

N.A.

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

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received
date entered

*Wash.
3-22-85*

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

1. Name

historic Phoenix Opera House Block

and or common

2. Location

street & number 112-122 West Lafayette Street not for publication

city, town Rushville vicinity of

state Illinois code 012 county Schuyler code 169

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: <u>Cultural</u>

4. Owner of Property

name Phoenix Opera House Community Center, Inc. (and others: see continuation sheet)

street & number Box 105

city, town Rushville vicinity of state Illinois

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Schuyler County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Rushville state Illinois

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title see continuation sheet has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town state

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Continuation sheet Owners of Property Item number 4 Page 1

Owners of property in the Phoenix Opera House Block, in addition to the sponsors, are:

Mrs. Jane Mourning - 470 West Lafayette Street, Rushville

Schuyler County Farm Bureau - 120 West Lafayette Street, Rushville

Dr. Forrest Johnson - 117 South Congress, Rushville

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Continuation sheet

Item number

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1. Inventory of Historic Landmarks in Schuyler County
Illinois Historic Landmarks Survey
February 1975
Illinois Department of Conservation
Springfield, Illinois

2. Inventory of Historic Structures in Schuyler County
Illinois Historic Structures Survey
October 1972
Illinois Department of Conservation
Springfield, Illinois

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Phoenix Opera House Block is comprised of six storefronts, occupying the west two-thirds of the south side of the Rushville square, and second floor space above all. All six stores originally had identical facades, with center entrances flanked by display windows, and a separate entrance for the second floor Opera House. One store retains the original entrance intact, while the others have been altered in varying degrees. Transom windows above the entrances still exist under added coverings in the three fronts under the Opera House proper.

The second floor facade is substantially intact. Each section has three double-hung windows, crowned by ornate pediments. Portions of a wide moulding separating the two storæes have been removed. The cornice at the roofline is intact except for the westernmost section. A Mansard roof section, much higher than the rest, defines the Opera House proper. While the original roof surface of the Mansard was slate (remnants have been identified) it is presently covered by asphalt shingles. An ornate crest with the words "Opera House" has been removed - pictures of the original exist.

Entrance to the Opera House is at the extreme east end of the Block. The stairs are four feet wide and offer a view of the ticket office straight ahead. Across the room, large double doors open into the auditorium proper. These doors had been closed off during remodeling but were recently reopened. The outer room retains the original appearance, with wainscoting and heavy mouldings around windows and doors. A large light fixture surely dates from the installation of electricity in 1890.

The Opera House was described on its opening night as follows...."the auditorium is 43 X 58 feet. It will easily seat 500 people, is lighted by four sets of chandeliers, is well heated and ventilated. The walls are pure white, have handsome plaster-paris paneling on either side of the stage and around the front edges. The ceiling is 19 feet high and is bare of shoddy decorations. The stage occupies 22 feet off the south end; has a front of 20 feet and is lighted by 18 footlights. The scenery is complete and handsome, while the drop curtain is a scene of a lake and ancient city in Europe. The stage is ample for large troupes, and is furnished with four dressing rooms, trap doors, etc. The cost of furnishing the Opera House was over \$1,000." In 1900, a program of "improvements" was instituted, with a special scenery artist engaged to overhaul the scenery and to "fresco" the walls and ceilings.

Around 1924, the Masonic Lodge leased the Opera House space, and transformed it from its original appearance to that of a lodge hall. The stage was removed, and replaced by a balcony, reversing the focus of the room from south to north. The two massive doors opening frmm the foyer were closed off, and entrance arranged from the south, along with five tiny "robing rooms." The wood trim was changed from the ornate original to the sturdy plain style typical of the twenties. This change, while regretably destroying the original Opera House interior, is a prime example of adaptive use of space, typical of a practical midwestern town. Whether this room should retain its' 1920's appearance or be returned to its original style is a question for the future. It would be a primary goal of the sponsors, however, to restore the facade of the building to its original appearance, and the Opera House to its original role in the community as a cultural and performance facility.

A structural analysis of the building completed by Architect William B. Coney is attached, along with notes indicating repairs or changes made since his original inspection in 1980.

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Continuation sheet

Structural Report

Item number 7

Page

The structural report attached was compiled in 1980. Since that time, the following changes have been made:

The roof has been repaired, and no longer "leaks in a generalized fashion."

Doors described in paragraph 4 have been reopened.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates Built 1882 Builder Architect Thos. Wilson/Chas H. & Lewis C. Wells

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The construction of the Phoenix Opera House Block was a milestone in the development of the town of Rushville. With the erection of this impressive structure, the community gave notice to the surrounding area that this was no longer a rough frontier settlement, but a center of both commerce and culture. They adopted the idea then prevalent in the area that income from commercial ventures on the street level would provide support for a community cultural facility upstairs. For a brief but glorious period, from 1882 until 1910, the Phoenix Opera House played a major role in the social and cultural life of Rushville. Today the Phoenix is one of the few remaining well preserved examples of the combined Opera House and commercial block; it is therefore important both to Rushville and to the area as a whole that the Phoenix be both recognized and preserved.

