

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service  
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property SMITH, SILAS P., OPERA HOUSE

historic name: Smith, Silas P., Opera House  
other name/site number: Doddridge County Public Library

2. Location

street & number: 117 Court Street not for publication: N/A  
city/town: West Union vicinity: N/A  
state: WV county: Doddridge code: 017 zip code: 26456

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet.)

Susan M. Perci 6/12/01  
Signature of Certifying Official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau Date

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  
( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of Certifying Official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau Date

**Smith, Silas P. Smith Opera House**  
Name of Property

**Doddridge County, WV**  
County and State

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**4. National Park Service Certification**

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I, hereby certify that this property is:	Signature of Keeper	Date of Action
_____ entered in the National Register _____ See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
_____ determined eligible for the National Register _____ See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
_____ determined not eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
_____ removed from the National Register	_____	_____
_____ other (explain): _____ _____ _____	_____	_____

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**5. Classification**

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**Ownership of Property:**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

\_\_\_\_\_ private  
 public-local  
\_\_\_\_\_ public-State  
\_\_\_\_\_ public-Federal

building(s)  
\_\_\_\_\_ district  
\_\_\_\_\_ site  
\_\_\_\_\_ structure  
\_\_\_\_\_ object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
_____ 1 _____		buildings
_____		sites
_____		structures
_____		objects
_____ 1 _____	_____ 0 _____	TOTAL

Name of related multiple property listing N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Smith, Silas P. Opera House  
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**6. Function or Use**

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**Historic Functions**

**Current Functions**

RECREATION & CULTURE:  
Music Facility: Opera House

EDUCATION: Library

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**7. Description**

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**Architectural Classification:**

**Materials**

LATE VICTORIAN: Commercial/  
Romanesque Revival

Foundation Sandstone  
Walls Brick  
Roof Rubber Membrane  
Other

**Narrative Description**

(See continuation on sheets.)

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**8. Statement of Significance**

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**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

**A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

**B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

**C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

**D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

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**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

B removed from its original location.

C a birthplace or grave.

D a cemetery.

E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

F a commemorative property.

G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

Performing Arts

**Period of Significance**

1900 to 1905

**Significant Dates**

1900, 1905

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Unknown

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(See continuation sheets.)

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of Repository: Doddridge County Public Library

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**10. Geographical Data**

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**Acreage of Property:** Less than one acre

**UTM References** (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

Quad Map Name: West Union

17 519410 4349200  
Zone Easting Northing

**Verbal Boundary Description** (See continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification** (See continuation sheet.)

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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Name/Title: Hazel G. Wysong

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: January 4, 2001

Street & Number: Rt 1, Box 156A Telephone: (304) 873-2830

City or Town: New Milton State: WV Zip: 26411

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**Property Owner**

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(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

Name: Doddridge County Public Library, Inc. (Cathy Jo Ash, Librarian)

Street & Number: 117 Court Street Telephone: (304) 873-1941

City or Town: West Union State: WV Zip: 26456

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The Silas P. Smith Opera House, presently the Doddridge County Public Library, stands at 117 Court Street, West Union, WV, sixty feet from the corner of adjoining Church Street, immediately across the street from the Doddridge County Courthouse (National Register 3-18-1982). The exterior of the stately building remains unchanged since it was completed in the spring of 1900. The brick building, measuring 40x70 ft, is two storied and stands on the original rectangular lot that measures 42x73 feet; hence, the building is flush with the sidewalk in front.

The front façade has five bays on the first floor and three on the second floor. The 2/2 double-hung vinyl sash windows have round arches, with stone surrounds and stone sills. A center front door is a metal replacement door, replacing a wooden double door in 1997. The doorway has a round arch transom above with stone surround to match windows. The original stone doorstep shows the signs of active use over the years. When the building was electrified, the utility lines were brought in over the entrance, detracting from the attractive doorway. The library board hopes this arrangement can be changed at a later date. The second floor windows have been lowered in the arch with glass in-fill, but still have a 2/2 light double-hung sash.

