and Gronsberg, Brierman & Co.'s factories, residences for the city's leading citizens, courthouses for several counties, the first opera house for Elgin, and the Dunham Castle at Wayne. Mr. Hoag died on August 18, 1916 at his home in Elgin, Illinois. The Hoag home was later partially destroyed by fire. Apparently any architectural drawings for the Woodstock Opera House were destroyed then also.

Work on the new City Hall was begun in 1889. It was constructed of white brick, trimmed with red sandstone and terra cotta. The main floor of the building was divided into a public library and reading room, police magistrate's office, council room, city auditor's office, collector's office--all on the east side, and the fire department on the west side. In the basement was the city jail, the steam heating plant and storage rooms.

The second floor was devoted to the Opera House, which, with a balcony, could seat nearly 640 people. The proscenium opening was 24' wide by 16' high, with a 26' deep stage and a grid at 32'.

A fire curtain was especially designed and painted for the Opera House by the Sosman and Landis scene studio of Chicago. It showed a "view of the Bay of Naples."

The city voted bonds for \$16,000 to cover construction costs and they were all paid off by 1900.

On September 2, 1890, the building was dedicated with a performance of Margery Daw by the Patti Rosa Players, then billed as the midwest's leading opera troupe.

That was the beginning of a long series of notable productions to appear on the Woodstock stage. In August of 1892 the Choate Dramatic Company presented Felicia with Mattie Choate as the lead. This was their third season at Woodstock. John Dillan, also an established favorite, appeared on the evening of October 6, 1892, in A.T. Dazey's comedy, The Model Husband. A large audience attended a November 30, 1892, production of Uncle Tom's Cabin.

A highlight of the history of the Opera House occurred during the summer of 1934. At that time there was in Woodstock the very exclusive Todd School for Boys. One of the students was a young man from Kenosha, Wisconsin--Orson Welles. He had gone to the Dublin Gate Theater and during the summer of 1934 returned to Woodstock with Michael MacLiammoor. In association with Roger Hill of the Todd School, he produced the Todd Theater Festival. The bill for the summer included Hamlet, Macbeth, Trilby, Czar Paul, and a rollicking version of The Drunkard.

When Welles "moved in" for the Theater Festival he removed and destroyed all the old scenery in the Opera House--starting with all new scenery.

The festival attracted a great deal of attention and was attended by the elite of Chicago and the summer residents of the fashionable Lake Geneva summer resort. Thornton Wilder, then teaching in Chicago, was there, as well as Claudia Cassidy, the critic of the Journal of Commerce, and Charles Collins of the Chicago Tribune. When the Festival ended, Orson Welles left Woodstock to join Katharine Cornell for the winter season.

Beginning in 1948, several seasons of winter stock were produced at the Opera House. The company gathered for these seasons of sixteen plays in sixteen weeks included such "unknowns" as Geraldine Page, Paul Newman, Shelley

SECOND CONTINUATION SHEET (2 of 2)

Form 10-300a  
(July 1969)

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(Continuation Sheet)

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(Number all entries)

7. HISTORY, continued.

Berman, Tom Bosley, Betsey Palmer and Lois Nettleton. They worked in the store and offices during the day and at night performed at the Opera House as members of the Woodstock Players. One woman considers her basement a shrine--that was where Paul Newman spent his summers.

Activity at the Opera House then started to diminish. There were occasional local productions, dramatic and musical, such as Of Thee I Sing and The Man Who Came To Dinner. However, by 1959 the physical plant had fallen into a sad state. The seats and the seat risers had been removed, the electrical system was faulty, and everything was covered with dust and pigeons who found shelter from the cold and died in the old Opera House.

In 1959, six high school students went to Ester Stewart with an idea--to reactivate the theater. They soon had a group of about twenty-five, called the Junior Civic Arts Association, working to reclaim the building from the pigeons. They worked all summer, scrubbing floors, walls, windows, laundering draperies, repairing the electrical system, and painting the proscenium. When their efforts to restore the "original turn of the century floor" were completed, they decided to put on a play. A mass effort was started to collect material and funds from the community, resulting in the staging of You Can't Take It With You.