As plans were being made for reconstruction of the south side of the Rushville square following its destruction by fire in January, 1882, two of the businessmen involved agreed to join the second floor spaces of their respective buildings in such a manner as to provide for a 40 X 80 foot hall. An association of five of Rushville's leading citizens - (John Bagby, M. C. Rice, H. A. Nieman, W. A. Ray, and Dr. M. Ayres) contracted to rent the hall the first year for \$600. The Rushville Lecture Club hosted the opening night program, which featured "Blind Boone", a well-known Negro pianist. He was the first of many professional entertainers to grace the stage of the Phoenix, widely advertised as having the first "fly gallery" in the area to accommodate moving scenery. Each season saw a parade of attractions such as UNCLE TOM'S CABIN and EAST LYNNE, every company promising more spectacular and expensive scenery and mechanical effects than the last. Some companies drew large crowds and boarded the departing train well paid - others had their baggage attached for non-payment of board bills.

Although professional companies visited regularly, the hall was kept busy in their absence by local events. Graduation exercises for both Rushville High School and the Kennedy Normal School were regular events. Society balls, complete with orchestra, lavish decorations, and formal dress are mentioned. Citizens met to receive election returns, hear temperance lectures, hold church bazaars and oyster suppers. One proud evening boasted a lecture by Belva Lockwood, first woman to run for President of the United States. The Phoenix hosted band concerts, elocution contests, and, perhaps introducing the instrument of its own doom, the first motion pictures.

By 1910, churches and schools had begun to build their own halls, and the motion picture lured people to a new attraction, bringing an end to the golden era of the Opera House. The Phoenix was shuttered until 1924, when the space was leased by the Masonic Lodge who transformed the room into a lodge hall. Once again people filled the rooms with music, fellowship, and ceremony. This activity too ceased in 1956 when the Masons moved into their own new building a few blocks away.

It is the goal of the present owners to restore the Phoenix to its original role as a center for community cultural activities, and to restore at least the facade of the

(continued)

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Continuation sheet - Significance

Item number 8

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building to its original appearance. Events hosted in a restored Phoenix will no doubt vary greatly from those of a century ago. Not since the Phoenix closed, however, has Rushville had a facility specifically planned for the performing arts. We seek to remedy this lack, and the Phoenix is both the logical and the historically correct location. Recognition as an Historic Site would be of great benefit to our cause.

APPENDIX B

STRUCTURAL REPORT AND COST ESTIMATE PHOENIX OPERA HOUSE RUSHVILLE, ILLINOIS

A new built-up roof is required on this building as soon as possible. Presently, the roof leaks in a generalized fashion.

Roof trusses are heavy timber in a modified Howe configuration. (Center 2 panels are without chords). This is an unusual design which I have not encountered before. Inspection of truss joints and bearings indicated no serious deterioration despite roof leaks. The roof has supported two record years of snowfall (1977-78) both establishing new 100 year records. No greater structural test can be made.

For the span involved the trusses appear oversized, but this could be because the center 12'-0" was meant to provide unobstructed space for storage (headroom is from 5'-0" to 9'-0" clear). This cannot be established without structural calculations. The north end of the roof is about 4'-0" higher than the south, but this is for drainage and to support a mansard-style roof at the north end facing the square. Clear indication of the original stage location was found in the framing for the ceiling between trusses. Ceiling joists were supported by a small truss for an east-west distance of about 20' where shown on the drawings and about 4'-0" of ceiling joists are oversized at this location. This would allow for fly space over the stage. This area was made into a finished ceiling in 1920. Plaster ceilings in main room are falling down and will need to be replaced. Plaster on walls here is generally good.

Investigation of the east wall of the main room revealed a 10'-0" high by 8'-0" wide opening between the east and west rooms. This was surely the main entrance doors to the Opera House itself.

The floor of the main room consists of two layers 3/4" (original) plus 1 x 2 sleepers 16" o.c. with 5/8" T & G blind nailed oak (1920). Concrete was placed between the sleepers presumably for soundproofing at the time the building was remodelled by the Masonic Lodge. The remodelling resulted in the building of the present balcony, the covering up of the main entrance, removal of wood wainscot, probable moving of the main entrance stairs, and much reworking in the entrance foyer, ticket selling area. The original configuration and location of these last items will not be discovered without removal of all the boxes being stored in the area and possibly removal of recent ceilings in the first floor.