A stone stringcourse breaks the front façade just below the second story windows and continues on the west side of the building. The front façade also has a brick corbeled cornice with dropped sides and a recessed brick design. The west side of the building has six windows on each floor, with the same design of the front windows. On the south (rear) there is an entrance with a simple doorway that is presently used as an emergency exit. There are four single 2/2 double-hung sash windows and a metal fire escape leading to a simpler arched doorway. The windows on the east-side match the front design without the stone surrounds. The sandstone foundation is visible from this exposure. The present roof is rubber membrane sloping to the rear. The roof edge steps down with a low wall and tile coping. Three chimneys extend above the roofline at the second and third step-down on both sides of the building.

In the interior, there is a central hall on the first floor with a stairway along the right wall leading to the second floor. The public library facilities are on the left side of the hall with a public reading/meeting room on the right side. To the rear are a kitchenette, restroom, workroom, storage space and office.

The second floor has a central hallway that leads to a large room that extends across the front of the building and to the fire escape in the rear. Doorways off the hall lead to four rooms on each side including restroom.

Four fireplaces and two free standing coal stoves on the first floor originally heated the building. Two original mantles with closed fireplaces and one hand-hued sandstone flue are exposed on the east wall. The two fireplaces on the west wall of the building have been covered with wallboard. Presently the building has a forced-air heating/AC furnace system that is vented

(NPS Form 10-900)

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through the original flue on the west.

The interior of the building has served different functions since it was built as an opera house in 1900. There is evidence that room partitions were altered when the building was used for apartments and classrooms. Ceilings have been dropped on both floors. Research in the second floor ceiling crawl space reveals that the theatre was on the second floor with the stage located across the front of the building. Pictures are included to reveal the elaborate decorative painting designs of the original theatre with the stenciled walls and ceiling. There is evidence of a large central chandelier and two complimentary chandeliers on either side. Examination also reveals the deterioration of the building at one time and the extensive roof re-enforcement with explains the need for bearing walls on the second floor before it could be converted to apartments. This may also explain the drop ceiling.

**Summary:** The Silas P. Smith Opera House is a simple Romanesque Revival style for a commercial building. The round arch details of the window openings and doorway add to the design features.



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The Silas P. Smith Opera House is significant under Criterion A for the Performing Arts during the period of 1900 to 1905. The building was built by the owner, Silas P. Smith, on a lot adjacent to his home on the corner of Church and South (now Court) Street. He purchased the lot on April 12, 1889, for \$1800. Construction did not begin until April 1899. The building is a simple commercial Romanesque Revival style with the dominant features being the round arched doorway and windows. The brick building dominates the streetscape behind the county courthouse.

According to various accounts in *The West Union Record* (local newspaper) during the late 19th century, Smith (1860-1943) was a native of Doddridge County, WV and a prominent citizen of his hometown of West Union. He had served as mayor, publisher of *The West Union Record* and postmaster, as well as being influential in many business and civic causes during his life.

It was around the turn of the 20th century, when West Union was experiencing growth and prosperity from timbering, oil and gas exploration and was a "flag stop" on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, that Smith "perceived a need for a cultural influence" in West Union. He provided that need by building the opera house and giving it his name.

