

THE SHOW GOES ON:  
ADAPTIVE REUSE AND THE PRESERVATION OF  
OPERA HOUSES IN NORTH DAKOTA

by

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To my family. Love you more.

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the topic of preservation of opera houses in North Dakota, their past and present functions, and will contribute to present historiographies and research of North Dakota history. Chapter One details the history one of these spaces and how they were used, specifically using a case study on the Metropolitan Opera House in Grand Forks, North Dakota. Chapter Two examines opera houses in three different North Dakota towns – Ellendale, Lisbon, and Maddock – through exterior analysis, interior description, and discussion of landscape and provides photographs of each site. Each opera house reflects a different phase in the restoration process. Chapter Three illustrates how opera houses are being used, emphasizing multipurpose functionality, and preserved today through heritage tourism. Following a driving tour format, this chapter takes the reader through nine sites, detailing histories and preservation stories. Finally, the conclusion includes final thoughts on the topic, a summary of the points discussed, and ideas for further research.

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## INTRODUCTION: HISTORY AND SCHOLARSHIP

The date was November 10, in the year of 1890, and the town of Grand Forks, North Dakota, was drumming with excitement. After two years of news about the construction of a new opera house, it finally came time for the opening night of the city's most recent obsession. People from both the town and the surrounding country were coming in for this event and, those who could afford it, bought their tickets. That evening, with what was likely freezing temperatures outside on the streets, visitors of the Metropolitan Opera House at 116 South Third Street were frantic to get inside the heated building and passed through the heavy stone arch that marked the entrance. After removing their heavy coats, checking them up front, and stopping into the first-floor candy store for a sweet treat, visitors made their way up the grand staircase to the theater.

After settling in their seats, audience members may have finally been able to take in the splendor. It is easy to imagine that, with the gas lights lit, they admired the classical motifs and simple beauty of their ivory colored, linen-and-card-stock programs and the delicate white ribbon that bound each program. Then, after looking their program over, they glanced up and wondered at the sight of the dazzling décor of gold, blue, and ivory within the interior of the theater space. They may have made conversation with their friends and neighbors until finally, everyone had packed into their seats. With the audience settled in and humming with anticipation, the lights on the full house dimmed. To open the night, Governor John Miller, the first governor of North Dakota, made the dedication speech. And, after the applause died down, that night's featured entertainment, the "Flotow's Melodius Opera in Five Acts, Martha," presented by the Emma Abbot

Grand English Opera Company, began. The wintery wind blew along the frozen streets, but inside the Metropolitan Opera House, history was being made.<sup>1</sup>

#### HOW TO PRESERVE THE WONDER OF THESE EARLY YEARS

The year is now 2018 and the topic of opera houses in North Dakota has been researched by other scholars, but not necessarily in the field of historic preservation. Across the country, communities have been preserving these types of buildings since the 1980s, but there is limited writing on the topic and it raises a few questions. Do the communities care about these buildings? How do the communities make use of the buildings and have these uses changed over time? How did opera houses come to North Dakota and what were their purposes? These questions lead the research for this work and to this answer.

To acknowledge a possible bias of this project, I am originally from this region and am attached to this topic, which may come through in this project. However, this attachment need not be negative. My familiarity with the state and town landscapes encouraged further study. Being close to this subject has led to a better understanding of the uses of the opera house and inspired analysis of how these buildings fit into not only the fabric of North Dakota history, but also how they tie state history into the context of national history. By already having an understanding of the area and the state history,

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<sup>1</sup> This is how I imagined this night might have went, with information about specifics from: National Register of Historic Places, Metropolitan Opera House, Grand Forks, Grand Forks, North Dakota. July 1999, Nomination form prepared by Cynthia Mala, Grand Forks Historic Preservation Commission, 1997, 11; Inaugural Performance Program, 1890, Metropolitan Opera House Collection, Elwyn B. Robinson Special Collections, University of North Dakota.

interpretation of opera house history in the state has more meaning and, therefore, becomes a serious subject of research.

To begin this study, the first step is to find out what scholars and researchers have to say about this subject. A few authors have gotten involved in the research of opera houses in North Dakota and on the Great Plains. Community historians and local authors have written sections and short articles on these buildings, but not many have combined their information with others to provide a look at these buildings at the state level or a context for the understanding of these spaces. Researchers have written scholarly articles on opera houses on the Great Plains, emphasizing that, in the beginning, opera houses were community spaces that provided respectable entertainment in towns that originally would not have had that opportunity. Other authors have stressed this same point and weaved the rest of the Great Plains states into this context, arguing that the experience of those in North Dakota was very similar to the rest of the Plains States. Authors tend to emphasize the important of community and the great need for community spaces to share in this type of experience.<sup>2</sup>

The goal of this work is to add to the scholarship already done on this region and state, because the history within the context of historic preservation is still hardly discussed. Opera houses have been, and continue to be, important facets of communities across North Dakota. Through the preservation and use of these spaces, opera houses

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<sup>2</sup> To read more on this subject, please see these works: D. Layne Ehlers, "This Week at the Opera House: Popular Music Entertainment at Great Plains Opera Houses, 1887– 1917," *Great Plains Quarterly* 20 (2000): 183–95; Ronald L. Davis, "Opera Houses in Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas: 1870-1920," *Great Plains Quarterly* 9, no. 1 (1989): 13-26.

continue to be symbols of community permanence and multipurpose places of community gathering and importance. In order to promote a better understanding of opera houses in general, I will provide historic context of opera houses and historiography on the topic. Scholars who research opera houses may use different lenses to understand what they are studying and, while some approach this topic through discussion of performers and performances, this work considers opera houses through the lens of historic preservation.

#### OPERA HOUSE HISTORY

Opera houses first dotted the east coast of the United States in Atlantic port cities like Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Charleston in multipurpose buildings inspired by the British. Along with this inspiration, trade goods made their way across the sea from the 1790s-1820s. Americans took inspiration from the English in scenery, ideas, songs, and shows. In this beginning stages of the country, opera houses all over the United States featured design styles from France, Italy, and England. At the same time, the first opera houses were not always built to be solely opera houses and multipurpose buildings could be found in cities along the east coast. Ann Satterthwaite described how new modes of communication and railway lines affected the spread of culture. With these new forms, railroads allowed for the transport of more entertainment to the rest of the United States than at other times, dubbing this “a golden age of live entertainment.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Susan L. Porter, “English-American Interaction in American Musical Theater at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century,” *American Music* 4, no. 1, *British American Musical Interactions* (Spring 1986): 7-9; Karyl Lynn Zietz, *The National Trust Guide to Great Opera Houses in America*, (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1996), 1; Ann Satterthwaite, *Local Glories: Opera Houses on Main Street Where Art and Community Meet*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1-6; *Ibid*, 4-6.

Communities made these spaces multi-use on purpose, to better suit their needs. American opera houses, compared to their English inspirations, were not built only as opera houses, but were a hodge-podge of buildings often built with different uses in mind. Opera houses built in the west were constructed at a moment that marked the move out west and the settlement of this time. While national culture was being created, so too were these small-scale examples of what was happening on the east coast. Moving on from national to a local view, Satterthwaite adds to the argument of opera house significance, saying that the opera house symbolized civilization and permanence. Satterthwaite also shares that these buildings were a source of entertainment; they offered a place to socialize. This was especially important in a geographical region where settlers were so often isolated and needed an outlet for socialization. They go into town, where the opera houses were in prominent locations.<sup>4</sup>

In towns on the northern plains, no matter the era or environment, people needed entertainment. Opera houses were a physical representation of a community's interest in music, culture, and entertainment. Moreover, when settlers immigrated, they did not just come to the plains and work. With them, they brought pianos and instruments and created a culture that turned to music and musical entertainment in their down time. They were interested in traveling military bands, sang songs in small groups, and gathered together in a show of community that surrounded one thing: music. Therefore, communities created spaces where music could be performed.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ann Satterthwaite, *Local Glories*, 1-6.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 2-6; Katherine Dyer, "Musical Expression on the Great Plains: Nebraska, 1854-1904," *American Music* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1985): 143-51.

On-stage entertainment varied between time periods as well as in the acts that took the stage, influenced as they were by national trends. While operas were popular, these stages feature other types of entertainment as well. Along with plays, folk songs and ballad operas filled some these early opera house halls as well. However, the popularity of this type of entertainment rise and fall as inspiration from across the Atlantic encouraged the wealthy classes to seek more cultured entertainment. In all, American ballad operas declined in popularity around the turn of the nineteenth century. Specific parts of the country also had different interests. For example, on the east coast, Italian operas were popular; in the south, French opera was popular in New Orleans. Overall, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, a shift in inspiration and works produced occurred. From the late 1790s to mid-1800s, Americans began producing more original work, causing a shift in interest from European works to this homegrown entertainment. On the east coast, larger cities like Philadelphia and New York City started to book American operas and opera companies, with the first American grand opera taking stage in 1845 in Philadelphia. These new American works started to gain popularity and marked an important change in American taste in entertainment.<sup>6</sup>

#### THEATRE HISTORIOGRAPHY

Because of what was presented onstage, there was often a stratification of culture and a separation of classes in the theater audience. For instance, Lawrence Levine, in his work *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, argues that the introduction of Shakespeare into education in the 19<sup>th</sup> century also introduced cultural hierarchy in the theater. The works that were

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<sup>6</sup> Zietz, *The National Trust Guide*, 1-3.

once accessible to all became accessible, or better understood by, those who received education. As Shakespeare's works became less accessible to all people, a cultural hierarchy formed between classes of people inside and outside the theater. Levine explores theaters and cultured spaces through the audiences, including industrial and blue-collar workers, and deconstructs this cultural hierarchy. Variables like this, as well as the introduction of non-English speakers into society and the professionalization of music and theater, led to a more stratified existence within the theater. Those who had time and disposable income were more likely to take part in a formalized education, while others had to work to put food on their tables and did not have this opportunity for education. This showed in this kind of theater.<sup>7</sup>

In M. Alison Kibler's, *Rank Ladies*, the cultural hierarchy is defined further. While Levine focused on highbrow culture and stratification of society, Kibler analyzes vaudeville, its nationalization, and the introduction of a new American culture. At the heart of her argument is a conversation about gender in the theater and how the masculinity or femininity of the act onstage affected whether it was regarded as high taste or low taste. These tastes, and therefore the presence of gender, warred against each other within vaudeville to see which would reign completely. Her argument moves from discussions of the audience members to female performers and the labor union. She

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<sup>7</sup> Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

analyzes how femininity was high taste and, within some vaudeville audiences, how it was rejected by the masculine atmosphere.<sup>8</sup>

This examination of the audience makes the argument that the audience controlled what was showed onstage by their reactions. Theater circuits and managers manipulated the onstage entertainment, but audiences decided what was successful and what was not. Public theaters tended to be rowdy places. To domesticize public theaters, managers encouraged the presence of women in these spaces. In this way, cultured spaces, such as opera houses, were considered separate from institutions such as minstrel shows, concert saloons, dime museums, and variety theaters, which were more masculine institutions. The introduction of women, rather than only men, created a more acceptable atmosphere for a respectable establishment. On the northern plains, a woman's place was more fluid. Not only on the prairie, where women needed to become as involved in work as their male counterparts, but in these spaces, where limited time and resources required led to an opportunity for more autonomy.<sup>9</sup>

Just as some scholars use class and gender to study theater audiences and performances, others continue the conversation by studying race in the audience and how this affected how the audience was treated. While the more respectable circuits were supposed to treat their visitors equally, visitors of different races, black visitors especially were treated differently than the white visitors. African American men and women did not get to enjoy the same hospitalities as white visitors. Onstage, while white actresses

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<sup>8</sup> M. Alison Kibler, *Rank Ladies: Gender and Cultural Hierarchy in American Vaudeville*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 4-5.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 8-9.

did not receive the same respect as white male actors, they still had more societal power than African Americans and often would revert from what was considered high taste performances to low taste performances, like minstrel shows. Though audience is not fully explored in this work, it is necessary to note as this will set up this topic for further research. Specifically, how race might have affected North Dakota opera houses, especially if there was a relationship between these spaces and the American Indian populations of the time and area. Shifting from the audience to the stage, a very distinct entertainment genre emerged at the height of opera house culture. This new and entirely unique genre made its way across the nation.<sup>10</sup>

Vaudeville, a style of entertainment categorized by its emphasis on variety, was popularized in the late 1800s. On this subject, scholars declare that vaudeville brought to the masses what had only been available to the upper classes, which allowed for a new class of citizens to get a taste of what was considered cultured entertainment. Shows and acting troupes traveled on circuits, which acted as a tour and provided easy booking for both managers of the theaters and the acting troupes themselves. Vaudeville reached its high point in the early 1900s, but the Great Depression took its toll and vaudeville's popularity decreased. Opera houses evolved for uses other than vaudeville and performances.<sup>11</sup>

Opera houses were important community spaces and often acted as neutral ground for community events such as political rallies and school programs. Following the shift

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Zietz, *The National Trust Guide*, 7-8.

from British inspiration in entertainment to a modern American entertainment, opera houses began to incorporate other cultures as well. Often embracing the various ethnicities of local townspeople, opera houses held community events based on holidays specific to different backgrounds. On-stage entertainment was a different story. While many opera houses did bring in performers of different races, it was primarily the main, white, ethnicities of the area that were introduced seriously. Culture of other ethnicities and races (i.e. American Indian, African American, Asian American, etc.) were introduced on stages, but were presented as mockeries or exoticized or not present at all.<sup>12</sup>

#### OPERA HOUSES AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Historic preservationists and preservation professionals, among many of those interested in opera houses and what they reflect, are interested in how current communities use these spaces. Norman Tyler's *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to Its History, Principles, and Practice* describes types of preservation intervention, or how communities or individuals may decide to deal with a property. Initially, he discusses only four types, including: preservation, keeping the property in the current condition; restoration, completely fixing everything until the property is like new; reconstruction, taking research from the property and building something that used to be there but is no longer intact; adaptive (rehabilitative), working with what they have and using it for something other than its intended purpose; and conservation, making small fixes but overall keeping the condition the same. For this project, another intervention type should

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<sup>12</sup> Satterthwaite, *Local Glories*, 3.

be added – destruction, clearing the property of standing buildings. Tyler’s book also makes a case for theaters as part of the “Experience Economy” and uses an opera house in Michigan as a case study. Opera houses and theaters provide a service and a space that one can experience physically and outside of normal business hours. The idea of this experience economy leads to heritage tourism. Heritage tourism, as defined by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, is “traveling to experience the places, artifacts, and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present.” It encompasses cultural, historic, and natural resources. The opera houses of North Dakota are a perfect opportunity for heritage tourism, which will be further discussed in Chapter Three. In addition to heritage tourism as a way to study these buildings, professionals have also studied the landscapes that the buildings are a part of, which encourages a better idea of their original purpose and use.<sup>13</sup>

A work that greatly impacted the approach this thesis takes to the study of buildings is that of *Cultural Landscapes: Balancing Nature and Heritage in Preservation Practice*, edited by Richard Longstreth. Cultural landscapes can be found anywhere, if humans have interacted with it at some point. They can be rural or urban, natural or manmade, wild or domestic, but they do have to be a part of human lives to count as a cultural landscape. Past studies on opera houses tend to focus on only the architecture and, while buildings are important, studies should expand their reach to the landscape

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<sup>13</sup> Norman Tyler, Ted J. Ligibel, and Ilene R. Tyler, *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to Its History, Principles, and Practice*. 2nd ed., (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009), 191-202, 285-288; Jamesha Gibson, “National Trust for Historic Preservation”, [*Preservation Glossary*] *Today's Word: Heritage Tourism* | National Trust for Historic Preservation, June 17 2015, retrieved from <https://savingplaces.org/stories/preservation-glossary-todays-word-heritage-tourism#.WjCuiEqnG00>.

that surrounds these buildings as well. Since it is most often these surroundings that make these buildings important, forgetting what purpose the building has in its surrounding loses part of the story. While it would be easy to focus only on the buildings, much of the narrative, plus an opportunity to tell the full history, would be lost.<sup>14</sup>

#### NORTH DAKOTA HISTORY

Another way to contextualize these buildings is through the understanding of the history of the state in which they inhabit. North Dakota, as a part of the United States, was not completely settled by European immigrants until about 1861, when the Dakota Territory was established. This state is best known for its relations to the Lewis and Clark Expedition and as a favorite destination for President Theodore Roosevelt. However, before either of these better-known events took place, multiple American Indian tribes dotted the Great Plains. Staking claim to the lower half of what would become North Dakota, these tribes, including the Mandan, Dakota-Sioux, and Hidatsa, settled near the Missouri River. The Mandan tribes reached the southern part of the Dakota Territory in 1300, until they were pushed farther north to land near current-day Bismarck. A sedentary tribe, they were the first to create a permanent settlement. To reach their final place in North Dakota, the Dakota-Sioux people were pushed north from southern states to Ohio and Indiana. After brushes with the Iroquois tribes in those states, the Sioux were forced to come further north to the Great Lakes. An adaptive people, they changed their

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<sup>14</sup> Richard Longstreth, ed., *Cultural Landscapes: Balancing Nature and Heritage in Preservation Practice*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

way of living based on their surroundings and what was available with them. They slowly moved westward to the Dakota Territory, where they lived a nomadic lifestyle.<sup>15</sup>

The Hidatsa tribes moved from northern Illinois to Minnesota and the Manitoba part of the Red River Valley in 1500. Staying in the Minnesota woodlands for about two hundred years, they moved near that same land by the Missouri River. While some American Indian tribes in northern Dakota lived off farming and fishing, most, if not all, were able to survive because of the multiple herds of buffalo. Before white settlers hunted them to near extinction, American Indian tribes were able to live off buffalo and sustain themselves through the harsh climate of northern Dakota.<sup>16</sup>

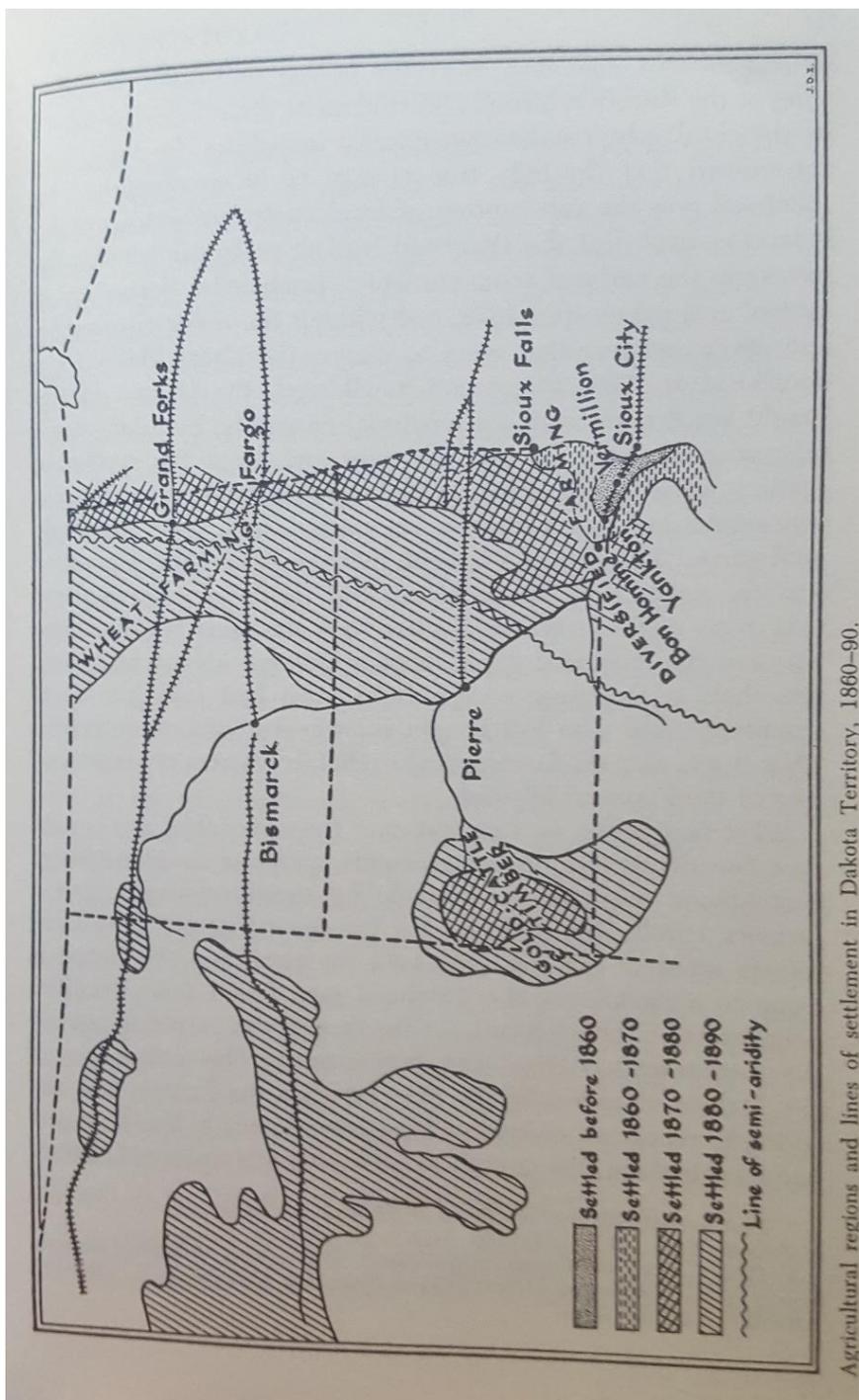
When North Dakota became a state on November 2, 1889, white settlers had been in the Dakota Territory for already one hundred years. In 1738, French explorer Pierre Gaultier de Varennes contacted the Mandan tribe. Scottish explorer, David Thompson, visited the Mandan tribe in 1797 and commented on their practices in journals of his travels. Later, Lewis and Clark reached the Mandan villages in the early 1800s. By the time of statehood, which separated the Dakota Territory into North and South Dakotas, tribes of northern Dakota were severely aware of European settlers. Settlers made a physical impact on this region as well through new types of transportation.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Robert P. Wilkins & Wynona Huchette Wilkins, *North Dakota: A Bicentennial History*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1977), 23-25.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 24-25.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 7; *Ibid*, 23-31.