In 1960 the Association asked for and received seats from the old Great Northern Theater in Chicago. It was then learned that the Eighth Street Theater, also in Chicago, was to be torn down. Once again the young people ventured forth, and this time returned to their Opera House with lighting equipment and drapes. They then put on a series of one-act plays, Happy Journey, Riders To The Sea, and Bertha, the Bartender's Beautiful Baby.

By this time adult interest was very high, and an adult board was formed. It was incorporated in 1961 as the Woodstock Fine Arts Association.

As for the building, sometime during this seventy year history, the steeple was removed, probably for structural reasons, then the canopy at the front entrance was removed, and in about 1939 a new fire station was built on the south end of the Opera House, the police station then moving into the west half of the building. When a new library was built in the 1950's, the front part of the east half of the ground floor became city offices.

**8. SIGNIFICANCE**

**PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)**

- |  |                                       |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 18th Century            | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century  | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century |                                       |

**SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1889-90**

**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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature             | <input 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**

The Woodstock Opera House is of special significance as one of the very few nineteenth-century theaters surviving in a small town setting in the state. Its exterior, except for the upper part of the tower, has hardly been altered and the auditorium and foyers still possess to a very high degree their original integrity. That the building was planned as a multi-purpose structure housing, in addition to the opera house, <sup>the</sup> public library, and the offices of the municipal government, also makes the building particularly distinctive. The building is also very important to the visual integrity of Woodstock's large town square which needs at least a few sizeable buildings like the Opera House to give it an appropriate scale. Because of the many important theatrical personalities associated with the Opera House, <sup>many</sup> ~~best~~ of whom was Orson Welles, the building is of considerable historic interest.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Woodstock Daily Sentinel, 1888-1892. Articles about the design, construction and use of the building.  
Elgin Daily Courier, Aug. 18, 1916. Obituary of Smith Hoag, the architect of the building.  
 Frederick Koeper, Illinois Architecture, 1968, pp. 300-301.

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					
	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	
NW	°	'	"	°	'	"	N42	°	18'	57"
NE	°	'	"	°	'	"	W88	°	26'	12"
SE	°	'	"	°	'	"				
SW	°	'	"	°	'	"				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: .126 Acres

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

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:  
Mrs. Alexander B. Sharpe, President

ORGANIZATION: Woodstock Fine Arts Association      DATE: December 1973

STREET AND NUMBER:  
906 South Valley Hill Road

CITY OR TOWN: Woodstock      STATE: Illinois      CODE: \_\_\_\_\_

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 Anthony T. Dean, Director  
 Title State Historic Preservation Officer

Date December 28, 1973

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Keeper of The National Register