The first cultural event was held on February 9, 1900. According to *The West Union Record*, "Smith's Opera House was not yet complete, but the work was far enough along that the building could be used and will be opened next Monday night by R.J. Elwood's celebrated stock company for a three night stand." R.J. Elwood Co. had several return engagements in the next five years. The titles of the first "operas" were *Master and Man*, *The Westerner*, and *Running Wild*. Dramas as listed in the local paper were *Young Mrs. Winthrop*, and *Ten Nights in a Bar Room*. The Carroll Comedy Company performed for three nights in July, 1900. In August of 1900 the Goodwin Winters. Co. "opened the opera season in West Union with a new singing and dancing specialty every night." Plays such as *Run Away Wife*, *Guilty without Crime*, *Struck Oil*, *Lost in London*, and *Camille* ("Alex Dumas' great society play") were listed. Operas, plays, lectures, social and business events were scheduled regularly and were "well attended." DeWitt Miller's funny lecture "*Love, Courtship and Marriage*" was advertised on February 10, 1905. The last "opera" mentioned in the local paper (*West Union Record* 3/31/1905) was *Libidies's Faust*, an "extraordinary attraction at Smith's Opera House," admission was : 25, 35, and 50 cents.

During 1905 the nationally depressed economy of 1903-1904 (*World Book Encyclopedia*) was catching up to West Union in rapid and confusing ways as the following news releases indicate. An article in *The West Union Record* (1/13/1905) states: "That West Union is entering a brighter future no one can deny. Her business firms are wide-a-woke and are pushing the old town ahead." The same newspaper reported on January 20, 1905, that the "economic conditions had changed in the town and county." For example, the Castleron Opera Company scheduled for the Smith Opera House was stranded in Clarksburg, WV "for lack of funds." The Opera House manager turned down their offer to play because "too many recent

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failures of this kind is one straw which shows the way the financial wind is blowing." Opera events were no longer scheduled after 1905. Nevertheless, according to the local papers, the Smith Opera House continued to serve the community for many civic, educational, religious and home-talent events such as church conferences, music recitals, political meetings, teacher institutes, graduations, moving pictures, and business meetings. By 1920, the building was converted to apartments. Mrs. Mary Phillips (1901 - ) reports that she and her family lived in the first floor apartment in 1920. "The first floor was converted into two apartments - one on each side of the hall - with a three-room apartment on the second floor. The rest of the upstairs was converted into efficiency apartments for the transient glass worker" until 1915 at which time the glass factories closed.

In 1930 through 1936, the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades of the West Union Grade School were housed on the second floor of the Smith Opera House because of over crowding in the local schools. The first floor remained as apartments. Educational classes were moved from the Opera House in 1936 when the school board provided other classroom space. The second floor was again used for apartments, which entailed partition changes. The occupants shared one bath on each floor.

On April 28, 1952, the Smith estate sold the property to Burton Sturdivant. On November 16, 1958, the Opera House was sold through the West Union Bank to Virgil Hall who continued to maintain apartments until the Doddridge County Library Corporation purchased the building from Virgil Hall on June 1, 1965, for \$7000. Since that time the Opera House Apartment Building has been referred to as the Doddridge County Public Library. The library first used only the left side of the first floor and apartments continued to be rented on the right side and the second floor. Later the first floor was used exclusively for the growing library and the Doddridge County Historical Society rented the entire upstairs for a museum from 1987-1995. In 1995, the museum was moved diagonally across Court Street to the "old jail" building which is included in the proposed historical district. At present, the library rents two rooms on the second floor to the Doddridge County Commission for office space. The library uses the additional second floor for overflow library activities and storage.

The Silas P. Smith Opera House, built in 1900, has served the town and county the following ways:

- 1900 -1905: Cultural arts and civic functions
- 1905 - 1930: Religious, civic and local talents events as well as rented apartments
- 1930 - 1933: Public school classrooms upstairs. Rented apartments downstairs
- 1953 - 1964: Owned by B. B. Sturdivant and became known a Opera House Apartments
- 1964 - 1965: Owned by Virgil O. Hall as Opera House Apartments
- 1965 : Purchased by Doddridge County Public Library for \$7000
- 1987 - 1995: Doddridge County Historical Society rented the second floor space from the

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library for the Doddridge County Historical Museum.  
At present, the Silas P. Smith Opera House is known as the Doddridge County Public Library

The building is in good condition and reflects the original simple commercial version of the Romanesque Revival style. The exterior retains the brick facade with spaced singular round arch windows and doors. The original decorative painting of the second floor theatre is extant although mothballed behind a dropped ceiling. This ceiling also hides the massive bracing for the roof system which took place sometime around 1920. The interior has simple wooden trim and a wooden staircase.