Agricultural regions and lines of settlement in Dakota Territory, 1860-90.

Figure 1: "Agricultural Regions and lines of settlement in Dakota Territory, 1860-90." Howard Roberts Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889: A Study of Frontier Politics*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1956), 211.

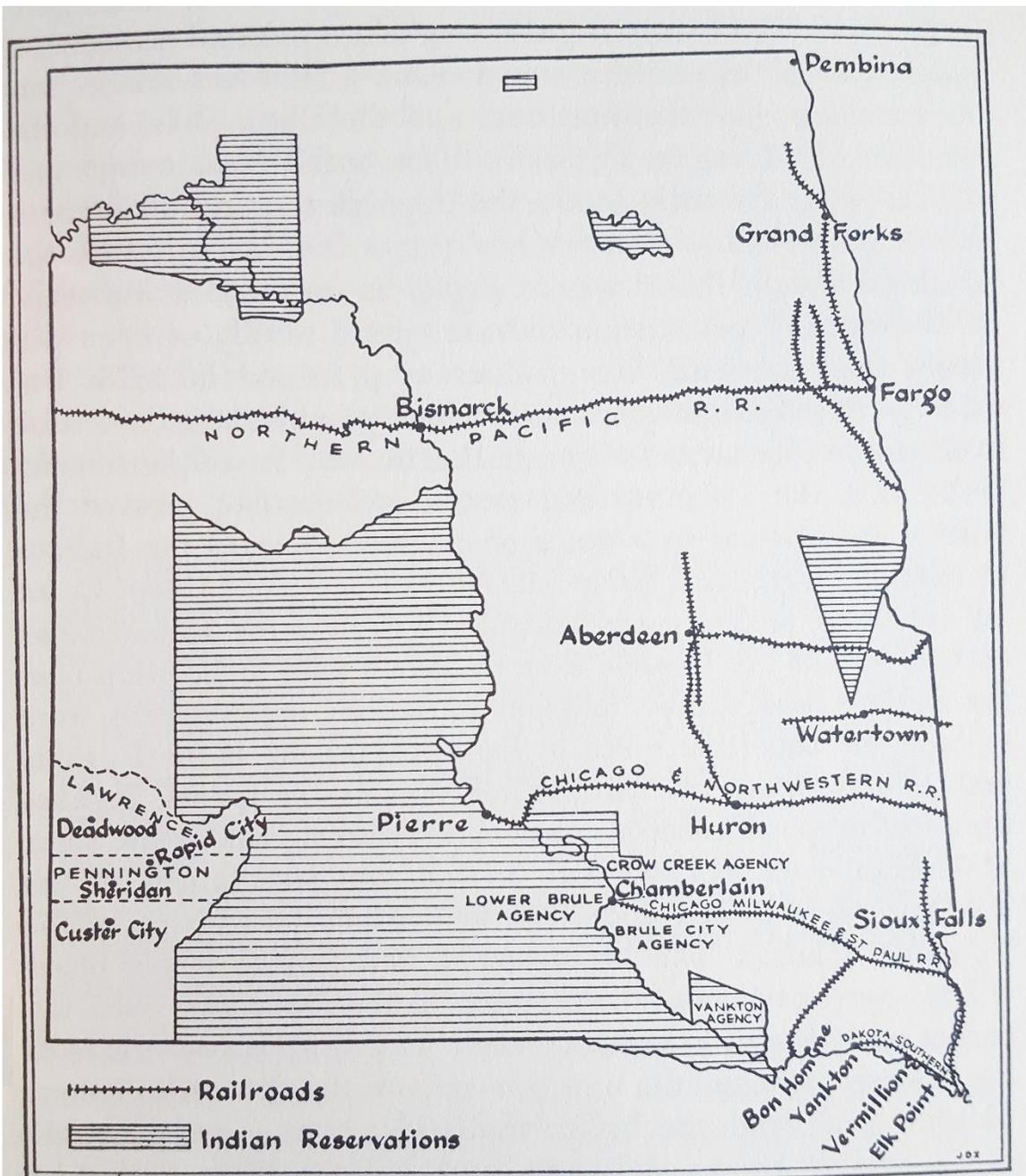
During the early days of North Dakota, steamboats and the fur trade dominated the landscape as white settlers made their way through the state. The Red River of the North flows north along the eastern border of North Dakota and allowed for settlers and fur traders to transport goods and people through steamboats. However, the Red River had low water levels and sharp turns, which made this a less popular mode of transportation. While steamboats had their time, these challenges, plus the inability to get ships up frozen rivers in the cold, blustery, northern winters, encouraged settlers to embrace a new, and much more accessible, mode of transportation: railroads.<sup>18</sup>

When settlers started to arrive, many made their living through agriculture. In 1862, the United States Congress passed the Homestead Act, which enticed travelers by offering 160 acres of free land to anyone who will live on the land and cultivate a portion of it for five years. Required from each settler was an initial fee of fourteen dollars when the settler first arrived on the land and then a final fee of four dollars when they received the title. By 1880, another law was passed that stated that, after living on the land for six months and paying another fee, the landowner could receive the title immediately. With the passing of laws like this, it is no wonder that immigrants from overseas and citizens from the east coast jumped at the opportunity to head west.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 63; Elwyn B. Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 148-149.



Indices of territorial growth in 1882. Note the Black Hills settlements, the new towns, the rapid advance of railroad building, and the shrinking Indian reservations.

Figure 2: "Indices of territorial growth in 1882." Howard Roberts Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889: A Study of Frontier Politics*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1956), 179.

Railroads had been slowly making their way to the north through the 1850s and by 1857, the boom in Minnesota had people looking further west. Many companies, including the Dakota Land Company of Saint Paul, established holdings throughout the upper Midwest in states such as North Dakota and Minnesota. More specifically, this company claimed stakes in southwest Minnesota and southeast Dakota, hoping to make a line to connect these states. When the railroad reached North Dakota, there was an influx of business activity to the state. Railroads became so important to society and industry that railroad politics were often mixed into the politics of the state itself, making it the only politics that mattered. Those who promoted and built these rail lines were in control of much of the state and often were credited for the start of many towns. With this much influence on the state and its government, it was a dangerous game for a politician to oppose any railway line to North Dakota.<sup>20</sup>

The Northern Pacific Railway came into North Dakota in 1872, making the connection between Fargo, North Dakota, and its sister city Moorhead, Minnesota. James J. Hill, a railroad tycoon well known for his promotion of railroads in Minnesota and his presence in Minnesota's capitol, St. Paul, was a major promoter of the railway system in North Dakota as well. Because of the incredible amount of business people promoting the frontier through the railway systems, many settlers poured into the state. The Northern Pacific had about ten million acres of land in North Dakota through a land grant. This sudden opportunity through this new transportation ushered in what some call the "Great Dakota Boom". This influx started in 1878 and came about because of multiple factors,

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<sup>20</sup> Howard Roberts Lamar, *Dakota Territory 1861-1889: A Study of Frontier Politics*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1956), 128; *Ibid*, 134; *Ibid*, 143.

including a simple, but fast, development in immigration population, and railroad construction. Along with the change in demographics, this period of time ushered in the shift to industrialization and urbanization, which, in turn, also led people to search for new opportunities to the west.<sup>21</sup>

Multiple railway lines were established in North Dakota and, by 1898, the main railroads in the state were the Northern Pacific Railroad and the St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Manitoba Railway line (which would later become the Great Northern). Between 1898 to 1904, the Soo Line Railroad came into the state and established 110 miles in the middle of the state running north to south. The Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad (often referred to as the Milwaukee) established a line as well that ran from South Dakota to southern North Dakota. Two other railroads, the Bismarck, Washburn, and Fort Buford Railway Company (est. 1899) and the Farmer's Grain and Shipping Company (est. 1902), also made way into the state, but would only make up a small part of the state's railway lines.<sup>22</sup>

These railroads allowed for a greater number of settlers to come to the Dakota Territory. As they settled, they established outposts, towns, and businesses along these railway lines. Some railroads, such as The Great Northern, even advertised discounted rates for men who would travel to, work, and settle in North Dakota. This advertisement campaign brought over 60,000 new homesteaders to the territory. Advertising good soil

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<sup>21</sup> Annie S. Greenwood, *North Dakota: Frontier of Opportunity*, (Minneapolis, N: T. S. Denison & Company, 1957), 82; Wilkins & Wilkins, *North Dakota*, 20; Wilkins & Wilkins, *North Dakota*, 52.

<sup>22</sup> Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 237.

and wheat farming, agriculture became a major trade of North Dakota and kept many settlers on these plains.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 236-237; Ibid, 242.



Figure 3: "Rand McNally And Company's Official railroad map of Dakota issued by the railroad commissioners." 1886. Library of Congress.

## THIS WORK

The goal of this work is to fully explore the topic of opera houses in North Dakota by providing a complete look into the topic within historic preservation. This work is broken down into an introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion. The first chapter shows the reader what happened inside these opera houses through a study on the Metropolitan Opera House in Grand Forks, North Dakota. Using collections at the Chester Fritz Library at the University of North Dakota and digital newspapers, this chapter details events at the opera house through onstage acts, business dealings, and community uses of the space. The reader will get a sense of how opera houses in North Dakota were used and why these spaces were popular in these communities.

Chapter Two, in response to the initial chapter, takes the reader to a discussion of the physical parts of the opera house. While Chapter One shows the look at the inside events, Chapter Two uses photographs of three opera houses to illustrate current physical conditions and the process of preservation through exterior analysis, interior description, and discussion of landscape. Using photographs taken by the author, Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, National Register nominations, and architecture guides, this chapter presents the buildings in ascending order, with each opera house representing part of the restoration process, from the beginning of the process to being completely restored.

The final chapter brings everything the reader has discovered together and presents multiple opera houses and their histories, from construction to preservation, as a driving tour. Emphasizing preservation stories and current uses, this chapter terminates in suggestions on how these sites could use heritage tourism to bring in more visitors and

how the state could use these opera houses to attract more tourists. The conclusion continues the discussion by including ideas for possible future projects for this topic and resources that community members or other researchers could use for further study.

## CONCLUSION

Opera house history in the United States dates to the beginnings of the country. Since then, tastes in and types of entertainment have shifted and become more widely available to more types of people, rather than only the wealthy. One type of entertainment, vaudeville, became wildly popular because of its variety and its ability to appeal to all tastes. This entertainment style, when studied through the lens of gender, warred between being masculine and feminine. Through manipulation of audience diversity, managers tried to introduce a feminine presence into the very masculine atmosphere of theater space in order to domesticate the theater. Thereby affecting the entertainment available to states like North Dakota.

Historic preservation, as a movement, has come in waves throughout history. While opera houses have been embraced and preserved throughout North Dakota's history, the usual trend is to focus only on the building and its history. Using a public history approach to historic preservation and to study opera houses in North Dakota, this work is focused on the uses of these buildings by their communities and within their landscapes. To further contextualize these buildings, North Dakota history, its settlers, and the effects of the railroad are examined. Arguing for the importance of the railroad, towns were often settled along the railways and, within the town limits, opera houses were often built near the railroad. Being situated so closely to the railroads allowed for

easy access to the space for traveling troupes and for moving heavy scenery and background. One example of this is the Metropolitan Opera House in Grand Forks, North Dakota.



The Metropolitan Opera House, known also as the Grand Opera House or Metropolitan Theatre, is in Grand Forks, North Dakota. Built in 1890 by the local business association, this opera house is a significant part of Grand Forks' physical heritage and landscape and represents a larger phenomenon of rural communities and their push for entertainment and culture in their towns. It played a vital role in its community through its uses as a commercial and cultural center as well as a community space. This chapter analyzes a collection at the Special Collections at the University of North Dakota archives and multiple newspaper sources to discuss the history of the building and how the space was used. While this chapter will include information on its use as a performance venue, it will also include information on the Metropolitan Opera House as a community space and as a business space. This analysis will give the reader an idea of how an opera house in North Dakota functioned inside, from business dealings to what was onstage, as later chapters will get into the physical buildings and the exteriors.

With this opera house, the reader can read a discussion of both what happened inside of the building and a discussion of the exterior. This chapter is first so that the reader can gain a better understanding of how opera houses were used. Throughout all the material, primary and secondary, on opera houses in North Dakota, the Metropolitan Opera House had the most information available and therefore gave the best glimpse into the life of the opera house. A brief overview of Grand Forks and the landscape around the opera house is included here to better contextualize the Metropolitan Opera House for the reader.

## GRAND FORKS IN 1890

To set the scene for this story, Grand Forks is in the northeast section of North Dakota, right on the North Dakota-Minnesota border. With the passing of the Homestead Act of 1862, traders and settlers rushed into this region and changed the landscape of the state drastically. Grand Forks went from a simple trading post to a budding settlement. Grand Forks' most prominent feature is the Red River (or Red River of the North), which flows directly through city and acts as a physical barrier between the states of North Dakota and Minnesota. The city of Grand Forks was planned and platted with the river, rather than the usual "north-south" axis that can be seen in most North Dakota towns.<sup>1</sup>

In 1890, Grand Forks was a growing town that had already established a public school, a police station, the National Bank, and multiple hotels. On top of this, the town had a mill, a boarding house, a railroad station, and a Standard Oil Company. The Metropolitan Opera House's neighborhood was made up of many businesses, including a jewelry store, gentleman's furnishings shop, a bakery, and tailor. Situated near downtown, the future site of the opera house was a prime location for a center of entertainment because its proximity to these local businesses. These samples of the Sanborn map from 1892 on the next couple pages show the opera house two years after was constructed. The maps show the outline of the stage and balcony towards the back of the building. The small, pink square at the bottom left-hand corner of the opera house housed the dressing rooms for the theater. Notice that at the front of the building (top of

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<sup>1</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Grand Forks, Grand Forks County, North Dakota. Sanborn Map Company, September 1892. Map. Retrieved from <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc/gmd/g4174gm.g065391892>. The map on page 23 shows the relationship between the river and the town.

the little square) shows that the spaces at the front of the opera house were used for other businesses, marking its use as a multipurpose space. This evidence suggests that Grand Forks was becoming a well-settled, therefore more likely to be permanent, town. The logical next step was to build a place of entertainment.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Grand Forks Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, September 1892.

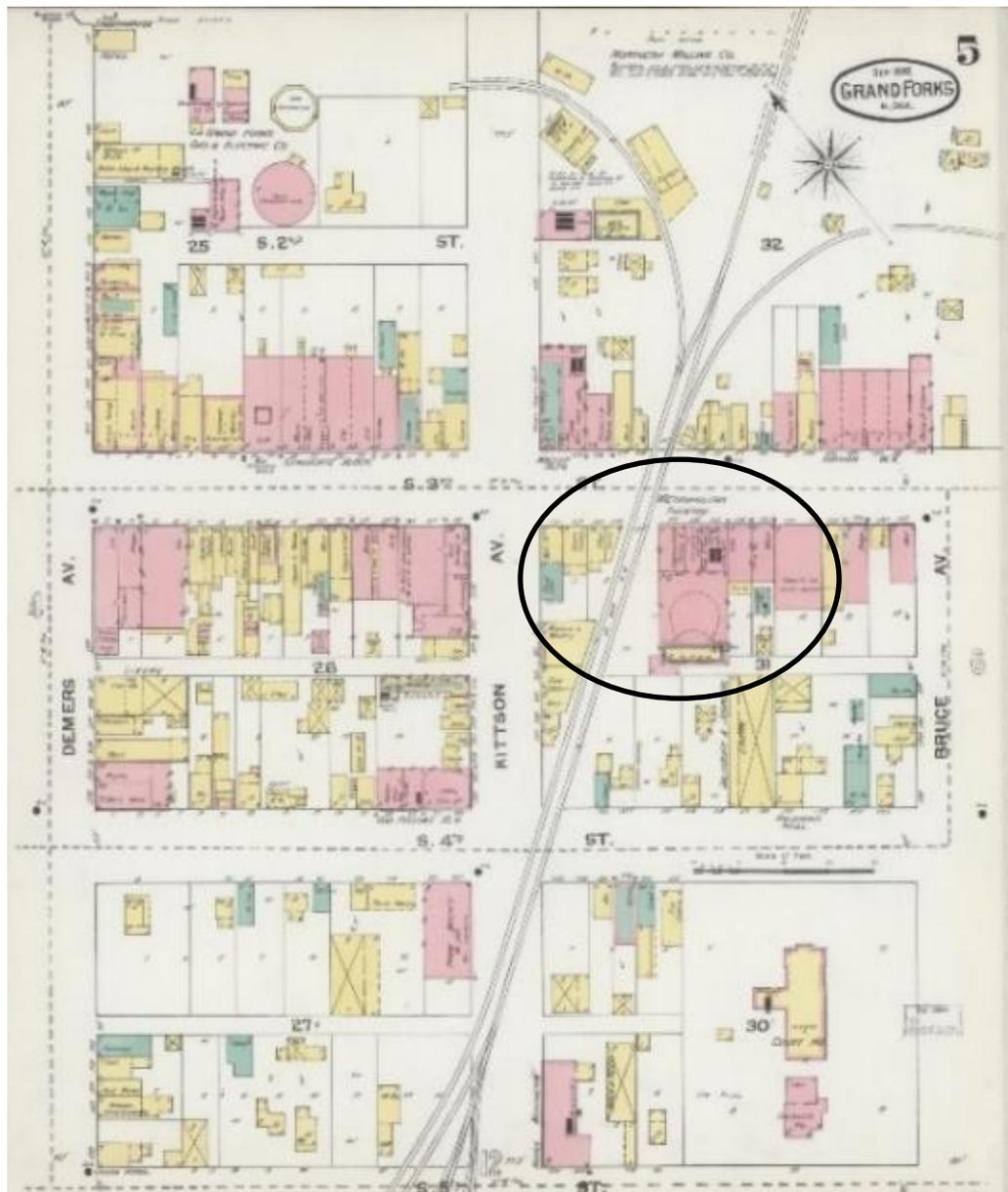


Figure 5: "Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Grand Forks, North Dakota." 1892. Library of Congress.

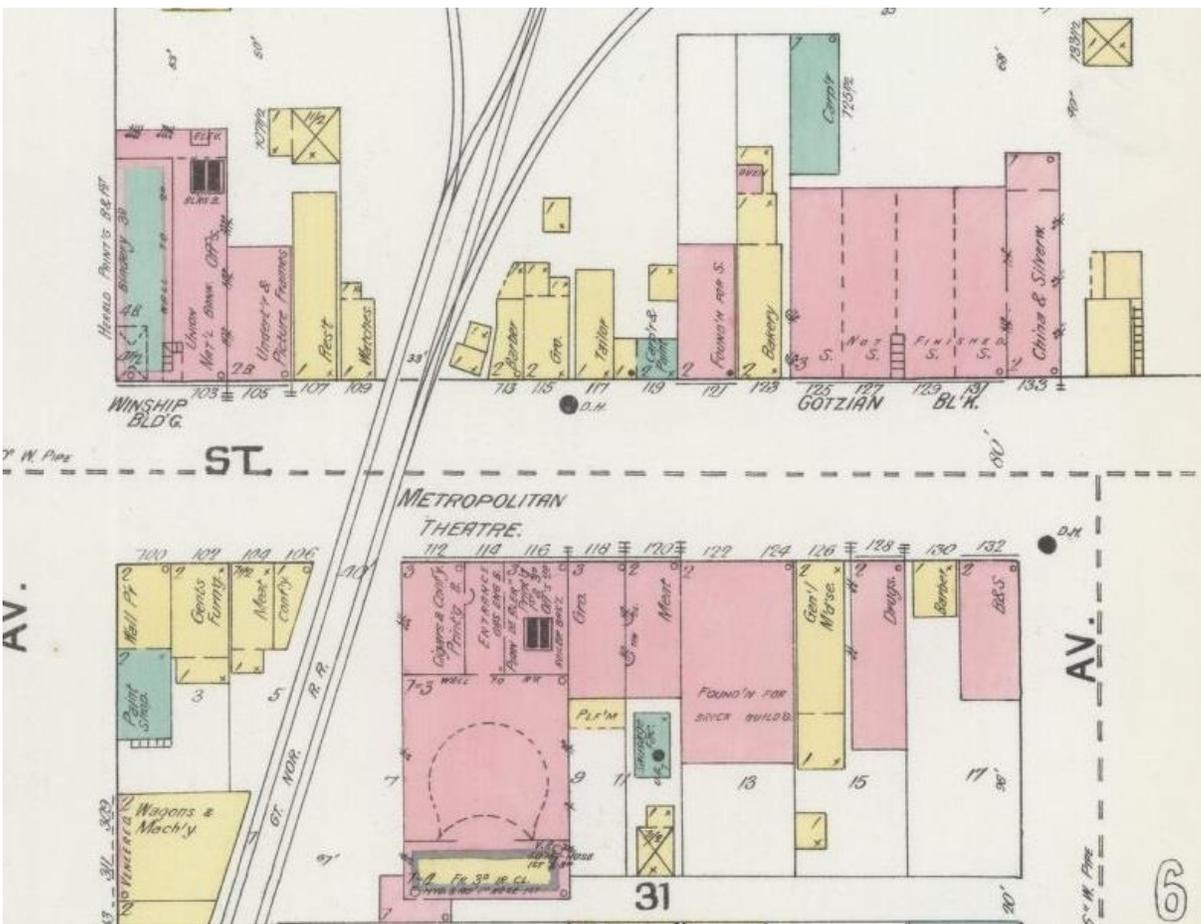


Figure 6: "Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Grand Forks, North Dakota Street Closeup." 1892. Library of Congress. This map is a close-up of the previous map and shows how close the opera house, labeled here as the "Metropolitan Theatre," is to downtown businesses. It also is useful to note the opera house's proximity to the railroad lines to the left of the pink building, which provided easy access for scenery and actors.

