

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICENATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

New Opera House

AND/OR COMMON

The Old Opera House; The Opera House

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

200-204 N. George Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Charles Town

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Second

STATE

West Virginia

CODE

54

COUNTY

Jefferson

CODE

037

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

☐ DISTRICT☒ BUILDING(S)☐ STRUCTURE☐ SITE☐ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

☐ PUBLIC☒ PRIVATE☐ BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

☐ IN PROCESS☐ BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

☒ OCCUPIED☐ UNOCCUPIED☒ WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

☒ YES: RESTRICTED☐ YES: UNRESTRICTED☐ NO

PRESENT USE

☐ AGRICULTURE☐ COMMERCIAL☒ EDUCATIONAL☒ ENTERTAINMENT☐ GOVERNMENT☐ INDUSTRIAL☐ MILITARY☐ MUSEUM☐ PARK☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE☐ RELIGIOUS☐ SCIENTIFIC☐ TRANSPORTATION☐ OTHER:**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

The Old Opera House Theatre Company, Inc.

STREET & NUMBER

204 N. George Street

CITY, TOWN

Charles Town

VICINITY OF

STATE

West Virginia 25414

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Jefferson County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

Washington and George Streets

CITY, TOWN

Charles Town

STATE

West Virginia

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

☐ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

CHECK ONE

CHECK ONE

___EXCELLENT

___DETERIORATED

___UNALTERED

☒ ORIGINAL SITE

☒ GOOD

___RUINS

☒ ALTERED

___MOVED DATE _____

___FAIR

___UNEXPOSED

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Old Opera House in Charles Town consists of two distinct, though attached units that serve as offices, rehearsal rooms, theater, dressing rooms and a small apartment (the theater unit was opened in 1911, but the front part of the present office/apartment section was already on the site and probably dates from the 1890s or thereabouts). The building is located on a corner town lot and is detached from surrounding structures.

Rectangular in shape, the main theater building is four bays wide while the attached auxiliary unit is two bays wide. The lobby and seating areas are each two stories high, and the stage and fly section is three stories. Only the front portion of the office area is two stories (an apartment is on the second floor), while the rear is one story. The entire building is flat roofed and of brick construction, laid in a common bond except for a Flemish bond with what appear to be glazed headers on the front and side of the lobby section.

The Opera House is placed against the sidewalk on two sides, and there are no porches, although there is a projecting stair leading to the apartment entrance. Each section of the structure has received slightly different treatment in fenestration. Across the front (and at the side of the lobby) are large, store-front-type windows with decorative wood panels and lintels on the first floor and round-headed arches above second-level openings. The upper floor has 16/2 sash in the lobby and 1/1 attached double windows in the apartment. Windows on the side of the theater have diamond-patterned casement sash, while those in the stage area are 6/6. Several chimneys project from the roofline; each is integrated within a wall and has a corbeled cap.

Among the numerous decorative elements on the exterior are a variety of designs in brick. Rounded arches are evident throughout, and those in the lobby area have large keystones. Panels formed by projecting brick bands break lines between floors at the theater entrance. Also in this section is an interesting brick design featuring an outline in headers surrounding T-shaped patterns in stretchers; it is placed above a stone belt course and below a wooden cornice with modillions.

The interior of the office/apartment section is rather plain and undistinguished, though lane boards of an old bowling alley are still visible on one floor. It is the theater itself that houses the more attractive elements, but restraint is the rule here also. As one approaches the stage through a lobby that has a fine pressed-tin ceiling in one area, the most striking feature is the emblem over the proscenium with its gold-leafed "P". At floor level is an orchestra pit with nicely turned balusters and curved railing, a style repeated in the railing at the balcony (both rails are original). Grills in the ceiling as well as two supporting columns for the balcony are of cast iron. Old wall sconces are in place, and the stair from lobby to balcony has well-worked balusters and squared newels.

Neither exterior nor interior have been greatly altered over the years despite changing needs and uses. The old stone nameplate between first and second floors at

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7

PAGE 2

the front is gone, and the three center windows on the second level of the lobby have been bricked in, but little else has changed. The interior of the theater has been altered over the years to accommodate evolutionary changes in the industry (for instance, a movie projection booth was installed in the balcony about 1931, though it has since been removed), yet the basic fabric of the design remains intact.

The owners, Old Opera House Theatre Company, have done much toward restoration of the building to its original splendor and use. Besides a necessary thorough cleaning, they have overseen upgrading of entrances and stairs in the lobby area to meet current fire codes, refurbishing of the theater ceiling with hard plaster and wire lathe by a Job Corps crew under the direction of an acoustical engineer from the Harpers Ferry Center, and rebuilding of the orchestra pit and re-installation of the original railing. With the guidance provided by historical architects, restoration is expected to progress toward completion within the next few years.

SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

1911

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

T.A. Mullett

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Old Opera House at Charles Town, Jefferson County, West Virginia, for many years the cultural center of that city, has once again taken on the importance of providing an auditorium for educational and entertainment uses by the community. The building itself, designed by T.A. Mullett of Washington, D.C., is a reminder of the late nineteenth-early twentieth century era when multi-purpose opera houses became the latest step in the evolution toward a broader popular culture.