**Summary:**

The Silas P. Smith Opera House provided a cultural influence in West Union from 1900-1905 during which time operas, dramas, musicals and lectures were scheduled regularly. The building continued to serve the public in many capacities; public meetings, public school classrooms, apartments, Doddridge County Historical Museum and, presently, as Doddridge County Public Library.

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**Bibliography:**

Childers, Alton, "Mostly about Ourselves" Series \_\_\_\_\_, HERALD RECORD, Virginia  
Nicholson, ed., Doddridge County Historical Museum, West Union, WV

Doddridge County Courthouse, West Union, WV  
Deed Book, #144, p. 153  
Death Book S  
Will Book, #4, p. 266

WEST UNION HERALD, R. N. Stuck, ed., Doddridge County Public Library West Union, WV  
1930-1937

WEST UNION RECORD, Silas P. Smith, ed. WV University, Colson Hall Library,  
Morgantown, WV 1900-1909.

Willis, Madelyn, librarian, "Smith Opera House File," Doddridge County Library, West Union,  
WV

Interviews by Hazel Wysong:

Haught, Verna, 316 Front Street, West Union, WV student, 1930-33, interviewed February 7,  
2000

Hunt, Betty, HC 69 Box 10, West Union, WV librarian, 1989, Doddridge County Public Library,  
interviewed March 2000

Jett, Pearl, 306 W. Main Street, West Union, WV student, 1930-33, interviewed March 2000.

Kiger, Helen, 208 Neely Avenue, West Union, WV student, 1930-32, interviewed March 2000

McKinney, Verla, 102 Front Street, West Union, WV student, 1930-32, interviewed 3, 2000

Phillips, Mary, 308 Front Street, West Union, WV resident, Opera House apartment, 1920-22  
and in 1930s, interviewed July 2000.

Stewart, Beulah, HC 69 Box 14, West Union, WV, student, 1930-33, interviewed March 2000.

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**Verbal Boundary Description**

Being on the NE corner of Lot #16, as laid down on the plat of said town, which said lot fronts 42 feet on said Court Street (formerly South Street), and which lot extends back from said Court Street in a southerly direction a distance of 73 feet with the line of Lot #15 owned by J. E. Trainer Estate to the line of the Silas P. Smith resident property and runs hence with said residence property a distance of 42 feet in a westerly direction to another line of said residence property, and from thence in a northerly direction with said residence property of a distance of 73 feet to Court Street, and thence with the line of said Court Street a distance of 42 feet in an easterly direction to the line of Lot #15 owned by J. E. Trainer and containing 3,066 square feet, more or less, and upon which said lot stand the two story brick building and which brick building is 40 feet in width and 70 feet in length, there being two feet on the west side of said building used as a cement walkway, and three feet in the rear of said building on which is a stairway and fire escape for said building, as recorded in the office of the Clerk of the County Court of Doddridge County, WV in Deed Book 142, at page 550.

**Boundary Justification**

This is the property historically associated with the Silas P. Smith Opera House.

(NPS Form 10-900)

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Name of Property:              Silas P. Smith Opera House  
Address                              117 Court Street  
Town                                  West Union, WV  
County                                Doddridge County

Photographers:                  Ray R. Cox, Salem, WV - interiors  
   Paul Jerrett, New Milton, WV - crawl space  
   William Wysong, New Milton, WV - exteriors

Date:                                      March 2000

Negatives:                              Doddridge County Public Library  
   and the WV SHPO, Charleston, WV

Photo 1 of 5:                      Front, north elevation and west elevation, camera facing SE

Photo 2 of 5:                      Rear elevation and fire escape, camera facing N