## OPERA HOUSE BEGINNINGS

The Metropolitan Opera House was the crown jewel of Grand Forks, North Dakota, starting right at the time of its construction. While this gem became the main performance and community space of the city, another one existed before it. Just across Third Street, to the north east of the future site, was a public hall called the Gotzian Block. Much like the Metropolitan Opera House, the Gotzian Block was also multipurpose. The Gotzian Block was veneered, which was a style of woodwork used to make a space look nicer, since at least 1884. A Sanborn Map of Grand Forks four years later in 1888 shows that the first level housed a furniture store, a grocery store, a clothing store, and a boots and shoes, “B&S,” shop. Then, on the second level, the map lists that there was scenery and a stage on that level.<sup>3</sup>

If the Gotzian Block was for both businesses and entertainment, why construct a new building? One idea is the need for newer construction. The 1892 map shows that the stores within the block were unfinished stores and only one color, therefore built of one material, rather than the two-tone it had been four years earlier. It was likely that the Gotzian Block had been worn out and needed renovating and, since the town had grown so much, the community might have simply wanted something grander. The 1892 Sanborn map shows the Gotzian building as no longer housing a theater space, but was an unfinished store space that might have meant it was under renovation. The 1897 map

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<sup>3</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Grand Forks, Grand Forks County, North Dakota, Sanborn Map Company, August 1888, retrieved from <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g4174gm.g065391892>; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Grand Forks, Grand Forks County, North Dakota, Sanborn Map Company, July 1884. Retrieved from <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g4174gm.g065391884>.

indicated that the Gotzian Block was now made up of one level shops which sold pianos and organs, furniture, and chinaware. In 1901, the block was made up of the same stores. In 1906, the block was made up of a music store, a crockery, a bakery, and a furniture. In 1912, all businesses were the same with the exception of the bakery, which became an undertaker's. The businesses available in this section are a mix of necessities and goods for disposable income. Placing an opera house here, especially near music stores, was good business sense as it encouraged those who had the funds available to spend a little more of it. By studying a building, through an analysis of the landscape, the research finds more layers. Moving from the surroundings, now it is time to talk about to the building itself.<sup>4</sup>

#### OPERA HOUSE ARCHITECTURE

The idea to build an opera house started with a movement by local business owners, who ranged from department store owners to bankers and titled themselves the Grand Forks Opera House Company. This group was behind the push for the opera house and provided funding for the construction of the building. The full company was made up of almost 40 businessmen from Grand Forks. The association was proposed in 1888 and then fully formed in 1889. The opera house company raised funds, created plans, and

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<sup>4</sup> Grand Forks Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, September 1892; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Grand Forks, Grand Forks County, North Dakota, Sanborn Map Company, Dec 1897, retrieved from <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g4174gm.g065391897>; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Grand Forks, Grand Forks County, North Dakota. Sanborn Map Company, Jan. 1901, retrieved from <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g4174gm.g065391901>; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Grand Forks, Grand Forks County, North Dakota. Sanborn Map Company, Aug. 1906, retrieved from [https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn06539\\_006/](https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn06539_006/); Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Grand Forks, Grand Forks County, North Dakota. Sanborn Map Company, Aug. 1912, retrieved from [https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn06539\\_007/](https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn06539_007/).

hired the people who be involved in the next phase of the project. Before construction could begin, the company needed to hire architects, contractors, planners, and contributors to get its grand new opera house just right.<sup>5</sup>

Most, if not all, of those chosen to work on the construction of the opera house were local hires from the city of Grand Forks, the Red River Valley, or the neighboring state of Minnesota. By choosing local labor and talent, this construction was useful in stimulating its own economy and supporting the tradespeople of the same area. One member of this group was the architect, Warren B. Dunnell. A Minneapolis architect, Dunnell was best known for his designs of prominent Minnesota buildings. Some of his most well-known works include the Minnesota Training School for Boys in Red Wing, the Owatonna State School Administration Building in Owatonna, and the State Hospital in Fergus Falls. His buildings feature elements from the Romanesque Revival, Beaux-Arts, and Châteauesque design movements. The superintendents of the newly constructed building were Burnham W. Fisk, a Grand Forks architect, and William S. Russell, a city engineer. Contractors chosen for the construction of the Metropolitan Opera House include: John Dinnie for brick, the Kilroe Brothers for wood and metal, and the C.O. Rice & Company for decorations and Furnishings. Peter Clausen, an incredibly well-known artist from Minneapolis, was commissioned for the scenery and the A.H. Andrews and Company was chosen for the chairs. F.S. Martin provided the heat and ventilation and Luke & Barnes provided the piping. Finally, Carroll & Chamberlain provided plumbing. These names show how involved people were in the construction of the opera house, as

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<sup>5</sup> Inaugural Performance Program, 1890, Metropolitan Opera House Collection, Elwyn B. Robinson Special Collections, University of North Dakota.

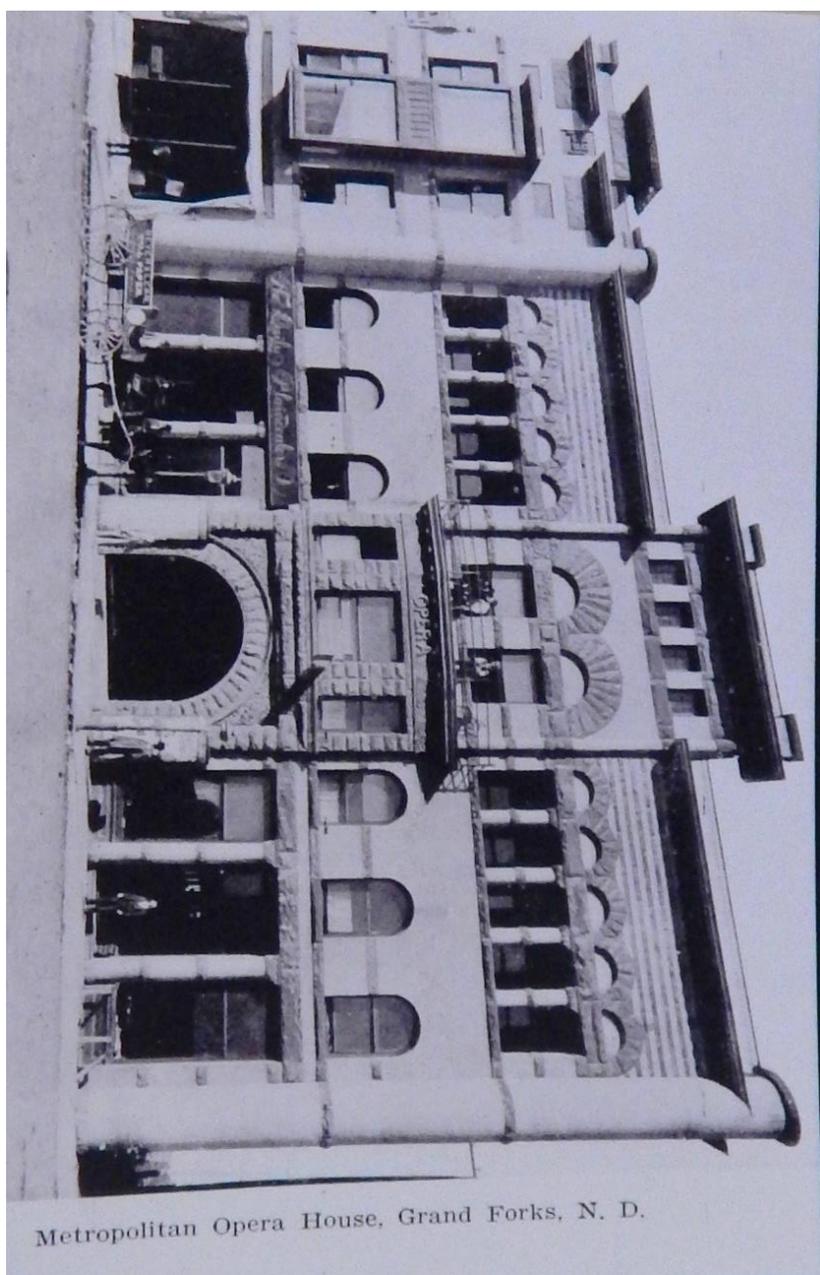
well as just how many people were needed to build the building and run it as a business and entertainment venue. A new opera house was a large undertaking that required much attention and work.<sup>6</sup>

The staff of this brand-new opera house included manager George H. Broadhurst and stage manager Carl Kramer. S.S. Titus was the acting president, George B. Winship, one of Grand Forks' first settlers, acted as Vice President; Burke Corbet, Secretary, George A. Batchelder, Treasurer, E. J. Lander and John Birkholz also stood on the board. On the third page of the program given out at the opening of the opera house was a listing of ticket subscriptions for the inaugural performance. In what was likely a very public listing, Captain Alex Griggs, the founder of the town, was the first name and was listed at a \$300.00 ticket subscription. Other notable names included those on the board at \$100.00 subscriptions, as well as the contractors, local architects, and prominent businessmen in the community. While all male, this conglomeration of names shows the stake that the community, at least the higher classes, had in this opera house. The success the opera house was contingent on how involved the community was in construction, and later ticket sales, of the building. The names of those involved in the construction of the building are important, as they helped the building come to fruition. However, also important is the physical architecture and landscape of the opera house.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For more information, see Denis Gardner's *Minnesota Treasures: Stories Behind the State's Historic Places*.; Inaugural Performance Program, 1890, UND.

<sup>7</sup> Inaugural Performance Program, 1890, UND.



*Figure 7: "Metropolitan Opera House, Grand Forks, N.D.," n.d. Metropolitan Opera House Collection, Ewlyn B. Robinson Special Collections, University of North Dakota.*

An in-depth analysis of the opera house building produces some questions about the sections of the building and whether the entire building is original or if there had been any additions. The building is in the Richardsonian Romanesque architecture style, which can be seen in the building's heavy, stone features, rounded arches, and stark contrast between stone walls and large windows. Constructed with a brick foundation, its primary materials were brown and red, brick and sandstone, with wood for the windows. Recessed dark red bricks and stone were seen throughout the front façade and created an interesting pattern. The main entrance faced North Third Street, towards the Red River of the North. Located on the front façade and elevation, the front entrance was marked by a large, sandstone arch, with two substantial columns at each end of the arch. Above the arch, an identifying "OPERA" sign marked the entrance. The actual doors would have been through the arch. The windows on the second and third levels were all recessed into the walls, with the third level windows featuring detailed arches above each individual window. At the top of the building was a platform created for decoration, attached to the building by a continuation of the brick. Below this was four small windows and above was a parallel column at each end of the platform.

Just one photograph can create thousands of questions. In the instance of the photograph above, a few questions were raised about additions and details that might not be noticed right away. On the front façade, third-story level, was a stone marker with the year 1891 chiseled into it. Since the year it was built was 1890, this might indicate a later addition. While there is nothing to back this up other than the building itself, the main columns located on equal sides of the building add to this theory. The building could be

broken down into two main parts, the larger and possible original building, and the possible addition to the left in the photograph or to the east physically. Two large columns bookend this main portion, with the 1891 section finishing off the elevation but looking a bit out of place. Another support for this idea is within the symmetry of the building. The portion to the right in the photograph, the west elevation physically, could be cut down the middle and produce equal portions. The entire building could pass as cohesive because a few architectural details are mimicked in the smaller portion, but the pronounced, square windows in the 1891 section are jarring compared to the arched windows flush with the outer building, located in the main section. While this is just a theory, it may have something to it. Moving on from this idea of an addition to the lower, first level spaces, the distinction of these spaces from the rest of the building was obvious. The columns on the first level marked those spaces as separate. While the columns tie some of the building elements together, those commercial spaces were distinct and let the viewer know that there was something else there. Those spaces were part of a whole but also their own.

While photographs tell much about buildings, maps might do an even better job. The physical landscape around the opera house and the businesses were constantly changing, but the main concept of use stayed the same. The uses of the opera house as a multipurpose building were well illustrated in a Sanborn Insurance Map from 1892. The Metropolitan Opera House was built right next to the Great Northern Railroad. In 1892, the opera house had been standing for about two years and its first level housed a few businesses. A cigar and confectionery shop as well as a printing shop was in the space to

the west of the entrance, and another printing place was located to the east. The theater and balcony were outlined on the map and the opera house was labeled as the Metropolitan Theatre. A bakery, a barber, a few tailors, and a meat store, grocery, drugstore, and a couple banks all made up the neighborhood in 1892. The next step for the actual opera house was to hold the first event, which would open the opera house to the public and set the business in motion.<sup>8</sup>

#### OPENING NIGHT

The opera house opened to the public on November 10, 1890, with a production of the Emma Abbott Grand English Opera Company's "Flotow's Melodious Opera in Five Acts, Martha." Another version of the program, bound with less decorum than the piece referred to in the introduction to this work, and with more of a mind for durability, was featured information about future performances in the Metropolitan Opera House by the Emma Abbot Company. These programs showed the different levels of hospitality that certain audiences received. It is likely that those who bought more expensive tickets received the more delicate of programs, while the plainer ones were for the cheaper seats. Therefore, the Metropolitan Opera House opening was open to more than just the expensive seat holders. Like many of the other opera houses in North Dakota, this building was here to bring the entire community interesting entertainment and diversion.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Grand Forks Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, September 1892.

<sup>9</sup> Emma Abbott, born December 9, 1850, in Chicago, Illinois, was a soprano singer well-known for her clear style and pitch. A singer who studied both vocal performance and guitar in Europe, Abbott was well-respected in her field. She formed her opera company in 1878 and, until 1890, toured with her opera company, which was a popular choice for opening performances at opera houses throughout the United States, but mostly in the west. She passed away January 5, 1891. Katherine K. Preston, "Abbott, Emma,"

The programs included a synopsis of the operas, their cast lists, a welcome poem from the Ingall's House, a business associated with the railroads, and advertisements and notes from the opera house's sponsors and contributors. After studying the effect of railroads on North Dakota, it is unsurprising that a railroad-related business is associated with the opera house. This shows a commercial partnership between railroads which brought people to the town and opera houses that provided entertainment for those customers. Listing the sponsors also shows how financially minded management was and makes the point that on top of supporting culture and the arts this opera house was an important commercial space. Finally, through the popularity of the event, it is clear that the opening night was a success, as the opera house hosted 35 more performances within that fiscal year.<sup>10</sup>

#### THE OPERA HOUSE AS A BUSINESS

One use of an opera house not usually thought of or discussed is its use as a business. The Metropolitan Opera House was under the control of many businesspeople from the time it started. While this type of management is supposed to create a system of checks and balances, sometimes it leads to mismanagement. This section specifically on the commercial and business use of the opera house will show the how the business of the opera house was managed and the interconnectivity of relations between business and community, from a local to regional level.

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*American National Bibliography* 1999, retrieved from <https://doi-org.ezproxy.mtsu.edu/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.article.1802582>, accessed December 18, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Inaugural Performance Program, 1890, UND; Metropolitan Theatre, First Statement, November 10, 1890 – April 30, 1891, Metropolitan Opera House Collection, Elwyn B. Robinson Special Collections, University of North Dakota.

The Metropolitan Opera House's start was grand, but after about five years things started to get rocky for the management of the opera house. In 1895, *The Courier Democrat*, a newspaper of the region, listed that the manager of the Metropolitan Opera House, Frank L. Witt, had resigned.<sup>11</sup> Only five years after the opening, this meant that the opera house had been through at least two managers, which raises the question of what was happening there. Apparently, the leaving of that manager was well enough known among the opera house community of the upper Midwest, as several letters came to varying opera house board members of interest in the job. These changes in management were not the worst of the problems, as money started to become an issue as well. Money troubles did become a problem for the opera house and foreclosure was imminent.<sup>12</sup>

The opera house may have been too expensive and grand, as it racked up money problems and caused stress on those that worked there. This stress would make for some nasty legal battles later. Mismanagement may have become the downfall of the opera house. In 1897, the *Jamestown Weekly Alert* reported that the Metropolitan Opera House was to be mortgaged and bought for \$30,000 by a bank in Boston and foreclosed for the same amount. In March of that year, it was foreclosed upon and sold. *The Dickinson Press*, in July 1897, told its readers that the opera house had been sold at a public auction to a man named W. F. Ball of Fargo, North Dakota, who had represented the Commercial

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<sup>11</sup> *Courier Democrat*, April 18, 1895, accessed November 14, 2017, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88076432/1895-04-18/ed-1/seq-2/>.

<sup>12</sup> C. A. Klaus, letter to E. J. Landers, esquire, Jamestown, North Dakota, to Grand Forks, North Dakota, March 4, 1892, Metropolitan Opera House Collection, Elwyn B. Robinson Special Collections, University of North Dakota; Louis J. Columbus, letter to John Birkholz, esquire, Crookston, Minn., to Grand Forks, North Dakota, March 4, 1892, Metropolitan Opera House Collection, Elwyn B. Robinson Special Collections, University of North Dakota.

National Bank of Boston. The bank had been the only bidder, with a bid of \$32,210.16. The *Press* went on to say that other mortgages had been taken out on the property as well, adding up to about \$20,000 more on the structure.<sup>13</sup>

In 1898, a year later, the old and the new managements clashed. In October, *The Courier Democrat* reported that the Metropolitan Opera House was in a legal snarl. The new owners, the bank in Boston, had started charging the old owners rent to stay in the building. This rent was not paid, so the Boston owners threatened to close the building. The opera company, still technically in control of the house itself, claimed that the rent was too high and, in a desperate attempt for leverage, threatened to remove scenery and seats from the building. The manager who made these threats claimed that these items were his own property. This mess shows the clash between the new and the old and the local and the national. The local-based management was fighting for control against a national group that was either trying to force them out and use the building for something else, or was trying to slowly push them out to get different management into the opera house. The change in management caused even more trouble with the acting companies who were supposed to be performing. This change affected how companies were hired, causing the dates to remain uncertain, which messed up the traveling troupes' bookings.

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<sup>13</sup> *Jamestown Weekly Alert*, February 11, 1897, accessed November 14, 2017, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042405/1897-02-11/ed-1/seq-8/>; *The Dickinson Press*, May 29, 1897, accessed November 14, 2017, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88076013/1897-05-29/ed-1/seq-4/>; *The Dickinson Press*, July 10, 1897, accessed November 11, 2017, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88076013/1897-07-10/ed-1/seq-4/>.

Being cancelled on caused the traveling troupes to threaten suits against the opera house.<sup>14</sup>

The issue of mismanagement within the opera house was taken to the courts. The Commercial National Bank of Boston v. Arthur Dennis, the Grand Forks Opera House Company, and the then-manager. What seems to have happened is that the Grand Forks Opera House Company was forced to shift ownership to the Commercial National Bank of Boston, but did not. A restraining order and subpoena were taken out by the bank against the Metropolitan Opera House Company, which was finally forced to relinquish its remaining rights. The threat from the company and manager to claim the seats and scenery came to fruition during the suit. In 1899, *The Hope Pioneer*, from the small town of Hope about eighty miles from Grand Forks, further discussed the case. Judge Amidon of the United States Court decided in favor of the Commercial National Bank of Boston. The ex-manager named Lauders had tried to claim the chairs and scenery. He got to keep the removable property and curtains, but the overall case was won by the new owners. From all this confusion within ten years after opening, the Metropolitan Opera House had to be due for some good news.<sup>15</sup>

A year later, it seemed that circumstances were improving for the opera house.

The *Devils Lake Tribune*, a newspaper from a town about ninety miles away from Grand

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<sup>14</sup> *Courier Democrat*, October 20, 1898, accessed November 11, 2017, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88076432/1898-10-20/ed-1/seq-2/>.

<sup>15</sup> “Restraining order from Commercial National Bank of Boston against Grand Forks Opera House Company,” September 27, 1898, Metropolitan Opera House Collection, Elwyn B. Robinson Special Collections, University of North Dakota; “Subpoena against Grand Forks Opera House Company,” November 7, 1898, Metropolitan Opera House Collection, Elwyn B. Robinson Special Collections, University of North Dakota; *The Hope Pioneer*, August 24, 1899, accessed November 11, 2017, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn87096037/1899-08-24/ed-1/seq-3/>.