Inspection of the basement revealed 90% of the building is crawl space and not accessible without removal of a great deal of trash. Heating is hot water with an old oil boiler which appears to have been sized only to handle the first floor stores (which have supplemental gas space heaters hung from the ceilings). Electrical is in need of total replacement.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Information concerning the original appearance of the Opera House is taken from a December, 1882 issue of the Rushville TIMES, as reprinted in the Fall, 1980 issue of The Schuylerite, a publication of the Schuyler County Historical Museum, Volume Nine, Number 3.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property LESS THAN 1

Quadrangle name Rushville SE

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	5	7	0	7	7	0	0	4	4	4	3	7	5	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C

Zone			Easting				Northing							

D

Zone			Easting				Northing							

E

Zone			Easting				Northing							

F

Zone			Easting				Northing							

G

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H

Zone			Easting				Northing							

Verbal boundary description and justification

129.17 feet off the West side of Lot Three(3) and the West 46 feet of 129.17 feet off the North side of Lot Two(2) Block Eleven (11) of the Original Plat of the town, now city of Rushville, in the County of Schuyler and State of Illinois

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

state _____ code _____ county _____ code _____

state _____ code _____ county _____ code _____

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jane Boyd, Secretary

organization Phoenix Opera House Community Center date January 12, 1985

street & number Box 105 telephone 217/322-6136

city or town Rushville state Illinois

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature William G. Farnan

title Deputy S.H.P.O.

date 3/21/85

For NPS use only

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

date _____

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date _____

Chief of Registration



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

IN REPLY REFER TO:

MAY 17 1985

The Director of the National Park Service is pleased to inform you that the following properties have been entered in the National Register of Historic Places beginning May 5, 1985 and ending May 11, 1985. For further information call (202) 343-9552.

STATE, County, Vicinity, Property, Address, (Date Listed)

CALIFORNIA, Napa County, St. Helena, Helios Ranch, 1575 St. Helena Hwy. (05/09/85)

CALIFORNIA, San Francisco County, San Francisco, St. Joseph's Hospital, 355 Buena Vista Ave. East (05/09/85)

CONNECTICUT, Hartford County, Hartford, Saint Anthony Hall, 340 Summit St. (05/09/85)

CONNECTICUT, Middlesex County, Middletown, Washington Street Historic District, Roughly bounded by Washington and Main Sts., Washington Terrace and Vine St. (05/09/85)

CONNECTICUT, New Haven County, Middlebury, Middlebury Center Historic District, Roughly bounded by Library Rd., North and South Sts and Whittemore Rd. (05/09/85)

IDAHO, Canyon County, Nampa, Nampa City Hall, 203 Twelfth Ave. S. (05/09/85)

✓ ILLINOIS, Cook County, Chicago, Guyon Hotel, 4000 W. Washington Blvd. (05/09/85)

✓ ILLINOIS, Cook County, Lansing, Ford Airport Hanger, Glenwood-Lansing Rd. and Burnhan Ave. (05/09/85)

✓ ILLINOIS, DeKalb County, Sandwich, von KleinSmid Mansion, 218 W. Center (05/09/85)

✓ ILLINOIS, Kane County, Batavia, Wilson, Judge Isaac, House, 406 E. Wilson St. (05/09/85)

✓ ILLINOIS, LaSalle County, LaSalle-Peru vicinity, Starved Rock Lodge and Cabins (Illinois State Parks Lodges and Cabins TR), Box 116, Utica (05/08/85)

✓ ILLINOIS, Lake County, North Chicago, Dewey House, Veterans Administration Medical Center (05/08/85)

✓ ILLINOIS, Macon County, Decatur, Decatur Downtown Historic District, Merchant St. roughly bounded by North, Water, Wood, and Church Sts. (05/09/85)

✓ ILLINOIS, Schuyler County, Rushville, Phoenix Opera House Block, 112--122 W. Lafayette St. (05/09/85)

✓ ILLINOIS, St. Clair County, East St. Louis, Majestic Theatre, 240--246 Collinsville Ave. (05/09/85)

LOUISIANA, Avoyelles Parish, Bunkie vicinity, Frithland, LA 29 (05/09/85)

LOUISIANA, Avoyelles Parish, Evergreen vicinity, Clarendon Plantation House, LA 29 (05/09/85)

LOUISIANA, Avoyelles Parish, Mansura, Roy, Dr. Thomas A., Sr., House, L'Eglise St. (05/09/85)

LOUISIANA, Lafayette Parish, Lafayette, Latiolais, Alexandre, House, 900 E. Butcher Switch Rd. (05/09/85)

LOUISIANA, Ouachita Parish, Monroe, Neville High School, 600 Forsythe Ave. (05/09/85)

LOUISIANA, Pointe Coupee Parish, Jarreau vicinity, LeBeau House and Kitchen, LA 414 (05/09/85)

LOUISIANA, Richland Parish, Mangham, Mangham State Bank Building, Main and Horace Sts. (05/09/85)

LOUISIANA, Vermilion Parish, Lake Arthur vicinity, Narrows Plantation House, Off Hwy. 717 on S. shore of Lake Arthur (05/09/85)

MASSACHUSETTS, Middlesex County, Watertown, Pratt, Miles, House, 106 Mt. Auburn St. (05/09/85)