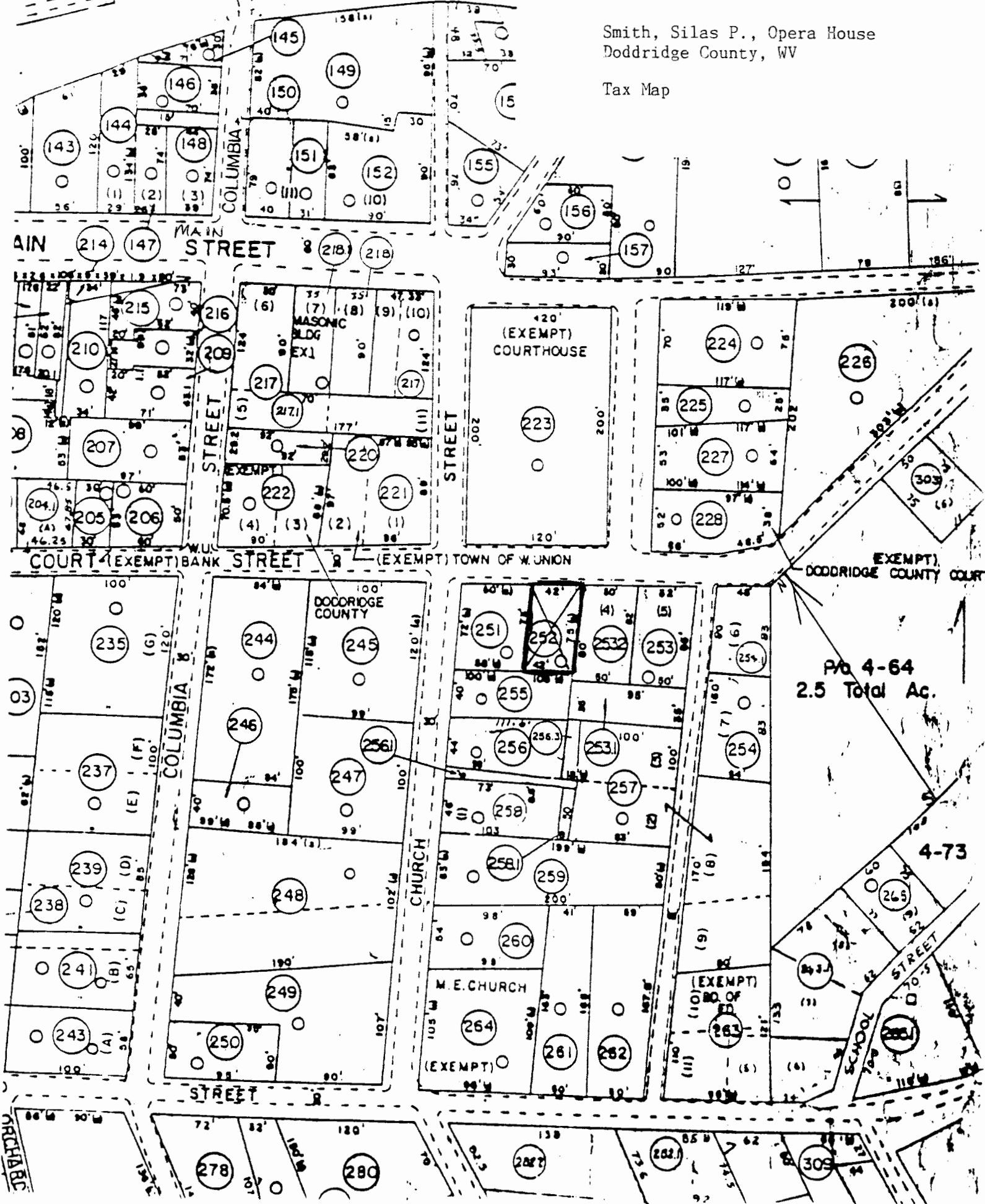
Photo 3 of 5:                      Decorative painting in former theatre space

Photo 4 of 5:                      Interior, first floor library

Photo 5 of 5:                      Historic Photo of side of building, or west elevation. Camera facing SE.