Forks, made no mention of the case, but did report that the opera house management was trying to secure the actress and prima donna, Madame Emma Nevada. It looked to be a promising move and the opera house re-opened in February of that year. However, in an event that had nothing to do with actual business but everything to do with business connections, some feathers were clearly ruffled by the then-manager. In the *Devils Lake Inter-Ocean*, a local column shared that any good relationship that had existed between the *East Grand Forks Courier*, the Grand Forks newspaper, and the management of the Metropolitan Theatre had been “irreparably ruptured” for some unknown reason. However, these rumblings marked that the next eventual change in management was in the opera house’s future.<sup>16</sup>

The management did change but, more importantly, so did the system of booking in theaters and opera houses. In 1905, the manager left, which continued the pattern of a new manager every two to five years. In 1908, an article in *The Evening Times*, a local Grand Forks newspaper, titled, “A Big Theatrical Deal Has Been Closed: Grand Forks Opera House to Be Booked by Enormous Concern,” discussed a major change in the booking of the opera house. Booking interests of C.P. Walker of Winnipeg, Maurice W. Jencks of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and H. L. Walker of Brookings, South Dakota, were combined into a larger circuit. Before, traveling companies could work individually with

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<sup>16</sup> *Devils Lake Inter-Ocean*, February 9, 1900, accessed November 11, 2017, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88076514/1900-02-09/ed-1/seq-4/>; *Devils Lake Inter-Ocean*, April 13, 1900, accessed November 11, 2017, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88076514/1900-04-13/ed-1/seq-9/>; Madame Emma Nevada, a concert and operatic soprano, she was born in Nevada City, California, around 1860. She began her career at sixteen years old, though she started singing in public at eight years old. She studied voice in Berlin and Vienna and was popular among European and American crowds. She died in 1940. “Emma Nevada,” *New York Times*, Saturday, June 22, 1940, p. 15, col. 3, accessed December 18, 2018, <https://msu.edu/~graye/emma/emmaobit.html>.

the opera house or theater to be booked. But now it was almost impossible for a company to do business with any theater in the northwest or western Canada if they did not first go through this new booking system. This change benefitted all parties in the situation. The show manager was able to book an entire season and not have to worry about broken contracts. And local managers did not have to worry about flighty traveling troupes. This change not only affected how business took place, but where business came from.<sup>17</sup>

This new combination also made it so that the primary office in Minneapolis, Minnesota, controlled the companies coming to the opera houses within their circuit, rather than companies out east. This change allowed for a more regional control and organization of the flow of entertainment. However, this meant that a good chunk of the companies going into circulation were Minneapolis-based. While the local talent got more jobs, this may have taken away some of the national connection. Grand Forks was under C. P. Walker's control and was a part of more than 200 opera houses and theaters under control of the consolidation. This many locations under the control of one main headquarters was going to need some adapting to.

These booking rights caused a change in power dynamics of the business. While the opera house in Grand Forks was owned by Walker, the house entertainment was booked by Klaw & Erlanger. In addition to the booking agents and house manager, three more men, the new owners of the circuits, had just as much say as who played in the

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<sup>17</sup> G. W. Alexander Brainerd, letter to unknown recipient, July 6, 1905, Metropolitan Opera House Collection, Elwyn B. Robinson Special Collections, University of North Dakota; *The Evening Times*, August, 19 1908, accessed November 11, 2017, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042373/1908-08-19/ed-1/seq-6/>; *The Evening Times*, August 19, 1908, accessed November, 11 2017, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042373/1908-08-19/ed-1/seq-6/>>.

space as the house managers. No longer was choosing entertainment a simple decision by one or two people. This switch to a circuit shows a shift from the opera house as a single entity to as part of a larger network. While the network was regional and often included local talent, national talent was still booked. What mainly changed was who booked the shows and talent, rather than what was booked (excluding individual tastes of booking and circuit managers, as these are unknown). These changes were shared through newspapers, which were the main source of news that kept patrons up to date.<sup>18</sup>

Specifically, programs, while certainly useful for information on the performances, also contained information on what was expected from patrons and what rules and regulations were held by the opera house. The opera house printed programs at regular intervals throughout the week to let their patrons know what events were happening in the opera house. Each program, furnished by the Metropolitan Theatre Program Company, contained specific information about the shows advertisements from local businesses, publication information, and rules for proper audience behavior.<sup>19</sup>

The rules and regulations guided theatergoers and let them know what to expect within the opera house. These rules showed that order was important to the opera house management and gives a glimpse into the society around the opera house. The rules encouraged the space to be taken seriously and controlled the atmosphere in the audience. Evening performances started at 8:30 p.m., with doors opening at 8:00 p.m. Any

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<sup>18</sup> *The Evening Times*, August 19, 1908, accessed November 11, 2017, <<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042373/1908-08-19/ed-1/seq-6/>>.

<sup>19</sup> Programs folder, Metropolitan Opera House Collection, Elwyn B. Robinson Special Collections, University of North Dakota.. The specific layout discussed here was figured out by analyzing the layout of all the programs in this collection and finding the common themes throughout the collection of programs.

latecomers had to wait until the end of the first act before they could enter the theater if the show had already started. If children came to the show, they needed their own ticket to be allowed in. Tickets needed to be complete, meaning that they could not be separated from the stub. By enforcing these rules, management hoped that this would lessen rowdy behavior.

Certain types of professions may have had special arrangements with the opera house. Physicians and railroad workers could register their names and seat numbers at the box office to receive a seat. If theatergoers who had ordered tickets had not picked them up by 7:30 the evening of the show, they lost claim to their orders. And lastly, something that certainly indicates the fashion of the era, in all capital letters were written, “ladies are requested to remove their hats during the performance.” The program was an important part of the opera house’s outreach to the community and reflected the connection the opera house had within the business community of Grand Forks. While the commercial use of the opera house was significant within this business community, its significance was also found in the use by its cultural and social community.<sup>20</sup>

#### THE OPERA HOUSE AS A COMMUNITY SPACE

Through the period of 1890s to the 1920s, the Metropolitan Opera House space had various uses within its community. The space served various needs that often ranged from local to national connections. School programs, charities, and local groups were

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<sup>20</sup> Programs, October 11, 1911, Metropolitan Opera House Collection, Elwyn B. Robinson Special Collections, University of North Dakota.

able to use the space, as were traveling politicians as well as mobile acting troupes and vaudeville shows that made their way through Grand Forks on their national circuit.

A good example of local use can be seen in the utilization of the opera house for school programs and commencements. Yearly graduation exercises by the University of North Dakota were often held at the Metropolitan Opera House. One such instance was on Thursday, June 17, 1897. Dean Pattee, a professor of the University of Minnesota Law Department delivered the address to the graduating class of nine. Moving from school programs into cultural events, in 1908, the opera house hosted a Syttende Mai Festen on the 18<sup>th</sup> of May. Syttende Mai is a Norwegian festival that celebrates the Norwegian Constitution Day. This event had local speakers, the Bjarne Male Chorus, a local group that was established on July 3, 1881, in Grand Forks, and the lineup for the program was in Norwegian, which reflects the ethnic character of the area. This follows the pattern of accepting ethnicities of the local population within the walls of the opera house, instead of simply one type of amusement. In 1918, the manager of the opera house stationed women of the Red Cross at the front lobby to take donations, which shows support for local causes. The community also used the opera house for athletic events, including wrestling in 1899 and a University of North Dakota athletics event in 1903. Other local events included Bjarne Chorus performances, local benefits, and lectures from local churches in the early 1900s.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *The Bottineau Courant*, May 22, 1897, accessed November 11, 2017, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88076086/1897-05-22/ed-1/seq-10/>; Syttende Mai Festival, Metropolitan Opera House Collection, Elwyn B. Robinson Special Collections, University of North Dakota; Bjarne Male Chorus Records, 1890-1977, finding aid, Metropolitan Opera House Collection, Elwyn B. Robinson Special Collections, University of North Dakota; *Jamestown Weekly Alert*, May 30, 1918, accessed November 11, 2017, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042405/1918-05-30/ed->

The Metropolitan Opera House was also used as a neutral space for politics and visiting politicians. In a political article, the Metropolitan Opera House was deemed the only place for then-Senator Nelson to speak when he was in North Dakota. Republican leaders and local politicians all tried to get the senator to deliver his evening address in the Metropolitan Opera House as East Grand Forks, Grand Forks' sister city in Minnesota, did not have any buildings large enough to accommodate the senator's crowd. Another article reported that the Republican State Nominating Convention met in the opera house. A final article reported that a rally of the "routed democracy" in Grand Forks was held at the Metropolitan Theatre. Around one hundred and ninety-six people attended. Judge Fisk, the Democratic candidate for Justice of the Supreme Court District Judge, and Editor Whitehead of *The Evening Press*, both attended the rally and were joined by Mayor Duis after the close of his speech. These spaces provided ground for both parties to speak on. This shared space did not likely mend any rifts but having a public space that could fulfill more than one purpose was and would continue to be useful.<sup>22</sup>

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1/seq-5/; List of Performances, 1898-1903, Metropolitan Opera House Collection, Elwyn B. Robinson Special Collections, University of North Dakota.

<sup>22</sup> "A Courageous Senator: Nelson Shows Up Hansborough and McKenzie as Political Fakes - Public Position a Private Snap," *The Wahpeton Times*, October 25, 1900, accessed November 11, 2017, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84024779/1900-10-25/ed-1/seq-2/>; "The Great Transaction's Done! (Cavalier Chronicle)," *Courier Democrat*, 28 July 1904, accessed November 11, 2017, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88076432/1904-07-28/ed-1/seq-1/>; *The Evening Times*, November, 02 1906, accessed November 11, 2017, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042373/1906-11-02/ed-1/seq-1/>.

## THE OPERA HOUSE AS A PERFORMANCE VENUE

The Metropolitan Opera House was the host to many types of traveling troupes and performers as a stop on national and regional circuits. Vaudeville shows, classic plays, and more contested types of entertainment, all crossed over the Metropolitan Opera House's stage. A show by John Phillips Sousa and his band made its way to Grand Forks in 1898. A notable performer and comedian, Frank Daniels also performed on this stage. His works "Idol's Eye" and "Miss Simplicity" were featured in 1899 and 1903 respectively. The Devils Lake Inter-Ocean announced that, in 1900, another performance of Frank Daniels Opera Company's "The Idol's Eye" took place at the Metropolitan Opera House. The Frank Daniels' Opera Company carried its own scenery and accessories, as well as a complete orchestra. Another well-known performer was Clay Clement, whose program in "Southern Gentleman" described the play as for those who believed in pure plays, in thought, feeling, and actions. The play was supposed to be interesting, without being scandalous, and funny, without being abrasive in nature. The opera house needed to provide worthy entertainment to keep people involved, but the managers had to make sure not to provide something scandalous in order to protect the reputation of the opera house as a civilized space.<sup>23</sup>

Along this same vein of plays is a continued trend of classical entertainment.

Classical entertainment in the Metropolitan Opera House came in the form of stock

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<sup>23</sup> Performance Contracts and Employment folder, Metropolitan Opera House Collection, Elwyn B. Robinson Special Collections, University of North Dakota. For more information on John Phillips Sousa and his rise in fame, see Patrick Warfield's *Making the March King: John Philip Sousa's Washington Years 1854-1893*; *Devils Lake Inter-Ocean*, February 17, 1900, accessed November 11, 2017, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88076514/1899-02-17/ed-1/seq-3/>; "A Southern Gentleman Playbill Clay Clement," accessed November 12, 2017, Archive.org.

companies and composers. In March 1900, Max Bendix, a new favorite composer to the American people, stopped in Grand Forks as a part of his concert tour through the United States. Bendix wrote and composed multiple works, although he would not reach his height of popularity until the 1930s. Multiple stock companies came through Grand Forks as well including the Chase Lester Company in 1902 and the Gordon Shay Company in 1903 and performed pieces from Monte Cristo and Carmen. These shows prove first that the Metropolitan Opera House was regularly used as a performance space and, second, it was a space that introduced national talent into the culture and community of Grand Forks.<sup>24</sup>

Booking national talent, such as Vaudeville shows, proved that even small-town North Dakota was connected to the larger national trends. Examples of the type of national entertainment hired includes a nationally known vaudeville group, Alphonse and Gaston, who performed at the opera house on January 1, 1903. Their vaudeville skit was based on a comic strip of the same name that was incredibly popular at the time. Another vaudeville actor, H. Beresford, was in a production of “Wrong Mr. Wright” in February 1900. On January 22, 1903, a well-known vaudevillian act took the stage with three different headliners labeled as Robin Hood, Isadore Rush, and Roland Reed. A married duo, vaudeville actress Isadore Rush and comedian Roland Reed, were categorized as comedians. Isadore Rush was most well known for her role in “Wrong Mr. Wright,”

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<sup>24</sup> List of Performances, 1898-1903, UND; The Broadway League Inc., “Max Bendix,” Internet Broadway Database, accessed November 12, 2017, <https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/max-bendix-11368>.

although her appearance at the Metropolitan Opera House might have been as a solo performer.<sup>25</sup>

To discuss performance and use of space in the Metropolitan Opera House, race and gender issues need to be introduced. While it did not seem to be a problem to show respectable female actresses and their opera companies, race was often reflected through mockeries rather than through actual performers. One instance, although there are many, is that of the performance of “Coontown 400” on May 1, 1900. There were no North Dakota newspaper articles on it, but an article written for the *Los Angeles Herald* in California suggests that this show was aimed at white audiences. Written in fake dialect to mock the stereotypical African American character, the article described the premise of the show and also suggested that the entertainment company was run by a woman and lead actor, Ms. Juvia Roan. She sang “coon” songs, which were a type of song that was in a mock dialect supposed to have belonged to African Americans.<sup>26</sup>

Another example of a performance that furthered the stereotypes of these mockeries was that of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” which was performed at the opera house multiple times. Described in an April 1906 review of Stetson’s rendition as well-known and liked, performances of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” were not outright mockeries like those seen in coon shouting and minstrelsy shows. The program described it as a play that

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<sup>25</sup> List of Performances, 1898-1903, UND.

<sup>26</sup> For more information minstrelsy and coon songs, see Eric J. Lott’s *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) and Sharon Ammen’s *May Irwin: Singing, Shouting, and the Shadow of Minstrelsy*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017).; List of Performances, 1898-1903, UND; “Coontown Four Hundred: Has Dey Own Show in Dey Own Way, Cullud S’clety Turns Out,” California Digital Newspaper Collection, *Los Angeles Herald*, Number 290, July, 18 1900, accessed November 11, 2017, <https://cdnc.ucr.edu/cgi-bin/cdnc?a=d&d=LAH19000718&e=-----en--20--1--txt-txIN-coontown+400-----1..>

spoke the universal language of the heart and a moral classic, meaning it was supposed to tell the story of human connection and was not meant to be a mockery. Right below this section in the program is another on a vaudeville juggler and, lastly, a section on Al G. Field's Minstrels. Tom Powell and Dave Nowlin were Al G. Field's "Greater Minstrels." Their act centered around a comedic styling that used black face and impersonations, the latter of which likely used the same dialect mentioned above. While located in a state that seemed geographically isolated, this shows that the Metropolitan Opera House took part in most national entertainment trends.<sup>27</sup>

Before theater performance was an acceptable career for women, it belonged to mostly men because it was not seen as societally acceptable for a woman to be onstage. Women had a challenging time edging themselves into the field, but some women who knew how to work the crowd did very well for themselves. One performer, who attained national fame and reflected both factors of race and gender was Matilda Sissieretta Joyner Jones, who performed at the Metropolitan Opera House as Black Patti on January 9, 1899, and November 20, 1899. Ms. Jones was an African-American soprano and likely performed in Grand Forks on the tour that debuted her career. She became well respected, loved, and accomplished as a performer. Another actress, Belle Archer, a white woman, got her start as a step in for an actress that passed away before her role in "A Contented Woman," which she traveled across the country with. Her performances at the Metropolitan Opera House, one in December of 1898 and the other in February of 1900 (seven months before her death) marked the height of her popularity as an actress in the

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<sup>27</sup> Performance Contracts and Employment, UND.

United States. Another successful actress who graced the Grand's stage was Kate Claxton. Ms. Claxton performed in the opera house in February of 1903 and was best known for her role in "The Two Orphans," the play she performed in in Grand Forks. Opera house use as a performance space was a primary function of the opera house, but, as time went on, another type of entertainment became common.<sup>28</sup>

By the 1910s, while it functioned primarily as an opera house and performance space, the opera house also hosted motion pictures from the 1910s into the 1920s to keep up with the changing entertainment needs of its community and society. In 1909, "up to date" motion pictures were being offered at the opera house, Monday through Friday, with an admission fee of ten cents. Originally, motion pictures were used to supplement live shows but in 1913, a film was shown as a headliner. "The African Pictures" premiered at the beginning of that year on January 27 and allowed theatergoers to sit in their seats and view animals of Africa in their native habitats. The synopsis on the program discussed the wonder of seeing such large and exotic animals act so regularly and in such a relatable fashion. The film had daily matinees and showed camels, hyenas, rhinoceroses, gazelles, ostriches, leopards, and a scene solely on the watering hole. One scene in particular featured a hyena in a cage and tamed gazelles and deer, which leads to

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<sup>28</sup> Many women who pursued this type of career chose comedy, minstrelsy, coon shouting, or specific female stage types to portray in order to be accepted on stage and in the public sphere. For titles on women who made a name for themselves in vaudeville and performance, please see *Queen of Vaudeville: The Story of Eva Tanguay* by Andrew L. Erdman, *May Irwin: Singing, Shouting, and the Shadow of Minstrelsy (Music in American Life)* by Sharon Ammen, and *Women Vaudeville Stars: Eighty Biographical Profiles* by Armond Fields. For information on women within vaudeville in general, please see *Rank Ladies* by M. Alison Kibler.; List of Performances, 1898-1903, UND; A biography for Black Patti can be found at Women of History: Stepping Out of the Pages, Telling Their Stories, "Women in History - Sissieretta Jones," accessed November 11, 2017, retrieved from <http://www.womeninhistoryohio.com/sissieretta-jones.html>; Thomas P. Collins, *Arizona on Stage: Playhouses, Plays, and Players in the Territory, 1879-1912*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 192-195.

the question of if this film actually presented animals in their native habitat, or if these animals were in captivity and recorded there. The second to the final scene shows the death of a rhinoceros. The camera man in the scene, having got too close to the animal, was charged and the animal was killed on-screen. The final scene included a lion hunt. Rainey, the filmmaker, kills the lion and “the natives rejoice in the killing”. A view of the dead lion ended the film. While individually odd and shocking from a modern perspective, the showing of this film as a headliner marks another shift in entertainment. The opera house continued showing live entertainment, but, in later years, headlining films became more common.<sup>29</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Known by many names to the members of the community, the Metropolitan Opera House, Grand Opera House, or Metropolitan Theatre, of Grand Forks, North Dakota, was not just another stone and brick building in the physical landscape of the small North Dakota city. It reflects a great history of national culture and changing landscape, all within one building at the center of a river city. Built and opened in 1890, the Metropolitan Opera House was the main source of cultural entertainment in Grand Forks and was a business, entertainment space, and cultural center. The purpose of this chapter was to discuss the life of the Metropolitan Opera House and the Opera House Company through the analysis of the Metropolitan Opera House collection at the Special

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<sup>29</sup> Program, March 27, 1909, Metropolitan Opera House Collection, Elwyn B. Robinson Special Collections, University of North Dakota; “The African Pictures,” January 20, 1913, Metropolitan Opera House Collection, Elwyn B. Robinson Special Collections, University of North Dakota; “The African Pictures,” January 27, 1913, Metropolitan Opera House Collection, Elwyn B. Robinson Special Collections, University of North Dakota.

Collections at the University of North Dakota archives. It also provided an analysis of the landscape surrounding the opera house and a discourse on the opera house's functions within its community as a business, an entertainment venue, and a cultural center. While the significance of the opera house is not national, its impact on the history of Grand Forks is considerable. From its opening night to the motion pictures it would later, the Metropolitan Opera house was a local treasure that continued to serve its community for years to come.

## CHAPTER TWO: ARCHITECTURE, INTERIORS, AND LANDSCAPE OF ELLENDALE, LISBON, AND MADDOCK OPERA HOUSES

Much like the mixed discussion of interior use and exterior description in the last chapter, Chapter Two delves into the architecture of three different opera houses. The architecture seen in multiple opera houses in North Dakota fall into commercial architecture. Using Richard Longstreth's *The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture* and Virginia Savage-McAlester's *A Field Guide to American Houses: The Definitive Guide to Identifying and Understanding America's Domestic Architecture*, this chapter will discuss the architectural designs of the exterior of three opera houses, with descriptions and photographs of the interior as well. This chapter will highlight the opera houses in Ellendale, Lisbon, and Maddock as they make an interesting study in both the similarities and differences in style in this type of building. I will also talk about the landscapes of these towns and sites, and how the location of the opera houses in the towns was important to the continuation of these spaces. I will conclude that the location of these buildings in town showed how the community valued them and, by understanding this, the reader can understand both the buildings better and why the community would want to save them.

In his work, Longstreth describes commercial architecture types and breaks them down into separate categories. Useful in his discussion is the section on two-part commercial blocks. Longstreth states that this type of building, which you will see in buildings like opera houses, are the most common of the several types he describes. They tend to be two to four stories and have two distinct zones of the building, separated

horizontally. According to Longstreth, the first story zone usually features shops, banks, a lobby, or offices at street level, while the following stories may hold private spaces, like hotel rooms, meeting places, or more office space. One might find a theater space in this second zone as well. This type of architecture was prominent in the 1850s to 1950s, with different eras having more or less elaborate designs and architectural additions, like towers or turrets.<sup>1</sup>

Many, if not most, of these opera houses are in the downtown area of their communities. These locations have made it important for their continuation. As centers of their communities, they are more likely to be considered important by citizens of the town and therefore saved and given new purpose. Their locations make them great spaces for adaptive reuse projects or simply as community-focused places for meetings and events. They are also likely to be on main streets. Main streets serve as centers for cities and towns. According to Longstreth, main streets were like the heart of the city, filled with a dense array of buildings that held civic and commercial importance. Especially between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, this section of town became bustling places of business and commerce. This set the perfect setting for the introduction of the opera house, with this street and section of the town as the rightful place for this type of community space.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Longstreth, *The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1987), 24.

<sup>2</sup> Longstreth, *Buildings of Main Street*, 7.