Date \_\_\_\_\_

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

ENTRIES IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

STATE ILLINOIS

Date Entered JUL 17 1974

<u>Name</u>	<u>Location</u>
The Woodstock Opera House	Woodstock McHenry County

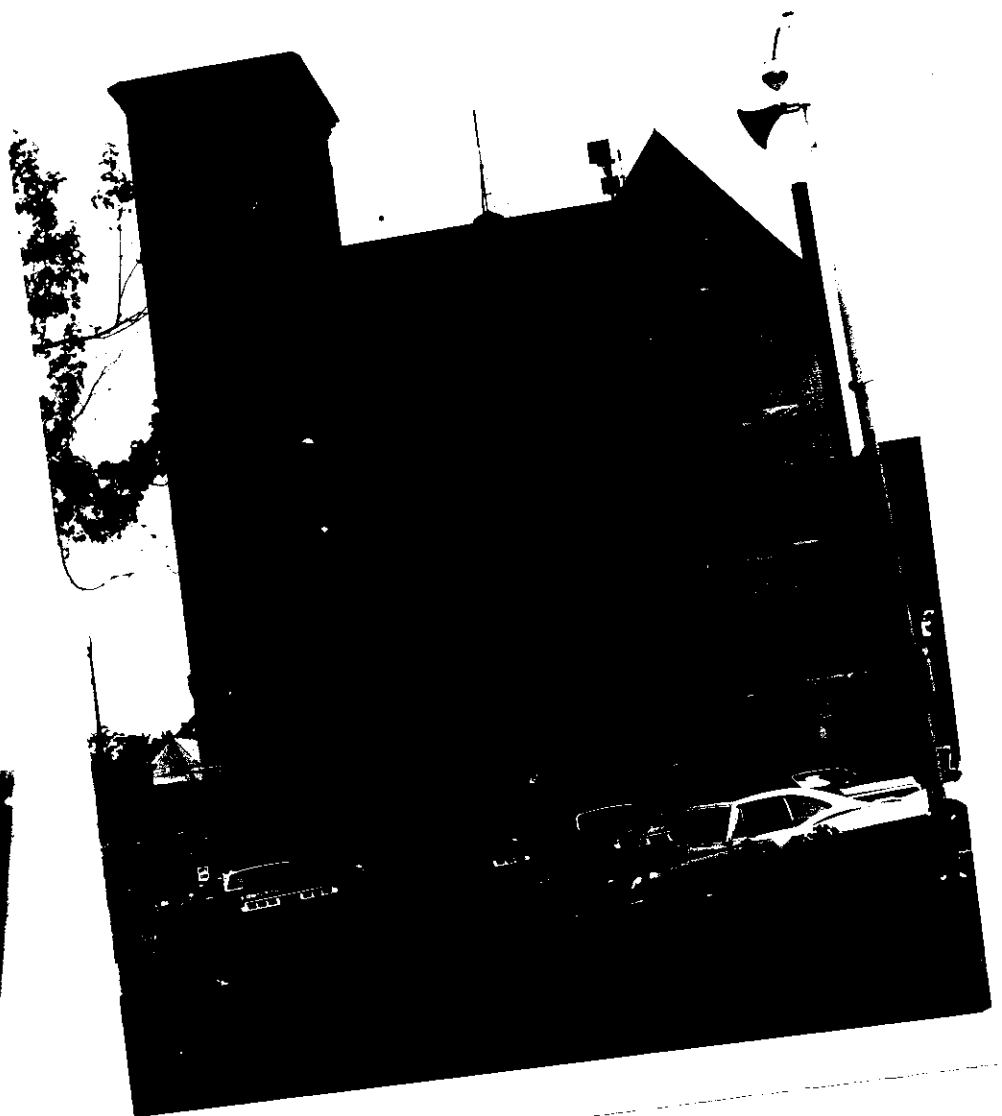
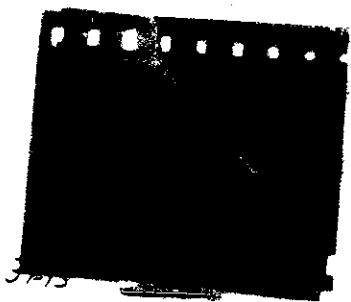
**COPY OF CONGRESSIONAL NOTIFICATION**

Also Notified

Hon. Charles H. Percy  
Hon. Adlai E. Stevenson, III  
Hon. John B. Anderson







7. Historical Themes: (check one or more of the following)

- Archeological Site (Pre-Columbian)
- Archeological Site (Post-Columbian to 1673)
- French Influence (1673-1780)
- Illinois Frontier (1780-1818)
- Illinois Early (1818-1850)
- Illinois Middle (1850-1900)
- Illinois Late (1900-present)
- Famous People (give names & dates)

8. Specific Date: 1890

Areas of significance (check one or more of the following)

- Aboriginal (historic)
- Aboriginal (pre-historic)
- Agriculture
- Architecture
- Art
- Commerce
- Communication
- Conservation
- Education
- Engineering
- Industry
- Invention
- Landscape Architecture
- Literature
- Military
- Music
- Political
- Religion/Philosophy
- Science
- Sculpture
- Social/Humanitarian
- Theater
- Transportation
- Urban Planning
- Other (specify)

Brief statement of significance: (include all names and dates)  
 Use additional sheets if necessary. **Fine bldg, but failed to make NR**

9. Form prepared by:

Name and Title: \_\_\_\_\_ TH \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
 Organization: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Street and number: \_\_\_\_\_  
 City or Town: \_\_\_\_\_ County: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

During the course of the Survey we often find it necessary to search for references for a particular site. When filling out the Survey form, please list according to the following example, published references to the site for which forms are being completed. If a bibliography can be compiled, it will greatly deduct from the Survey's task.

Bibliography

Robertson, Robert, Cf Whales and Men. New York, Alfred K. Knopf, Inc., 1954.