Smith, Silas P., Opera House  
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Tax Map

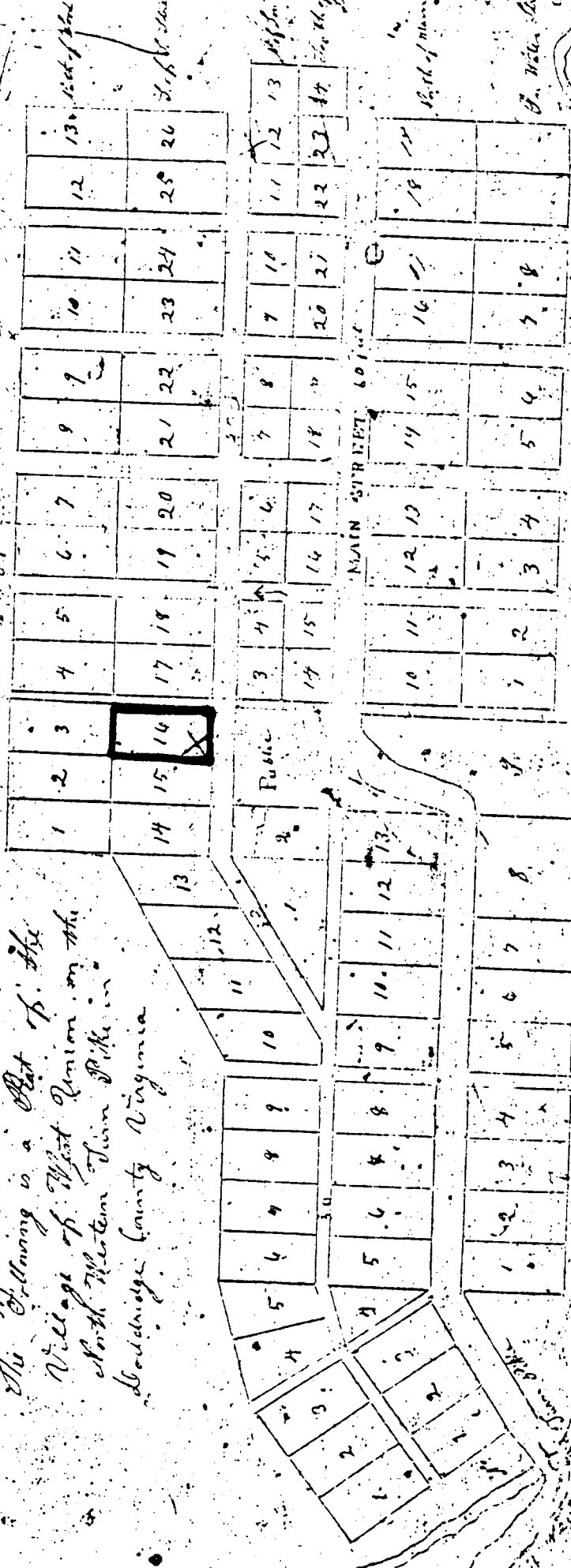


P/O 4-64  
2.5 Total Ac.