ELLENDALE

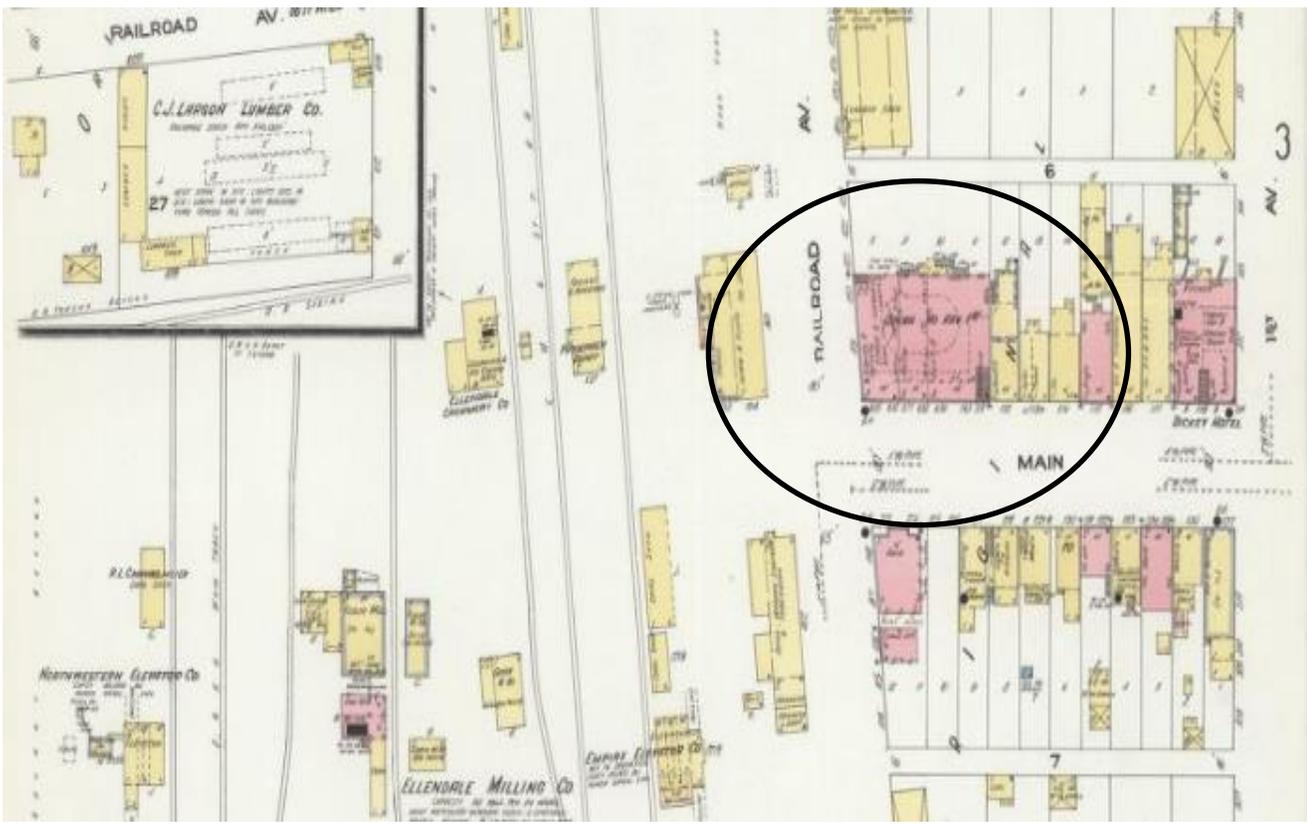


Figure 8: "Sanborn Insurance Map of Ellendale." 1910. Library of Congress.

Ellendale, North Dakota, sits at the intersection of State Highway 281 and County Road 11. About 45 minutes from the North Dakota-South Dakota border, Ellendale is a pleasant little town filled to the brim with lively citizens and budding businesses. The Ellendale Opera House is located on Main Street, right beside where the old CM & St. Paul Railroad used to run through town. The largest building on this street, the opera house has been a topic of pride for Ellendale residents since it was built. The Sanborn map from 1910 shows the opera house the year after it was originally constructed. Across the street was the town's bank, a pool hall, a print shop, and a bakery. Down the block, on the north side of main street, would have been Ellendale's Dickey Hotel. This would have been a prime location for the opera house, due to its proximity to other businesses and places of hospitality.<sup>3</sup>

The Ellendale Opera House exhibits design influences of the Chicago School style of architecture. This three-story building spans three lots and is brick and sandstone foundation. The main façade, or south elevation, is segmented into six bays, with the third and sixth bays unequal. Each bay is made up of recessed brick and separated by plain brick piers. The piers each feature cast iron capitals and bases in the ionic fashion, making the piers resemble columns.<sup>4</sup>

Within the bays are windows, all currently boarded up by plywood boards painted with different scenes inspired by theatre and 19<sup>th</sup> century life. The roof is flat with an

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<sup>3</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Ellendale, Dickey County, North Dakota. Sanborn Map Company, Oct, 1910. Map. [https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn06534\\_004/](https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn06534_004/).

<sup>4</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Ellendale Opera House, Ellendale, North Dakota. April 1992, Nomination form prepared by Lauren McCrosky, State Historical Society of North Dakota, 1992.

overhanging cornice that steps down onto the southern façade. Other elevations are plain brick, with double hung windows throughout the north and west elevations. The west elevation windows feature segmented arches above each window and brick piers lining each story on this elevation.<sup>5</sup>

The street level facades on the south elevation have all been changed from their original state. The westernmost façade has had a layer of large stone applied and an awning added to the top of the front. Two windows take up the main part of the front of this section, separated by a pier with the same stone application. The middle façade is marked by glass windows and aluminum siding. The transoms above the entrance have been boarded up. The easternmost façade has been restored to match the second and third stories. Two bays have had windows replaced, with wood trim between windows and transoms. A continuation of the pier comes down between the two bays and sections them off, with the entrance to this section behind the column.

The building tells its own story of its change over time. The exterior changes are hard to keep up with, especially for a building of this size, and the interior is no different. A first level business space was renovated (and will be further described within the next chapter) in the early 2000s. The owners updated the wooden flooring and placed new sheetrock on the walls. A small bathroom was created in this space as well. Another feature of this business space was the kitchen they created for easier access, allowing the

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<sup>5</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Ellendale Opera House, April 1992.

space to have multiple uses for events. The other business spaces are either unfinished or were not able to be photographed. However, the original brick can be seen on the walls.

Climbing the grand staircase encased in its own entrance takes the visitor to the second floor, which shows great promise but needs a lot of work. While the floors are intact, the walls and ceilings of beadboard leave the visitor wondering what it must have looked like before. Much of the plaster is falling away and many rooms show years of wear and tear. Visitors have left their marks, often literally, in the form of graffiti, initials, and drawings that have long since lost their meanings. These old office spaces are now used as storage for the opera house foundation, holding costume collections, old seating, and paper collections.

The second story also holds the theatre space. Much of it was gutted at some point of its history, with seating on the rickety balcony still in place. The floor in front of the stage has been cleared and, if the opera house hosts a performance on the stage, seating is laid out on the floor in the form of folding chairs. This part of the opera house, like much of the building, needs work. Any hint of design choices, patterns, and materials have been removed and, instead, the space is set for functionality and safety. The stage is stable, but the backstage shows flaking paints of the walls and ceilings. The balcony has been somewhat stabilized near the walls, but still needs to be completely replaced.

The third floor's design is much like the second level's, with office spaces surrounding the theatre. This level holds the entrances to the balcony in the theatre and is the last level that allows for visitors to safely encounter. While the floors are stable, the ceilings and walls show missing boards and plasterwork. The office spaces on this floor

are also used for storage spaces. The Ellendale Opera House is a large building and is an example of an opera house in the beginning stages of restoration. They have some of the restoration started but still have much to be done, with plans in place. This is a notable example of this multipurpose, commercial building type.



*Figure 9: "The Ellendale Opera House is situated on Main Street, near the railroad." In this photograph, the railroad would have been to the left of the opera house, with the rest of Main Street continuing to the right. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 10: "Plywood Murals at the Ellendale Opera House." Unable to replace all the windows, concerned citizens created these murals on plywood and placed the boards over the original windows. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 11: "First Level Façade on the Ellendale Opera House." The first-floor spaces were used for businesses and spanned over multiple lots. In 1910, these spaces were used by clothing stores and grocers. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 12: "Ellendale Opera House Event Space." The first floor, newly renovated space is often used for events that raise money for OPERA, Inc. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 13: "Ellendale First Level Business Space." The business space to the west of the renovation is used for storage but plans for restoration are in place. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 14: "Ellendale First Level Staircase." The staircase to the second floor of the opera house is located east of the renovated space. While it has its own entrance, the doors are locked and the staircase is accessible through the restored space. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 15: "Ellendale Second Floor Landing." The second-floor landing shows makeshift electrical connections and lighting. The ceiling's plaster is no longer visible, only the boards beneath. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 16: 'Ellendale Theater.' The theater space looking towards the balcony from the stage. Much of the walls, ceiling, and floor has been replaced with newer material and much of the balcony needs to be replaced. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 17: "Makeshift storage space in theater." Many places that can be used for storage, are. The tiles beneath the balcony, seen here, have been ruined by water damage and will need replacing. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 18: "Water Damage Under Theater Balcony." Water damage has affected multiple places within the opera house. This is the hall outside of the theater space. Original seating can be seen left of center photograph. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 19: "Missing Ceiling Tiles in Ellendale Theater." Some original ceiling tiles were left on the part of the ceiling that still needs to be replaced within the theater. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 20: "Facing Stage in Ellendale Theater." Facing the stage from the audience, if there are any remnants of the original design elements, they cannot be seen. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 21: "Water Damage Backstage." Water damage has reached much of this space, including backstage plaster. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 22: "Paint Peeling in a Second Floor Office Space." A second-level office space with loss of plaster and peeling paint on the walls is currently used for storage. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 23: "Second Floor Office Space." A second-level office space with peeling paint, a light fixture from mid-1900s, and graffiti from previous visitors. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 24: "Second Level Staircase." Ascending the staircase to the third level of the opera house, you can see an old skylight and more ceiling missing plaster. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 25: "Balcony Seating and Ceiling." The balcony features original seating. The ceiling fell around the balcony. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 26: "Ceiling Tiles Flaking Over Balcony Seating." Another view of the balcony and ceiling shows flaking ceiling tiles. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 27: "Third Floor Landing and Skylight." The third-level landing falls beneath the boarded-up skylight. While the most floorboards are in good shape, some are warped, causing some small waves in the floor. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 28: "Third Floor Meeting Room." The third-floor rooms were once used as classroom and meeting places and are now used for storage, this one holding much of the original seating from the theater. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 49: "Warped Boards in Third Floor Meeting Space." The meeting spaces show some slight warping in the floor boards and water damage in the falling ceiling tiles. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 30: "Original Woodwork in Third Floor Meeting Space." Some meeting spaces are in better condition than the others and feature original heating implements with slight water damage to the walls. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 31: "Storage in a Third Level Meeting Space." Another third-level office space turned opera house storage space. 2017. Photograph by author.*

LISBON

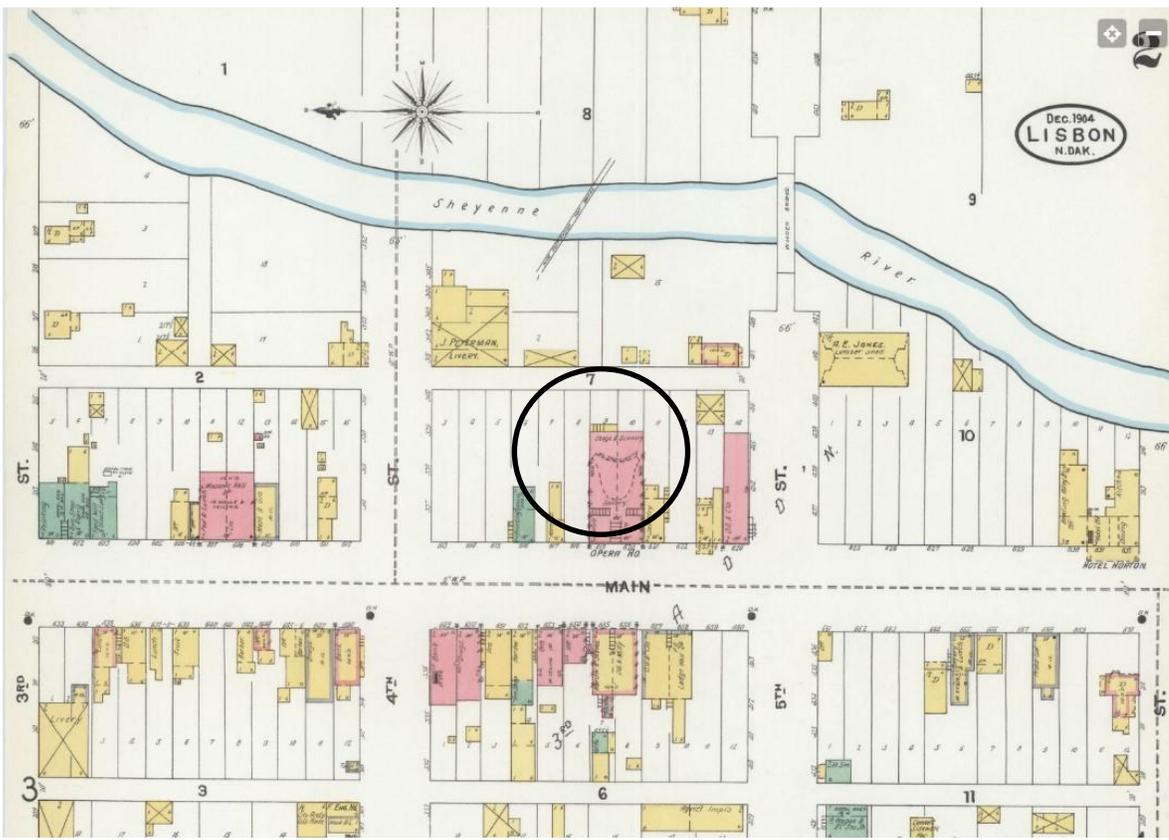


Figure 32: "Sanborn Insurance Map of Lisbon." 1905. Library of Congress

Lisbon is in southeastern North Dakota and, while most towns in this state are set up to be on a grid, this town is platted with the river. The Sheyenne River, a branch of the Red River of the North, runs through Lisbon and county Roads 27 and 32 take both visitors and citizens through the town. The opera house is located east of the river and north of the Northern Pacific Railroad tracks. Located right off Main Street, the Lisbon Opera House was on the same block as the print shop, a harness shop, and a jewelry store. As the neighborhood shifted around it, the uses of the first floor of the opera house changed as well. Multiple stores, including hardware, furniture, and grocery, were housed in the first-floor space. Around the opera house today are hobby shops, a restaurant, and even a movie theatre, built just a few lots down from the opera house.<sup>6</sup>

While Ellendale's opera house is still in the beginning stages of restoration and renovation, the Lisbon Opera House is an example of the halfway point. The work in the main parts of the building are mostly finished, with some spaces still needing work and plans in place for the renovation. The Lisbon Opera House is a three-story, brick building where the western elevation is the main façade. Across the cornice is a wide, dentil pattern and, below this, brick corbelling lines the roofline. This elevation is symmetrical, with three-one-three window patterns with segmented arches above each window on the second and third stories. A name block denoting this building as part of the "Cleveland Block" marks the middle of the façade. The street level story has been renovated and features glass panes with wooden trim and repeating square pattern beneath each window. Pilasters book-end each side of the entrance, with pointed tops on each pilaster.

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<sup>6</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Lisbon, Ransom County, North Dakota. Sanborn Map Company, Jan, 1905. Map. [https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn06550\\_003/](https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn06550_003/).

On both the north and south elevations the viewer can see the painted advertisements of the old drug store.<sup>7</sup>

The Lisbon Opera House has undergone some restoration work. The foundation in charge of the changes moved the first-floor staircase to the north side of the building for better access to the first-floor rental spaces as well as for the installation of the elevator. This level has space for local renters as well as the meeting space for the opera house foundation. Carpet covers much of the wood flooring in the rooms, except the entrance to the staircase and elevator, which retains the restored floorboards. The building has a basement; however, it was not open to the public at the time of my tour of the opera house.

The staircase on the north side leads up to the second level landing. Here, there is evidence of the original staircase, seen in the presentation of floorboards of a different color before the entrance to the theater. This room has been restored and painted and is used as a stop in tours to discuss the preservation of the opera house. This level also holds the ticket box, outfitted with a door with a window inset for ticket sales. A room right off this main room has also been mostly restored, but the wooden floors show signs of wear, the plaster on the walls is starting to crack, and the window sills are peeling. The fireplace in the room has been mostly restored just shy of working order. Also off of the main room is the theater. This space is cleared of original seating, with stackable chairs off to the side for performances. The stage has been stabilized and any cracking plaster

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<sup>7</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Lisbon Opera House, Lisbon, North Dakota, September 1979. Nomination form prepared by John Hensrud and Kurt Schweigert, State Historical Society of North Dakota, 1979.

on the walls backstage removed to expose the original brick. Two staircases flank the entrance of the theater and lead to the third and final landing.

The third floor holds private rooms and the entrance to the balcony. On the balcony are original seats mixed with some temporary seating, with a thick, metal railing separating the balcony seating from the drop to the theater floor. Lining the walls around the top of the theater are details from the original design of the room and any windows have been covered to prevent too much light from streaming in. Corinthian pilasters and molding around the stage and balcony have been restored. The same details around the top of the theater are reflected in the hallway as well. Off of the hallway are two private rooms, which have been cleaned and used for storage and as dressing rooms. While the rooms are cleared of any fallen plaster, they are not completely intact. Peeling wallpaper, cracking plaster, and signs of water damage are prevalent in the space and will require work in the future.

The Lisbon Opera House has had much work done to the façade and within the building, but there is still much more to do within the theater and upper floors of the building. This building is halfway through restorations, with more planned for the future and community support of its efforts. This opera house shows that, even with years of work done, the restoration process is long. The Lisbon Opera House has some community support and because of this support, the foundation has been able to make the progress that they have. The current physical appearance of the opera house shows just how invested the community is.



Figure 33: "The Lisbon Opera House." 2017. Photograph by author.



*Figure 34: "Faded sign reading, OPERA HOUSE and E.C. LUCAS DRUGGIST." 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 35: "Faded sign reading same inscription as other side." Located on opposite side of the building, 2017.  
Photograph by author.*



*Figure 36: "Cleveland Block name block." 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 37: "The façade of the building was restored in the early 2010s." This entrance brings the visitor into the first-floor rental spaces of the building. 2017. Photograph by author.*

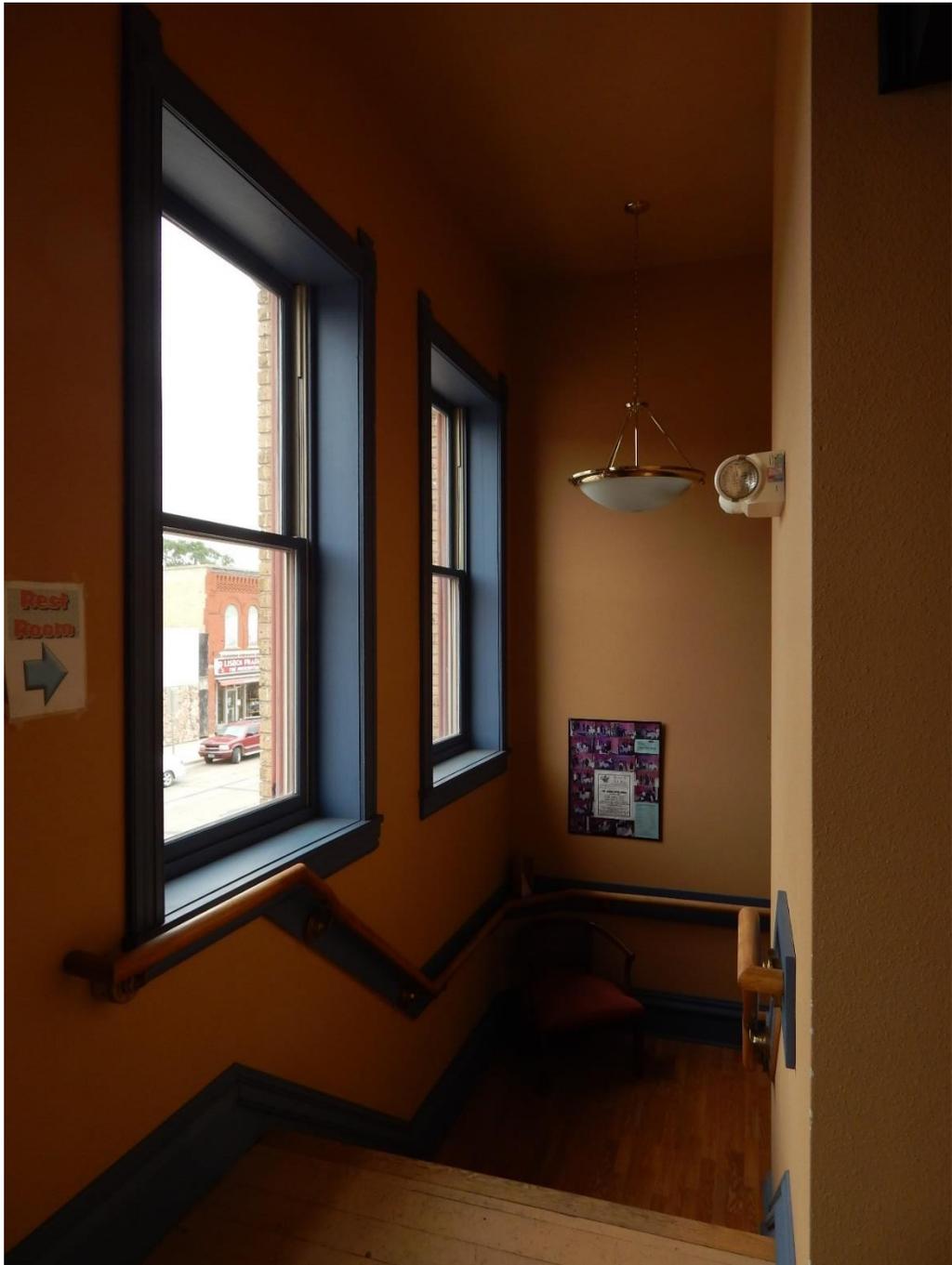


Figure 38: "This staircase leads to the second level, where the theater is located." 2017. Photograph by author.