About the end of the first decade of this century, Mrs. Annie G. Packette of Charles Town sought to make the performing arts a more integral part of community activity and undertook an effort to raise \$50,000 for an opera house. T.A. Mullett of the Washington firm of A.B. Mullett and Company (Thomas Augustine was the son of Alfred Bult Mullett, supervising architect for the U.S. Treasury Department from 1865 to 1874) was hired to design the structure. A rather simple and plain (though subtly decorated) theater building with an apparently well-conceived interior arrangement was the result.

On February 11, 1911, the New Opera House (its original name) presented a comedy featuring local talent; proceeds went to the United Daughters of the Confederacy for the benefit of indigent Confederate veterans. The scene was set and motion given to Mrs. Packette's desire to upgrade the cultural offerings of this town most noted for the trial and execution of John Brown. While full theatrical productions were the big events, the Opera House became the center of "almost every indoor event of any size in the county." Touring troupes, vaudeville, readings, minstrels, circuses and wild west shows were part of the increasing bill of fare as the country moved through World War I and the 1920s. Occasional basketball contests and boxing matches were held, and the hall opened for such seemingly disparate events as church services and election returns. The building even was used for the storage of food for disaster relief.

With "the most brilliant outside light in town" out front, "its rays lighting up George Street for a block in either direction," the landmark center attracted audiences in June 1914 to the "Battle Cry of Peace" by advertising:

Call to Arms--for Preparedness Against War
See New York in Flames
See Destruction of the Capitol at Washington
67,000 People in Cast. 30,000 National Guardsmen
Opera House--June 28-29. Admission 25 cents.

An amateur dancing contest of July 1915 had three winners of prizes ranging from

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

\$1.00 to \$3.00, and on the same evening six reels of "pictures" were shown. A matinee benefit for the Independent Fire Company took in 37 dozen eggs in 1916, the same year that an electrically operated machine for popping corn and toasting peanuts was installed. Gimmicks and "come-ons" were frequently used to attract patrons, too, and any boy in town who had 250 or more freckles was admitted free to a performance of "Dinty" in February 1922.

By the late 1920s the Opera House was featuring many forms of popular entertainment. It was the age of the "talkie" that brought significant changes, however, and showing of "flicks" became the primary function. Whether this contributed to a decline through the 1940s matters little now, but the fact is that the theater closed in 1948. A florist and then an antique shop occupied some of the space thereafter; it seemed only a question of time before the structure might deteriorate beyond repair. Then, in the early 1970s, a turnabout occurred.

A few farsighted and energetic people sought out the owners (one of whom was a daughter of Mrs. Packette), arranged to clean years of accumulated waste, and tried to sell the idea of revitalizing the former theater. The Old Opera House Theatre Company was formed, and in 1973 the land and building were donated to the corporation. Restoration and rehabilitation work began immediately (and continues to this day). While plans went forward to return the structure to a presentable state, equal determination went into efforts to reuse it as originally intended: a community cultural center. Now the sacrifices of a dedicated group are becoming more visible as theatrical productions are once again presented on the long-dormant stage. Looking ahead, the old multi-purpose concept will be updated, too, as forums, readings, band concerts, arm wrestling contests, dances, films, and civic and children's theater are put on the bill of this open and hospitable place.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Farmers Advocate (Charles Town, W.Va.) and Spirit of Jefferson (Charles Town, W.Va.).
Numerous and varied articles and advertisements.
Gallant, Carol. "The Old Opera House of Charles Town, West Virginia," Southern Theatre, XVIII (Summer 1975), 29-31.
Morgantown, W. Va. West Virginia Collection, West Virginia University Library.
Sanborn Map Collection.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1/2 acre

QUADRANGLE NAME Charles Town, W.Va.-Va.-Md.

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A 1,8 2,5,3 2,6,0 4,3 5,2 6,3,0

B

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C

D

E

F

G

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Opera House is located on a town lot (approximately 100' x 150') and is bounded by N. George and W. Liberty Streets and adjacent lots on the north and west.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

James E. Harding, Historian

ORGANIZATION

Historic Preservation Unit

DATE

W. Va. Department of Culture and History

April 17, 1978

STREET & NUMBER

Cultural Center

TELEPHONE

Capitol Complex

(304) 348-0244

CITY OR TOWN

Charleston

STATE

West Virginia

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL X

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

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Clarence Murray

TITLE West Virginia State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE May 16, 1978

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

DATE

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 2

"Mullett, Thomas Augustine," The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography.

Vol. XXVII. New York: James T. White & Co., 1939 (p. 452).

Program Booklet, "The Old Opera House." N.p., n.d. (Charles Town: The Old Opera House Theatre Company, 1976 (?)).

THE OLD OPERA HOUSE, 4353
CHARLES TOWN,
JEFFERSON COUNTY,
WEST VIRGINIA
UTM REFERENCE:
10/253260/435265