4-73

ORCHARD

The following is a Plat of the  
 Village of West Union in the  
 North Western Town Pike in  
 Doddridge County Virginia

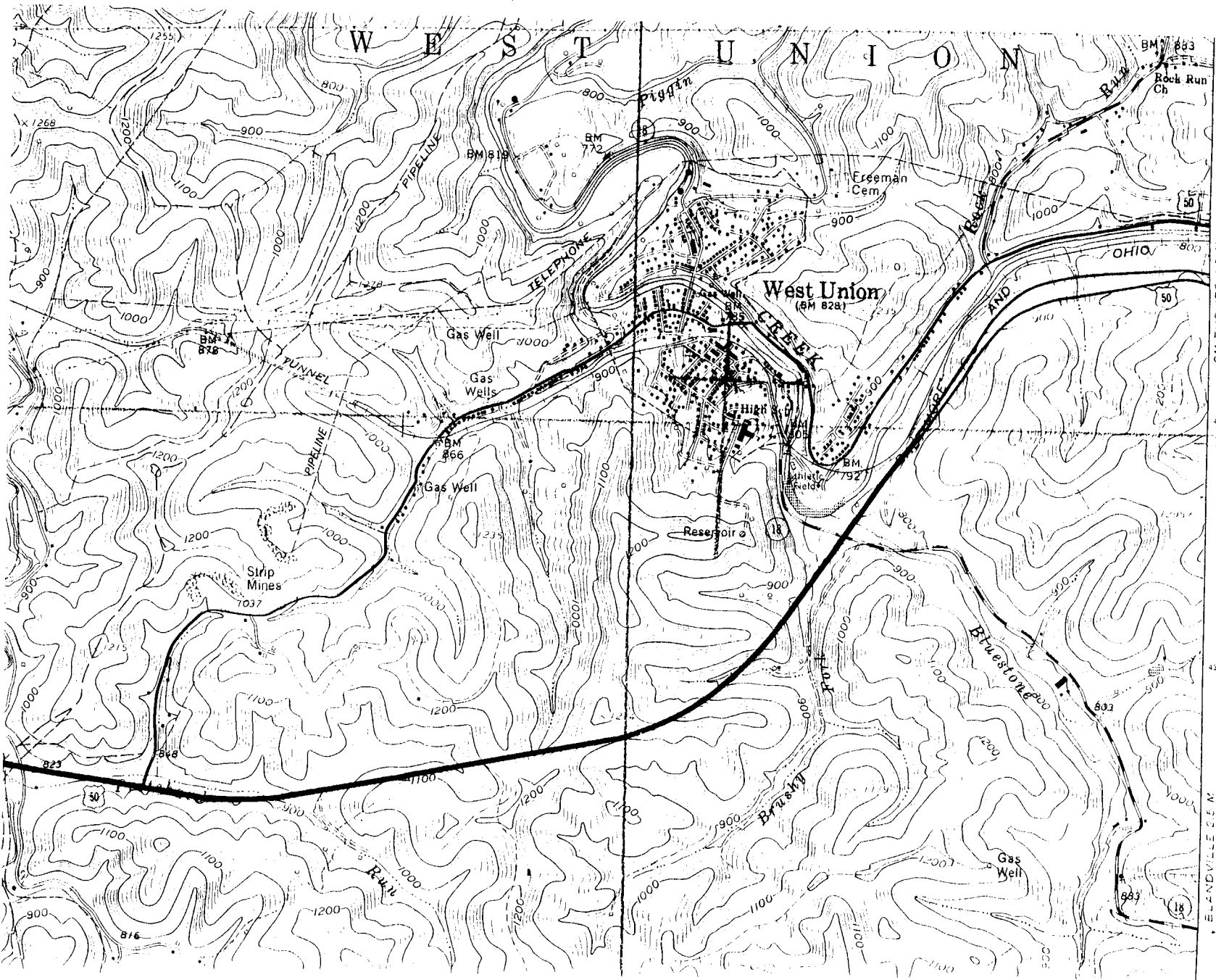


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Doddridge Co. Court House

X = location of Silas P. Smith Annex. Address: West Union, Doddridge Co. VA





SILAS P. SMITH  
 OPERA HOUSE  
 17 51940  
 4349200  
 WEST UNION  
 QUAD

4350  
 50  
 OHIO  
 50  
 4349  
 17'30"  
 4348  
 SANDVILLE CEM  
 18-A TO US 36 & 115