*Figure 39: "Location of the old staircase." This photograph shows the space where the staircase used to be located. Notice the floorboards of a different color in the bottom half of the photograph, this is where the original staircase used to be. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 40: "Right before entering the theater space, this room is used to greet visitors and sell tickets." 2017.  
Photograph by author.*



*Figure 41: "Ticket Door." Right before entering the theater space, this room is used to greet visitors and sell tickets. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 42: "Second Floor Office Space." On the second floor, this private space was likely used as an office for the owners of the building. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 43: "Lisbon Theater." The theater space has been cleared of original seating, making this space more suitable for different functions. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 44: "The updated theater with stackable seating set to the side." 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 45: "The stage looking out towards the audience space." 2017. Photograph by author.*



Figure 46: "The backstage of the theater features dress rooms now used for storage." 2017. Photograph by author.



*Figure 47: "Exposed Brick and Backstage." This photograph shows exposed brick and the original door used to bring backdrops and scenery into the theater. 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 48: "View from the balcony towards the stage." 2017. Photograph by author.*



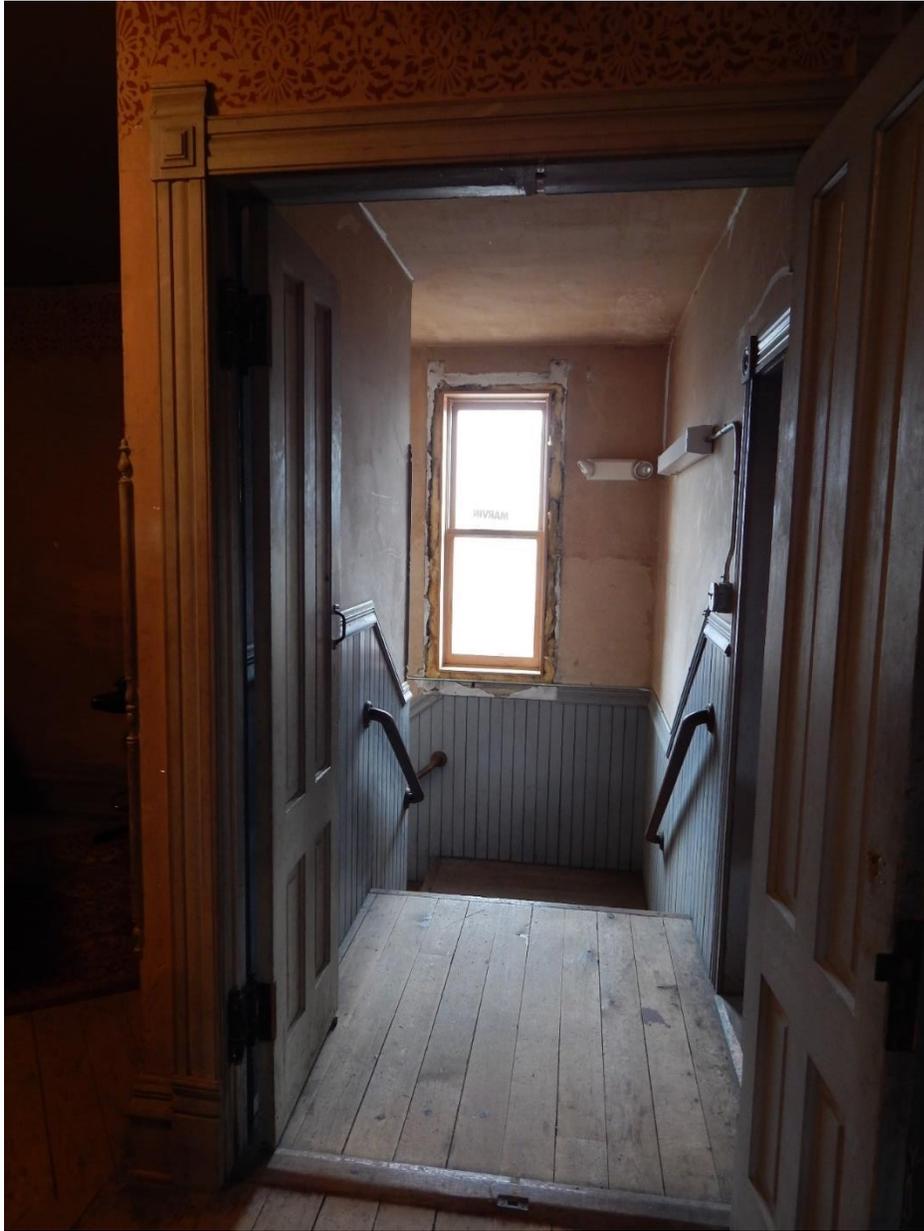
*Figure 49: "View of balcony and lower floor." 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 50: "A third-floor office space used for storage and as a dressing room." 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 51: "A remnant of the design that lines the ceiling in the theater and third floor hallway." 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 52: "One of the staircases that connects the second and third floors. Molding around the windows has been removed." 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 53: "A view of the same staircase shows water damage." 2017. Photograph by author.*

MADDOCK

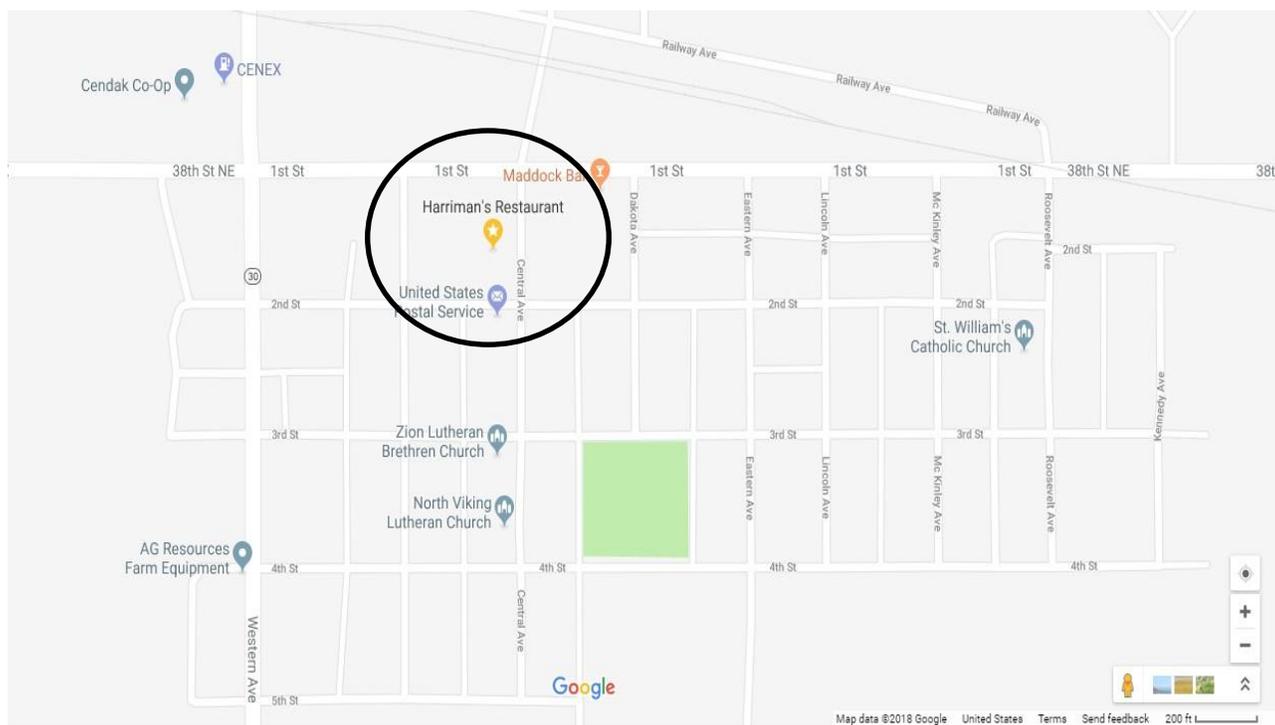


Figure 54: "Maddock, North Dakota." 2018. Google Maps.

Maddock, unlike the Ellendale and Lisbon, is not located on a larger highway. Also, unlike the others, no Sanborn map is available to tell the story of the businesses that surrounded the building near the time of its construction. Therefore, the landscape of the current situation will be delved into. Maddock, North Dakota, is in Benson County and holds a population of about 380 people. Surrounding the opera house is the main part of the town, with the post office across the street to the south and the local bar to the east. Maddock is an agricultural community and is home to farm equipment stores and co-ops. Two Lutheran churches and one Catholic church are the primary faiths represented in this town. While one cannot assume that this is the way Maddock has always been, it does not seem like a far leap to think that the simplicity of this town dates back to its founding in the early 1900s.

The Maddock Opera House, or Harriman Opera House as will be discussed in the next chapter, does not have many frills. A two-story building of brick and stone foundation, this opera house's façade has the only decoration. Facing the street, the first level is all renovated windows with green trim and simple transoms. There are two entrances, the first in the middle of the building that welcomes visitors into the first level restaurant and community space. The second entrance is located further east on the same side of the building and features the ADA accessible ramp into the same spaces listed above. The corners of this façade level show a solid pattern of brick quoining.

Between the first and second levels is a ledge that separates the front elevation. Five windows are also located on this level, with flat brick, segmented lintels and keystones above each window, reminiscent of possible Federal influence. Brick quoining

is on each corner in a repeating pattern. The flat roof does not show an overhang but beneath the roofline is a corniced edge with a dentil pattern below, also an example of the Federal style. Multiple windows with the same detailing above are featured on the east elevation.

The interior was completely renovated in stages and finally opened in 2017. The restaurant part of the opera house had been opened first and money raised from rental spaces went to the renovation of the upstairs theater. The first floor houses the Harriman Restaurant, the community library, a community room, and a bar to the back of the building. Bedecked with new flooring, updated fixtures, green paint, and wooden furniture, this space serves the community. There is a small bar in the back of this space and west end of the building that shows exposed brick and design details that parallel the front of the building. The bar holds the staircase to the basement, which exposes the stone foundation and wooden beams that keep the opera house standing. Moving back to the front of the building, the staircase from this space leads to the second floor.

The second floor holds the theater, and the corresponding kitchen and bathrooms for that room. All newly opened in 2017, the theater has wood flooring and pink, paneled walls with white molding and trim around the room and windows. A new ticket window, in the same color as the trim, marks the entrance to the theater from the staircase. The elevator is off the of the main room at the south end of the floor. Towards the west end of the room, a small staircase leads to the stage. The Maddock Opera House is completely renovated and supported by the community in its efforts. After years of renovation work

and community events, this situation is the best-case scenario of how an opera house can be saved and preserved by its community.



*Figure 55: "The Maddock Opera House." 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 56: "The restored space within the opera house houses the Harriman Restaurant (right) and the community library (left)." 2017. Photograph by author.*



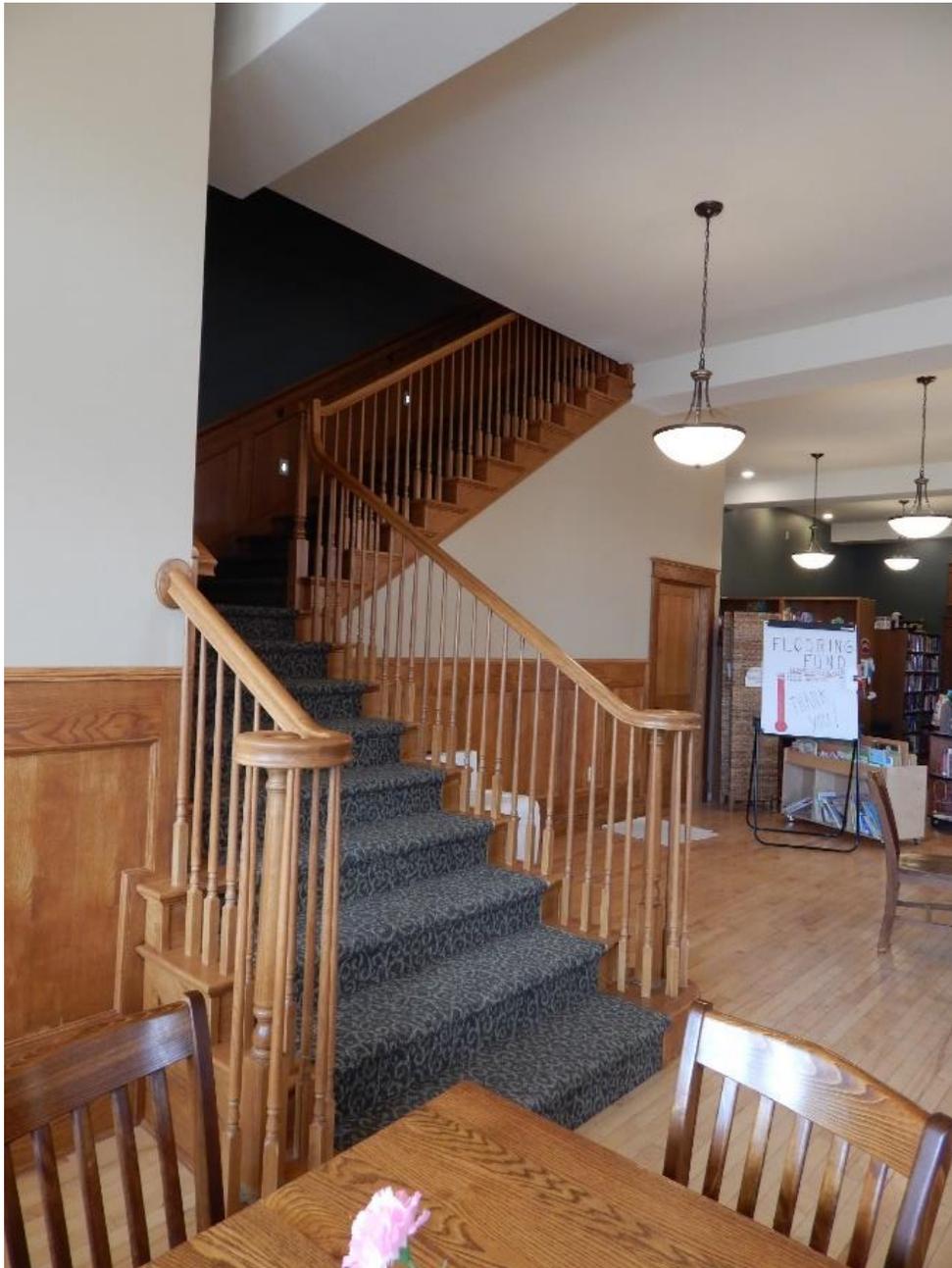
*Figure 57: "The Harriman Restaurant." 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 58: "The community library and restaurant share a space." 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 59: "The owners of the opera house created a community meeting space that can be rented out." 2017.  
Photograph by author.*



*Figure 60: "The staircase to the second-floor theater space is right off the community library and restaurant." 2017.  
Photograph by author.*



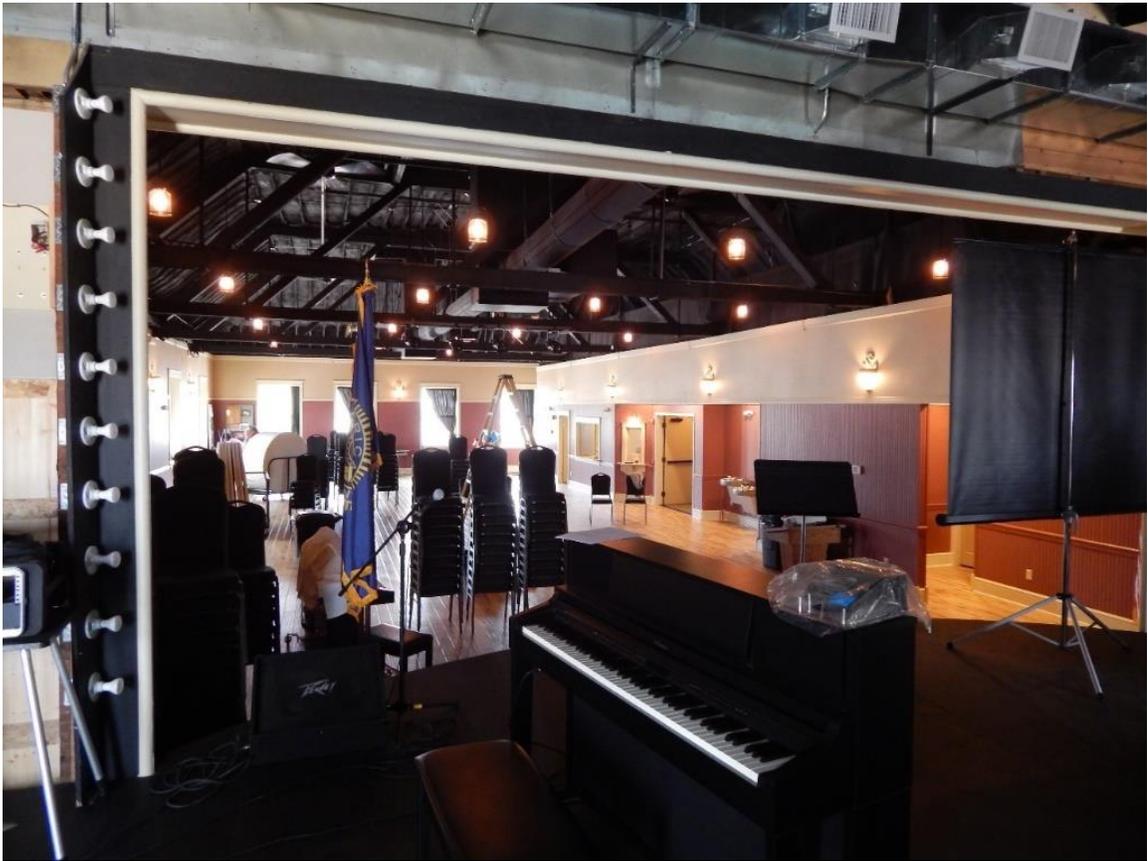
Figure 61: "The opera house, restaurant, and community library are ADA accessible." 2017. Photograph by author.



Figure 62: "ADA accessible entrance to the opera house." 2017. Photograph by author.



*Figure 63: "Main entrance to the opera house." 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 64: "The entire building was completely renovated, including the theater on the second floor." 2017.  
Photograph by author.*



*Figure 65: "View from the stage of the audience space and dance floor." 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 66: "Updated lighting lines the ceiling of the theater, with a new ticket window and kitchen in the space." 2017.  
Photograph by author.*



*Figure 67: "A view of the renovated ceiling." 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 68: "A kitchen and sales window combination allow for multifunctionality in this space." 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 69: "A bar is located at the west end of the building. Notice the detail over the doorway, reflecting the same design over the windows on the building's façade." 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 70: "The stone foundation is readily apparent in the basement of the opera house." 2017. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 71: "Large, wooden beams support the building." 2017. Photograph by author.*

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, three opera houses were examined through exterior analysis, interior description, and landscape. These opera houses were used to display different stages of restoration and photographs of which to illustrate their physical conditions. The landscape was discussed to help give context to the opera house and to show how their physical location makes them important to their community, both past and present. Because of the importance of main streets to towns, building an opera house close to, or on, main street means that citizens valued these types of buildings. By putting opera houses in the main part of towns, communities showed how prized these spaces were. By understanding the landscape and how it relates to these buildings, one can better understand why communities would want to save them.

These opera house do not seem to reflect a certain architectural style completely but do fall under the guidelines laid out for commercial architecture. These spaces are multipurpose and serve many functions, which benefit the communities they inhabit. Restoration of these spaces is a process and involves community efforts. Without the community coming together to support events and fundraising efforts, these places would not be in the shape that they are now. A great amount of work has been done and much more is planned, which shows how involved these communities are in the restoration and preservation of these opera houses. While the location of where the community decided to place the opera house is important, so too is how much worth they place on the building itself and how much energy they decide to put into it.

CHAPTER THREE: PRESERVATION ON THE NORTHERN PLAINS:  
HERITAGE TOURISM AND PRESERVATION OF OPERA HOUSES IN NORTH  
DAKOTA

Since the 1980s and 1990s, there has been a community preservation movement that embraces the old as a site for the new. Opera houses in North Dakota reflect this movement. The citizens of the state have acted to renew their town's heritage and create these new spaces while still paying respect to the old. This movement, along with heritage tourism, allows for old buildings, like opera houses, to have new lives. While this movement can be seen nationally, it can especially be seen on a local and community level through the preservation efforts made by the communities. It is these communities that can make or break the re-adoption of older buildings back into their towns. Accepting these buildings and incorporating them back into their towns is useful for many reasons. Most importantly is the creation of space for use by the community. This can mean as private or public institutions, as both still get use of this space.

Chapter One showed the reader what happened inside the opera house and Chapter Two shared a discussion of preservation and landscape. Now, this chapter looks at preservation of opera houses in North Dakota, how communities use them, and how these communities can use these buildings for heritage tourism. Much like the tours that a handful of these sites will take you on, this chapter is a tour of its own across North Dakota through opera houses. Starting with Wahpeton and ending in Grand Forks, this tour will take the reader from community to community and will analyze the current uses of opera house buildings in the separate communities in North Dakota. Each location will

have a background of each location's story, from construction to preservation, and show the ways communities have decided to use and preserve these spaces. The discussion will follow the information provided about types of intervention in Norman Tyler's Historic Preservation: An Introduction to Its History, Principles, and Practice, and will look at how the buildings are used and how this use reflects these types of intervention. Lastly, this chapter will provide recommendations and ideas for further utilization of the buildings through heritage tourism as a way to connect them all within the state.

#### THE COMMUNITIES

The communities in this chapter are located throughout North Dakota, with some regions of the state more populated with preserved opera houses than others. The communities vary between town to city based on their population and growth, but all either still have their opera houses, or had them intact in 2017. All of these buildings are multi-purpose; not a single one of them functions only as an opera house or performance space. They all fall within Tyler's intervention types, as outlined in the introduction, although none of these buildings are reconstructed.

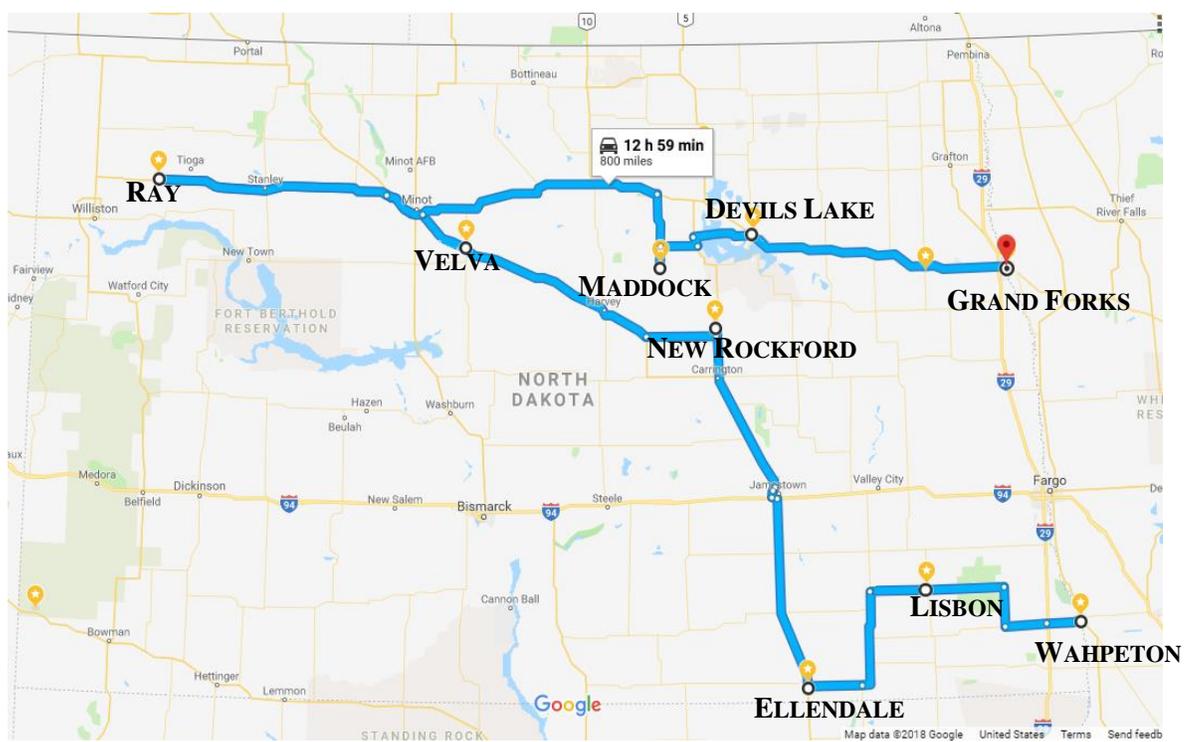


Figure 72: "Tour Sites." The sites are marked by yellow stars and town names. 2018. Google Maps.



*Figure 73: "Wahpeton Opera House of Wahpeton, ND." 2018. Photograph by author.*

The first stop is the old **WAHPETON** opera house, which is located at 403 Dakota Avenue in Wahpeton, North Dakota, and was built between 1894 and 1897 and featured electric lights and footlights. It operated as an opera house and business center, hosting a variety of businesses on its first level, including a general store, a grocery store, a candy store, and a newspaper office. The second and third levels hosted the theater stage and scenery. In 1919, the building was sold to brothers Frank and Joseph Vertin, Sr. The brothers ran the Vertin-Munson Funeral and Cremation Service as well as Vertin Furniture within this building until 1961, when they moved their business to another building in Wahpeton. The furniture store was bought by Robert Caspers, Sr. and Russ Munson and the name of the store was changed to Caspers Furniture. During this time, the opera house was known to hold seven levels of furniture until Casper sold the building in 1994. Within the next decade, the building also housed a hardware store.<sup>1</sup>

In July 2006, the roof of the opera house collapsed, closing not only the building but half the street as well. During the next six months, legal battles fought between the owners and the government about the condition of the opera house caused the fate of the opera house to be unknown. In other towns, a building with a collapsed roof would have meant definite demolition, but the citizens of Wahpeton fully supported the restoration of the opera house, stating that it was a landmark in the community. Though the exact date is not known, the opera house changed hands again, the Opera House Limited Partnership

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<sup>1</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Wahpeton, Richland County, North Dakota, Jan 1898, Dec 1904, Oct 1910, July 1916; Vertin-Munson Funeral & Cremation Service, "Our History," <https://www.vertinmunson.com/about-us> (retrieved September 16, 2018); Mary Nelson, "City Closes Part of 4<sup>th</sup>," *Wahpeton Daily News*, July, 26, 2006, accessed September 18, 2018, [https://www.wahpetondailynews.com/news/city-closes-part-of-th/article\\_ca788b1f-ed8b-5602-bcb3-27e3de05cf8e.html](https://www.wahpetondailynews.com/news/city-closes-part-of-th/article_ca788b1f-ed8b-5602-bcb3-27e3de05cf8e.html).

was formed, and that partnership took over ownership of the building. In 2007, preservation moved forward when owner, Jerry Meide, gave his decision to save the building, rather than tear it down. Snap Fitness, the business that currently operates on the first floor, took tenancy of the space, and the Three Rivers Arts Council was set to take the second level. The third floor was planned to hold apartments. In 2008, ownership changed from Jerry Meide to Greg and Darcy Meide.<sup>2</sup>

This opera house is an excellent example of adaptive reuse. Instead of tearing down the building and creating another empty lot, owners chose to lease out the spaces to businesses or parties that this building was not originally intended for. Currently, the Snap Fitness still inhabits the first floor and Performance Centers, Inc., a telemarketing company, is on the second floor. From Wahpeton, you'll follow ND-13 west until you hit the small town of Wyndmere, where you will then head north on ND-18. At the intersection of ND-18 and ND-27, you'll go west on ND-27. This will take you through the beautiful Sheyenne National Grassland right into Lisbon. Once in Lisbon, head north on Main Street and you will find yourself right at the next stop: the Lisbon Opera House.

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<sup>2</sup> Mary Nelson, "City Closes Part of 4<sup>th</sup>," July 16, 2006.; Nelson, "Residents Want Opera House Saved," *Wahpeton Daily News*, August 8, 2006, accessed September 18, 2018, [https://www.wahpetondailynews.com/news/residents-want-opera-house-saved/article\\_92471749-bb18-5e27-a99a-d084985e14f3.html](https://www.wahpetondailynews.com/news/residents-want-opera-house-saved/article_92471749-bb18-5e27-a99a-d084985e14f3.html); Anna Jauhola, "Opera House Coming Alone in Wahpeton," *Wahpeton Daily News*, October 30, 2007, accessed September 18, 2018, [https://www.wahpetondailynews.com/news/opera-house-coming-along-in-wahpeton/article\\_086f8bda-cd33-5263-bc1b-da641bfe85d8.html](https://www.wahpetondailynews.com/news/opera-house-coming-along-in-wahpeton/article_086f8bda-cd33-5263-bc1b-da641bfe85d8.html); Anna Jauhola, "Opera House to Have New Owners," *Wahpeton Daily News*, October 7, 2008, accessed September 18, 2018, [https://www.wahpetondailynews.com/news/opera-house-to-have-new-owners/article\\_2f5afb94-688b-5d56-baf6-e462fb250738.html](https://www.wahpetondailynews.com/news/opera-house-to-have-new-owners/article_2f5afb94-688b-5d56-baf6-e462fb250738.html).



*Figure 74: "Wahpeton City Mural." This mural, funded through a grant from the National Endowment of the Arts and painted by artist Shawn McCann, depicts the opera house and other important landmarks in Wahpeton's history. 2018. Photograph by author.*



*Figure 75: "Lisbon Opera House of Lisbon, ND." 2017. Photograph by author.*

The opera house in **LISBON**, North Dakota, is located at 413 Main Street. This opera house, as described by the handy little brochure visitors receive, was the product of a commission by a set of sisters from Buffalo, New York. Alice M. Beemis and Mary Beemis Parsons were in Lisbon in the summer of 1889. After this visit, they decided that Lisbon needed an opera house. This is a great example of how women had more autonomy on the prairie. Often tasked with domesticating the frontier, women were also a part of introducing what is cultured entertainment. Here, women were not excluded from the space, but helped create them. This cultural center in Lisbon is a three-story, brick building that was constructed in 1889. However, sources disagree on what happened next. Some report that the building was purchased by local businessman E.C. Lucas in 1895 while the other reports 1900. Lucas, along with his brother, opened the Lucas Brothers Drug Store on the first level and used the second and third levels for stage space and dressing rooms. The drug store's sign can still be seen on the outside of the building.<sup>3</sup>

Lucas had lucrative ideas for the opera house, claiming that he brought in national talent and kept the opera house interesting. The National Register of Historic Places form states that Lucas even used the hall to show motion pictures until 1922, when it was condemned. The space had been used for performances by national touring groups, choruses, a 1901 State Convention of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (which was interrupted by the news of President William McKinley's assassination and then

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<sup>3</sup> Lisbon Opera House Foundation, Informational brochure, Lisbon, North Dakota, n.d.

hosted the subsequent memorial services). Local events were also held in the opera house, including holiday celebrations, high school graduations, and school plays.<sup>4</sup>

In 1928, the department store JC Penney moved into the first level space of the building and, in 1954, the grand staircase that was located in the middle of the building was removed. This allowed for the ground floor entrance to be specifically for JC Penney. A staircase (the current one) was placed in the northwest corner of the building. The Lisbon Opera House, then known for its JC Penney branding, was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979. JC Penney closed its Lisbon branch in 1988 and, six years later, in 1994, the building was donated to the Lisbon Opera House Foundation, the group that currently owns and operates the building. Their goal with this building was and is to get the opera house back to the state it was in when it was built, “with the vision of it being a dynamic and useful part of Lisbon.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Lisbon Opera House, Lisbon, North Dakota, September 1979. Nomination form prepared by John Hensrud and Kurt Schweigert, State Historical Society of North Dakota, 1979; Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Lisbon Opera House Foundation, Informational brochure, Lisbon, North Dakota, n.d.; Ibid.



Over the past twenty-three years, the Lisbon Opera House Foundation has worked hard at restoring the space. The foundation takes the opportunity to educate those who come to the space on every single part of their restoration and the research that has gone into it, with framed designs for renovations and restorations and plans for the spaces. It has remodeled the front façade to resemble the original as closely as possible. It has also remodeled the first floor, which is used as rental space and the headquarters for their foundation. The foundation plans on restoring the interior, using small details, like leftover wallpaper, seats, and architectural details, as inspiration for design and materials. It replaced all windows and wiring, and have installed an elevator, which makes the second floor more accessible. The opera house is open for tours by appointment and host plays, wedding receptions, concerts, local talent shows, and many other community events. All proceeds from rentals of their spaces go back into the opera house.<sup>6</sup>

After taking some time to appreciate the small town feel of Lisbon, it is time to move on to our next stop. Head south on Main Street and jump back on ND-27 (67<sup>th</sup> St SE) and head west. Follow ND-27 for about eighteen miles until the ND-1/ND-27 intersection. Head south on ND-1 through small towns like Verona and Oakes until you reach Ellendale, where you'll head south on 89<sup>th</sup> St SE/US-281. Turn west on Main St and the Ellendale Opera House will be at the end of the street on the north side.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



*Figure 77: "Ellendale Opera House of Ellendale, ND." 2017. Photograph by author.*

The next site is the **ELLEDALE** Opera House, which is situated at 63 Main Street, in Ellendale, North Dakota. Built in 1908, you'll notice that this building is massive compared to the other opera houses in this tour. It is three stories and brick, but the first level spans three business spaces, rather than one or two. The second and third levels host the large theater space, plus multiple rooms that were used as rentals, business offices, and community meeting rooms. The businesses that set up shop in the first level spaces had lost their original buildings in a fire. The rebuilt businesses came first, then the second two levels were funded by multiple businesses from main street and constructed on top of the business spaces. The offices in the building were rented out to attorneys, dentists, and doctors. At the time of initial use, the auditorium could seat up to 1000 and the seats were removable. This space was used for everything from school plays and graduations, to basketball games and athletic events. The auditorium/theater space was even used for roller skating.<sup>7</sup>

The building was left unattended in the 1980s after the roof began to leak and repairs could not be made. In 2002, O.P.E.R.A, Inc., took ownership of the building from the city and began renovating. Since then, they have replaced the roof, renovated a first level business space, and replaced part of the back wall. The Ellendale Opera House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2009, which is much later compared to the others listed on the register. This is likely just because the community did not become involved in the preservation of the opera house until 2002, a much later date than

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<sup>7</sup> O.P.E.R.A., Inc., Informational brochure, Ellendale brochure, Ellendale, North Dakota, n.d.; Ibid.

the other foundations which often took ownership in the 1980s and 1990s. OPERA, Inc currently owns, runs, and is still trying to restore this space.<sup>8</sup>

The auditorium still needs a lot of love and is sometimes used for larger plays and productions. However, the main space in use is the renovated first level room. This space holds musical performances, art shows, traveling exhibits, and community events. Funds raised from these productions go toward renovations. The nonprofit is being run by a group of dedicated volunteers. Along with these special events, they also offer tours by appointment.

The next opera house on the list is north of Ellendale. To reach your destination, get back onto 89<sup>th</sup> St SE/US-281 and head north through towns like Edgeley and Jamestown for about a two-hour drive. While in Jamestown, take a quick pit-stop at the Jamestown Buffalo, a large buffalo statue great for photographs and a place to stretch your legs. This would also be an excellent place to stop for the night, if you're so inclined. If not, jump back onto US-281 and continue north until you hit New Rockford, where you'll turn west onto Central Ave. Follow Central until you reach the New Rockford Opera House, located on the north side of the street.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



Figure 78: "New Rockford Opera House of New Rockford, ND." 2017. Photograph by author.

The current **NEW ROCKFORD** Opera House, located at 824 Central Avenue in New Rockford, North Dakota, was built after a fire destroyed all wooden buildings on the west end of its current block in February 1910. Built as a block, the opera house spanned two lots. Two other opera houses, both wooden constructions, were in New Rockford before this opera house was built. The Niven Opera House was built above a first level space for other businesses. A brick building, this space featured the opera house on the second floor and, when built, had gas lighting. The opera house was managed by William Bucklin and opened to the public in October 1910. The Niven Opera House was built at the same time that New Rockford's second opera house, the Brown Opera House, was still in business. The two competed for the best traveling shows and talent. The Niven Opera House became the most popular place for entertainment in New Rockford because of its size and modernity. The opera house was the place to be for those who wanted to attend plays, musicals, and local community events, like holiday balls and church bazaars.<sup>9</sup>

Another fire in the spring of 1912 burned through the block to the east of the opera house. A wealthy businessman decided to build another theatre on this space, which began to rival the Niven by showing moving pictures. In 1916, the plays and traveling shows began to decline and the Niven was used as a movie theatre as well for a while. However, it was not as popular as the other theatre. The Niven Opera House

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<sup>9</sup> Edgar M. Arntson, Isabelle Aslakson, & Thordis K. Danielson, *A Century of Sowers, A Harvest of Heritage: 100 Years on the Land --- 1883-1983, New Rockford, Eddy County, North Dakota*, (New Rockford, N.D.: Centennial Committee, 1983), 197; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from New Rockford, Eddy County, North Dakota. Sanborn Map Company, Dec, 1912. Map. [https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn06558\\_002/](https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn06558_002/); Arntson, Aslakson, & Danielson, *A Century of Sowers*, 197-198.

continued to be the site of community events well into the 1920s. Over the years, multiple businesses took ownership of the building, but it physically deteriorated over time.<sup>10</sup>

In the 1990s, the then-vacant buildings were donated to the Dakota Prairie Regional Center for the Arts, a non-profit performing arts organization, and the opera house became the center for this group. In 2006, the preservation and restoration efforts of the Niven Opera House began. Because of its close association with the block it is a part of, the opera house became better known as the Niven Buildings before preservation efforts started. Citizens and local businesses began restoring the opera house, removing false ceilings to expose the original tin and replacing flooring, ductwork, and the furnace. Today, the Dakota Prairie Regional Center for the Arts is still within the buildings. The buildings hold a coffee shop, a wine bar, a gift shop, the stage, and a dance studio. The opera house is available for rentals for local community and personal events.<sup>11</sup>

The next location, because of the state of the opera house, can be appreciated from a distance, if you'd prefer. If not, head south on 8<sup>th</sup> St S then head west on ND-15-16<sup>th</sup> St NE. Follow ND-15 W for about 24 miles until you reach the town of Fessenden. Head north on US Hwy 52 for about an hour until you get to Velva, where you'll turn northeast on Main Street until you reach the old location of the opera house.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 198.

<sup>11</sup> "Back in the Spotlight: New Rockford Residents Remodel Historic Opera House," *The Bismarck Tribune*, October 15, 2006, <https://www.newspapers.com/image/347558652> (retrieved September 17, 2018); Ibid; Dakota Prairie Regional Center for the Arts, "About," <http://www.dprca.com/about-dprca> (accessed September 18, 2018).

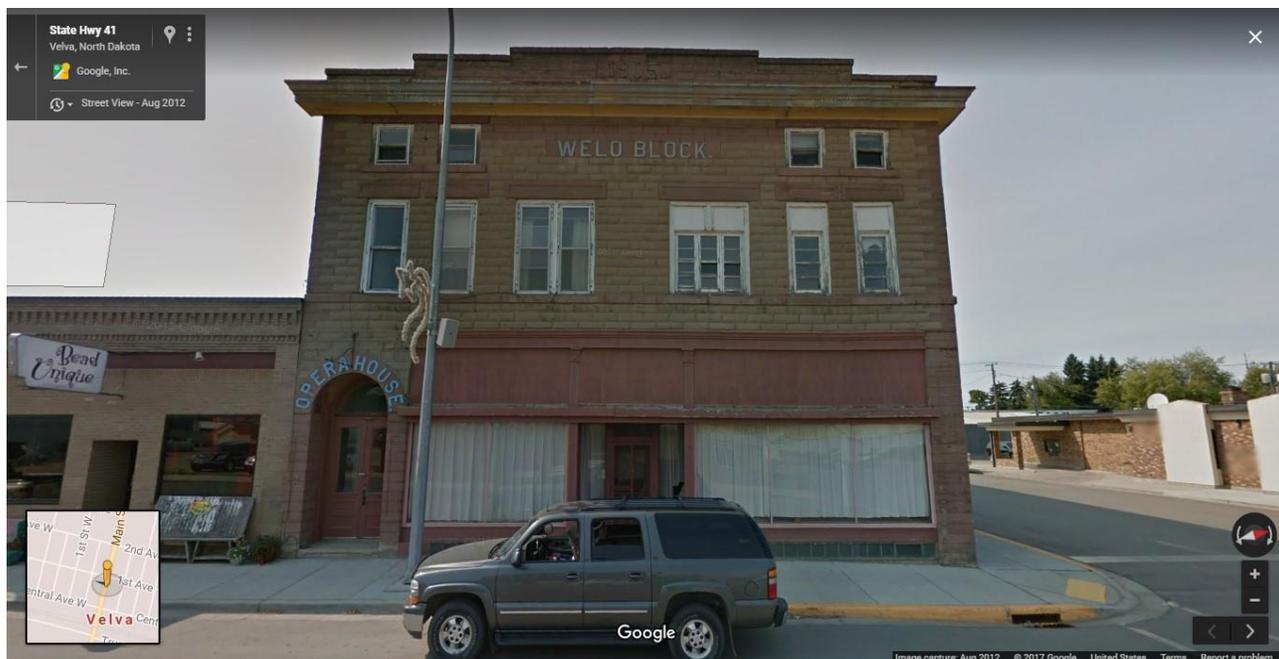


Figure 79: "Velva Opera House of Velva, ND, 2013." 2017. Google Maps Street View.



Figure 80: "Velva Opera House, facing southwest, 2013." 2017. Google Maps Street View.



*Figure 81: "Velva Opera House lot." Due to dilapidation and lack of caretaking, the Velva Opera House was demolished in June 2017. 2017. Photograph by author.*

The next opera house is that of the Welo (pronounced wee-low) Block building in **VELVA**, North Dakota. Built in 1905 by Tobias Welo, the three-story, brick Welo Building held a first level department store with a second level opera house and performance space. The first floor later held a grocery and dime store. The opera house held 300-400 people and was used for local events, like plays and graduations, as well as for traveling acting troupes and performers. The opera house was a community space and was used for all large functions and anything that needed a lot of space, since Velva a space for this specific reason. In 1913, the Welo Building got electricity and the opera house showed motion pictures. The second floor also had office and rental spaces. The third-floor housed apartments and the basement had a barber shop. The building changed many hands over the years.<sup>12</sup>

In 2005, the building had been empty for more than 10 years, with discussions of restoration and preservation underway for the centennial. Unfortunately, those discussions never developed into anything fruitful. In June of 2017, the Welo Building was demolished. It had been left vacant for too long and had become completely dilapidated. It had stood for about 112 years and was in need of many repairs, including a new roof and substantial work to the interior from water damage. The tale of the opera house in Velva, North Dakota, could be considered one of disappointment and missed opportunity. However, it drives home the point that the community really does decide

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<sup>12</sup> Melba Olson, comp, *A History of Velva: Star City Centennial: Velva, North Dakota, July 1-4, 2005: Incorporated 1905*, (North Dakota: Star City Centennial Committee, 2005), 114.

what happens to the building; the community is what makes or breaks the future of these community spaces.<sup>13</sup>

From Velva, the next stop is Ray, North Dakota. Ray is, by far, the farthest west. Take Main Street back to US-52 West and follow west for about 70 miles through towns like Sawyer, Minot, and Stanley. Around Minot, US-52 converges with US-2, so be aware when that changes. Once you reach Ray, head north on Score Street. Take the first right (east) on 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue W then the next left (north) on Main Street. The Ray Opera House will be on the left on the west side of the street.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid; Jill Schramm, "Historic building razed in Velva," *SecoND Front Newspaper*, June 30, 2017.



*Figure 82: "Ray Opera House of Ray, ND." 2017. Photograph by author.*

The **RAY** Opera house was built in 1904 on a site purchased by Bertha Herman. A man by the name of Sigbjorn (Sam) Charlson moved from Wisconsin to Ray in 1904 and set up business in the opera house, likely on the first floor. He bought the property in 1908. After calling it the Charlson Store, the Charlson family owned this property until 1946, when Adam Stevahn purchased the property and continued to run a store as well. As a performance space, the Ray Opera House hosted national, regional, and local talent, plus holiday celebrations and town dances. Other community events, like wrestling matches, masses, and graduations were also held here. In 1915, the Ray City Auditorium was constructed and the opera house fell into disuse. Almost forty years later, in the 1950s, the building was remodeled into rental units because of oil boom out in western North Dakota. During this time, a beauty shop was also installed on the second floor. When both shops and the rental units were no longer in use, these spaces became storage. The first floor fell out of use sometime between 1950s and 1961, when it became the HQ for the Montana-Dakota Utilities. A W. S. Raymond gave the opera house to the city in 1975.<sup>14</sup>

In late 1970s, there were plans for the second floor to be restored and first floor to be used by the Senior Citizens League of Ray, Inc. The Ray Opera House was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. The building currently houses the Ray Opera House Museum, a volunteer-run organization, and is supposed to have exhibits featuring musical instruments, pioneer artifacts, and “an unusual African display”. It is only open one day a week, Sundays, for two hours, from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m, during

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<sup>14</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Ray Opera House, Ray, North Dakota, November 1978, Nomination form prepared by Dawn Maddox, State Historical Society of North Dakota, 1978, 3; *Ibid*, 5.

the summer months. Much like the Grand Forks and Devils Lake opera houses, the Ray Opera House Museum is an excellent example of the adaptive/rehabilitative use intervention type.<sup>15</sup>

The next stop on this tour is Maddock, North Dakota. To reach Maddock, jump back onto US-2 E/US-52 E and follow this road for almost 100 miles. You could also take a pit stop in Minot, which also holds many options for overnight stays. If not, continue through until you reach the small town of York at the intersection of US-2 E and ND-30 S. Head south on ND-30 S for about 25 miles until you reach Maddock. Turn left (east) on 38<sup>th</sup> St NE/1<sup>st</sup> Street and take the second right (south) onto Central Ave. The opera house will be on your right, or on the west side of the street.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 3-5; North Dakota Tourism, "Ray Opera House Museum," n.d., accessed November 2017, <http://www.ndtourism.com/ray/attractions/ray-opera-house-museum>; Official Web Site of Ray, North Dakota, "Ray Opera House Museum," 2009, accessed November 2017, [http://www.raynd.com/index.asp?SEC=906BF261-FC6B-4073-9ADE-C5C002D63078&Type=B\\_BASIC](http://www.raynd.com/index.asp?SEC=906BF261-FC6B-4073-9ADE-C5C002D63078&Type=B_BASIC).



*Figure 83: "Maddock Opera House of Maddock, ND." 2017. Photograph by author.*

**MADDOCK**, North Dakota, is home to the Maddock Opera House. Also called Harriman Hall in a few sources, this building is a simple, two-story brick building. Built in 1905 by the Harriman brothers, it was a local treasure that hosted live performances. Both George and Loren Harriman were local businessmen and had clout in Maddock, which likely brought in more visitors. The Maddock Opera House opened on December 7, 1905, with a play, dinner, and a dance featured that evening. The managers of the space held Vaudeville shows and around 1919 they installed a movie machine that showed short movies between acts. In 1923, a fire from an adjoining building made its way into the Harriman building and one could only assume that it was remodeled. Because sources are so sparse on this building, it is hard to determine what happened next. It seems that between 1923 and 1951, it was under the management of the Cleveland Brothers. In 1951, the building became Milde's Hardware and the Cooperative Store Association. It remained that way for the better part of the mid- to late-1900s.<sup>16</sup>

This identity as a hardware store prevails to this day, even though it is now under different owners. In 2009, the Maddock Opera House Association, a volunteer-run, nonprofit, formed. The first level is multi-use and holds a restaurant, called Harriman's, a bar, and the Maddock Community Library. This space had been renovated first and opened in June 2014. The second level is the opera house which just opened on July 1, 2017. Within the past six months, they have brought in bands and local talent to perform, as well as use the space for community and holiday celebrations. The Maddock Opera

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<sup>16</sup> William E. Stiles and Stanley O. Stiles, ed., *The First Fifty Years: A History of the Community of Maddock, North Dakota, 1901-1951*, (Maddock, ND: The Standard Publishing Company, 1951), 222; Ibid, 191.; Ibid, 159; Ibid, 200.

House is not on the Historic Register of National Places. Since the National Register is a list, putting the opera house on the register adds it to a national inventory of historic places and could benefit the property by giving it national credibility and opening up grant possibilities. However, it is not ultimately necessary to nominate the building, but the foundation could benefit from tax credits and other possible preservation opportunities.<sup>17</sup>

Our second to last stop is in Devils Lake, North Dakota. From the Maddock Opera House, get back on 1<sup>st</sup> Street and head west. Turn north on ND-30 N and follow for about 7 miles. Once you reach the ND-30 and ND-19 intersection, go east on ND-19 for 12 miles until the ND-19 and US-281 intersection, in the town of Minnewaukan. Head north on US-281 for 3 miles until you reach another ND-19 and US-281 intersection, where you will head east on ND-19 for 20 miles. Once in Devils Lake, head north on College Dr N and take a right (east) on 6<sup>th</sup> St NE. Take the first right (south) onto Railroad Ave and follow this road until 4<sup>th</sup> St NE. Turn left (east) and the opera house will be at the corner of 4<sup>th</sup> St NE and 4<sup>th</sup> Ave NE. This site holds private residences, however, so appreciate from a distance or visit one of the first-floor businesses that are open to the public.

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<sup>17</sup> Andrea Johnson, "Historic opera house in Maddock gets new life," *Washington Times*, June 30, 2014, accessed December 12, 2017, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/jun/30/historic-opera-house-in-maddock-gets-new-life/>.



*Figure 84: "Devils Lake Opera House of Devils Lake, ND." 2017. Photograph by author.*

The opera house in **DEVILS LAKE**, North Dakota, is part of the Bangs-Wineman Block. It was built in 1895 as the Wineman Opera House Block. This part is the front façade. A two-story addition was added to the east (back) in 1909. In 1916, Harry Baird purchased the block and added more onto the east as well as a third story, which is known as the “Baird Expansion.” The first floor has been commercial space for the building’s entire existence. The top floors became apartments around the same time as the Baird expansion, but the storefronts have been constantly changing. In the 1910s, the building’s apartments were also used as winter lodging for those who spent summers in cabins. Glickson’s, a men and boy’s department store, has been ingrained into this building’s history and was owned by a Glickson family member as of 1985. The building is also known as the Glickson’s Department Store and was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1985. It was renovated around this same time.<sup>18</sup>

The first-floor space is still used for businesses and commercial use. It currently houses a coffee shop by the name of The Liquid Bean and an Edward Jones financial advisor office. The second and third floors are private apartments. This opera house was not the only one in Devils Lake. Another one was located a few blocks from the current one and was built earlier. That one was demolished in the 1970s, but sources are limited on that.

The final stop on this tour is the Metropolitan Opera House in Grand Forks, ND. To get there from the Devils Lake Opera House Apartments, take 4<sup>th</sup> Ave NE and head

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<sup>18</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Bangs-Wineman Block, Devils Lake, North Dakota. November 1985, Nomination form prepared by Dr. Norene A. Roberts, Historical Research, Inc., 1985, 2; Ibid.

south until you reach Railroad Ave. Take a left (south) onto Railroad Ave and follow this road until 6<sup>th</sup> Ave NE, where you'll turn right and head further south on this road. Follow this road until you reach US-2, then head east on this highway for almost 90 miles. This road will take you right into Grand Forks. Continue following the road until N 3rd Street, where you'll take a right (southeast) and follow this road until you reach the Metropolitan Opera House Apartments/Rhombus Guy's brewing company. If you go over the river, you've gone too far. This building is also a combination of private residence and public space. Please feel free to admire the building, with respect to the residents, and also check out the first level business to see how the owners have changed the inside to fit their needs.



*Figure 85: "Metropolitan Opera House of Grand Forks, ND." 2017. Photograph by author.*

The Metropolitan Opera House is located right next to the Northern Pacific Railroad tracks, across from the Red River of the North, and on Third Street in **GRAND FORKS**, North Dakota. As described in Chapter One, this location gave it excellent access to the railroad, which was used to bring in heavy scenery and traveling acting troupes. To briefly review, the Grand Forks Opera Company started in 1888-1889. A conglomeration of local businessmen, this company got the ball rolling on an opera house for the community. Built in 1890, the opera house was used by the community as a space for local events as well as national talent. It was foreclosed on in the early 1900s, and eventually bought by the Commercial National Bank of Boston. The management of the opera house switched to regional circuit in 1908 and performances started fading with movies replacing them in the 1920s.<sup>19</sup>

The Metropolitan Opera House became known as the MET movie theater in the 1920s-1930s. Renovated in the 1940s, much of the interior was taken out and the space became a bar, café, bowling alley, and apartments. The entire building was known as the Uptown Recreation Center. In 1997, a huge flood hit Grand Forks and the Red River Valley. Although the opera house was actually built with a flood drain (since it was built so close to the river), it failed and the first floor was flooded. The bowling alley was removed because of flood damage. Later that same year, a fire hit downtown and the

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<sup>19</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Metropolitan Opera House, Grand Forks, Grand Forks, North Dakota. July 1999, Nomination form prepared by Cynthia Mala, Grand Forks Historic Preservation Commission, 1997, 5; Inaugural Performance Program, 1890, Elwyn B. Robinson Special Collections, University of North Dakota; *The Dickinson Press*, May 29, 1897, accessed November 2017, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn88076013/1897-05-29/ed-1/seq-4/>.

building survived that, too. The Grand Forks Historic Preservation Commission put in on the National Register of Historic Places in 1999.<sup>20</sup>

This opera house is another example of adaptive reuse. Just like the Devils Lake opera house apartments, the Metropolitan Opera House's second and third floors house the Opera House Lofts, or residential spaces. The first level is the home of the Rhombus Guy's restaurant and brewery, a local chain and eatery. No company specific to the opera house name took over the property.

#### HERITAGE TOURISM RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the most interesting parts about studying these buildings can be found not in the architecture, but in the communities. Many of these spaces reflect this vivid interest of the community to embrace its history and make it come alive again. The research on these opera houses and the communities brought on the realization that if one person is interested in it, then there are probably others as well. From both a business and heritage tourism perspective, this could be built upon, starting with the most obvious: a driving tour.

A driving tour could feature the entire state of North Dakota or it could be broken down into regions of the state: north, south, east, and west. The tour could be simple but still significant. Each opera house would have a picture of the current building or, if that is not feasible, a historic photograph of the original building could be used. Each picture would have the address of where it is or would have been, plus a short paragraph about its

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<sup>20</sup> National Register of Historic Places, Metropolitan Opera House, Grand Forks, 6-7; Ibid, 7; Ibid, 1.

history and current use. The tour could be printed on brochures and dispersed to the opera houses themselves, if they are open to tourists, at actual performances, or even to local chambers of commerce. It could also be available online through pdf form. This would be an excellent way to showcase these beautiful treasures of North Dakota in an accessible fashion. However, as with every project, there might be some drawbacks or issues to think about.

These issues do not need to end this project idea as they create an opportunity to think ahead and be aware of possible challenges and their solutions. The first issue to think about is safety. A few of these buildings are not necessarily safe for tours and may need a disclaimer discussing it. For instance, the Velva Opera House was dilapidated and had been unsafe for the community to use. It was left for too long and finally had to be torn down. However, the history still deserves to be discussed and interpreted, so this is an issue to address. A second issue that might be just as important as the first is that of privacy. Since a handful of these buildings are apartments, it would be important to note that only some of these buildings are open to tours. Another possible issue is the communities. Although most of them are warm and welcoming, some of these communities might just want to be left alone. While one or two people driving through might be welcome, a whole slew could raise eyebrows and a ruckus. There is also the issue of lodging availability for visitors, but this could be addressed with a quick heads-up on where lodging is located.

In addition to safety for visitors, privacy of sites, communities who do not want to be bothered, and lodging near the sites, a fifth issue to discuss would be the odd

timeframes of a few of the businesses. As mentioned above, the Ray Opera House Museum is only open from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. on Sundays. And it is likely that that is only in the summer months, as North Dakota winters are frigid and old buildings lose heat quickly. Other opera houses might only be open during special events or might request that visitors book an appointment, rather than stop in. This topic might be another thing to address within the tour itself, with a quick point right away. A final issue is that these opera houses are spread out and it might be a challenge to make a driving tour that makes sense in connecting the points. However, those making this trip are probably in it for the entire thing, so this might not be a problem at all.

Now, after those opportunities for discussion that might cause some wariness and pause, there are also plenty of benefits to this driving tour. People would get to leave their houses and see some really great places in North Dakota. They could stop along the way and take in North Dakota's simple, but breathtaking, beauty. They would get to visit these small communities, meet people, and experience these sites and what they have to offer. Between each opera house, they could find museums, historic sites, and other heritage sites in each town, and get a sense of the state's history. When they've reached the opera houses, these heritage tourists would not only see and experience current buildings, but they would also learn about the buildings' histories and their original communities.

These tourists, while experiencing the buildings and intoxicating histories, also enjoy spending money on things they find important. Cue the monetary benefits to the communities and towns. Tours of the opera houses could lead to donations and more

interest in the causes, which could lead to even more donations. The opera houses with first level businesses would be excellent places for these tired, but enthusiastic, heritage tourists to stop and get a bite and a brew. Local lodging, if available (and it usually is), would be used, further stimulating the local economy, and the tourists could take off the next day, ready to find the next opera house. This driving tour would be an outstanding opportunity for heritage tourism within the state, but also to connect these cities and towns that might not have had connections in the first place.

## CONCLUSION

The goal for this chapter was to tell the histories and preservation stories of seven opera houses in North Dakotan communities and show how these communities used these buildings. It also provided a brief historical overview of the opera house trend in the nation and later presented ideas for heritage tourism of these opera houses as well as one town specifically. The opera house driving tour would cover the entire state with sections about each standing opera house and provide information and history in an accessible way while also creating revenue for these little towns through tourism. Through a mobile app, this could take advantage of the rich history within this small city.

Another goal of this chapter was to show how community-based preservation is and to exhibit different types of preservation intervention. Each of these buildings were either preserved or let go, depending on community interest. Community groups and local citizens are the main factor in the preservation of these buildings. They decide if the building, and the space it has to offer, is valuable and how to save it, if they can. This chapter exhibited intervention types of preservation, renovation, rehabilitative reuse, and

demolishing, which was added. The saving and preservation of these buildings also fill different roles in their communities, from cultural, commercial and public, to residential and private.

## CONCLUSION: HOW WILL THIS SHOW GO ON?: FINAL THOUGHTS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Opera houses have been, and continue to be, center pieces for their communities. The purpose of this project was to showcase the many examples of opera houses in North Dakota and to argue that these spaces are important to their communities and, historically, important for the civilization of their settlements. This work is comprised of research on both primary and secondary resources, the most useful of which were the opera houses themselves.

Chapter One argued that the Metropolitan Opera House in Grand Forks, North Dakota, was integral to its community as an arts and cultural center and as a meeting place. However, much like other opera houses, these places were not easy to run, therefore it went through some hard times. This chapter also showed how opera houses were utilized by the communities, as places for entertainment, as an important business, and as a center for community events.

Chapter Two dove into descriptions of three opera houses. Through exterior analysis, interior description, and discussion of the importance of landscape, chapter two shared part of the stories of these buildings. The usual trend in historic preservation is to save a building because of its architectural importance. However, while these opera houses have small details that reflect some of a larger trend, these buildings were constructed merely for functionality. There were many places, like the Metropolitan Opera House, where the design choices were meant to give off a certain presence, but in most cases, the opera houses were built for multipurpose uses. These buildings held first

floor spaces for business and often featured the theater space on the second and third floors. In a place where everything one should need or want should be in one part of town, placing buildings with dual purpose in the main part of town made sense for the developers of these towns, which is another point of this chapter. While descriptions of the buildings are useful, the landscape of the town should be taken into consideration. Opera houses were popular because of their placement in their towns. Often near the railroads and business districts, opera houses attracted visitors and citizens of the town and created business for themselves and the shops around them. Opera houses made these towns destinations, rather than simply stops along the railway.

Chapter Three was set up as a tour. Taking the reader through various stops at opera houses around North Dakota, and using photographs to set the scene, the reader traveled to opera houses one by one. This chapter argued for the use of heritage tourism to encourage visitors to these sites and shared the histories and preservation stories of these buildings along the way.

#### FUTURE RESEARCH

This project is, in no way, an extensive list of all the opera houses in North Dakota. While a good amount of work has been done, there are still many more approaches a researcher can take. One such approach is to check out the collections at the State Historical Society of North Dakota. About six months after my own visit to the SHSND, a collection was donated by Lawrence Hill, a scholar who did work and gathered research on opera houses in 49 cities in North Dakota in the 1980s. His research collection contains photographs, notes, slides, and so much more on these opera houses.

This would be a wonderful resource for those interested in researching this topic further. Another collection is the oral history collection at the SHSND. This collection contains multiple oral histories from North Dakota citizens, sharing their own stories and including anecdotes about the opera houses in their town. This could be another interesting approach to study opera houses in North Dakota.

This thesis reported on opera houses that were standing as of June 2017. Further research can be done on these opera houses, but also on the ones that could be intact but are not known about. There are opera houses in Marmarth, but because of the size of the town and lack of resources, there is not much out there about it. There could also be other opera houses in Western North Dakota that have yet to be research and could followed up on as well.

To add onto that, research should be done on the opera houses that are no longer standing. In the research at multiple archives and historical societies throughout North Dakota, information on other opera houses was found but that could not be followed up with for the sake of time. Cities across North Dakota, including Fargo, Minot, Jamestown, Hillsboro, Portal, and Minto, have all had opera houses but they are no longer standing so have limited information. The information is out there for the person who has the time, energy, and funds to continue searching.

Lastly, the choice to study these opera houses through historic preservation and public history was a personal choice that reflects the author's career. Should someone choose to study the audience, looking through the lenses of gender and race would be a worthwhile study. One avenue of research that should also be investigated was whether

American Indians had any part in these opera houses and, if so, did they faced prejudices if they tried. Race could be a really valuable lens to look through at opera houses in North Dakota and would, no doubt, lead to a further understanding of how communities used these buildings.

The year is 2017, on a hot day in July. Today is the day scheduled for the reopening of the Maddock Opera House in Maddock, North Dakota. The folks in Maddock have seen this building change from owner to owner throughout their lives and have known it as a hardware store for the better part of their lives. Years back, when the Maddock Opera House Association decided to save the building, the people of Maddock were excited about this new venture. After seeing the building slowly deteriorate, finally new life would be coming. The association and the townspeople watched as people worked hard to improve and fix the parts of the buildings that they could, and replace the parts that needed a little more elbow grease. In 2014, the first floor of the building opened to the community. True to form, this level housed a business. A restaurant, called Harriman's after the original owners, served delicious food and gave the community a place to meet. On top of that, the town's library set up shop on the first floor as well, emphasizing community focus.

It was not long after the opening of the first floor, that the date for the grand opening of the theater was set. The association began planning events to celebrate the opening. On July 1<sup>st</sup>, a \$15 dollar ticket could get the visitor into an all-day festival of old-time games. All afternoon, visitors lined up for recitals, ice cream socials, and carnival games. Finally, at around 4 p.m., the opera house dedication and opening

program was held. That evening, Merrill Piepkorn and the Radio Stars Band, with recording artist, Richard Torrance performed on the newly opened stage. The restored opera house was finally open again. While visitors and citizens roamed about outside in the dusty, summer heat, inside, history was being made.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As with the introduction, this is an imaging of how the events took place, with specific information from the *Minot Daily News*, “Maddock Opera House grand opening today,” accessed November 6, 2018, retrieved from <http://www.minotdailynews.com/news/local-news/2017/07/maddock-opera-house-grand-opening-today/>.

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