rm No. 10-300 REV. (9/77)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL 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
Grainfield Opera House

AND/OR COMMON
Grainfield Opera House

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
Main and Third Street — __NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN
Grainfield — __ VICINITY OF — CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT No. 1 Keith G. Sebelius

STATE
Kansas 67737 — CODE 20 — COUNTY Gove — CODE 063

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
__DISTRICT	__PUBLIC	X OCCUPIED	__AGRICULTURE	__MUSEUM
X BUILDING(S)	X PRIVATE	__UNOCCUPIED	X COMMERCIAL	__PARK
__STRUCTURE	__BOTH	__WORK IN PROGRESS	__EDUCATIONAL	__PRIVATE RESIDENCE
__SITE	**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**	**ACCESSIBLE**	__ENTERTAINMENT	__RELIGIOUS
__OBJECT	__IN PROCESS	X YES: RESTRICTED	__GOVERNMENT	__SCIENTIFIC
	__BEING CONSIDERED	__YES: UNRESTRICTED	__INDUSTRIAL	__TRANSPORTATION
		__NO	__MILITARY	__OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
Opera House Company, Inc.

STREET & NUMBER
Grainfield, Kansas

CITY, TOWN
Grainfield — __ VICINITY OF — STATE Kansas

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Register of Deeds

STREET & NUMBER
Gove County Courthouse

CITY, TOWN
Gove — STATE Kansas 67736

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
Historic Sites Survey

DATE
1970 — __FEDERAL X STATE __COUNTY __LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
Kansas State Historical Society

CITY, TOWN
Topeka — STATE Kansas 66612

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
PREHISTORIC	__ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__COMMUNITY PLANNING	__LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	__RELIGION
1400-1499	__ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__CONSERVATION	__LAW	__SCIENCE
1500-1599	__AGRICULTURE	__ECONOMICS	__LITERATURE	__SCULPTURE
1600-1699	__ARCHITECTURE	__EDUCATION	__MILITARY	__SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
1700-1799	__ART	__ENGINEERING	__MUSIC	__THEATER
1800-1899	X COMMERCE	X EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	__PHILOSOPHY	__TRANSPORTATION
1900-	__COMMUNICATIONS	__INDUSTRY	__POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	__OTHER (SPECIFY)
		__INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1887 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Grainfield Town Company

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Grainfield Opera House evidences the aspirations as well as the practical needs of early settlers in western Kansas. As an example of nineteenth architecture, it evidences the wide marketing of factory-produced iron fronts generally, and by the Mesker Brothers firm of St. Louis in particular.

Chronology

Grainfield, Kansas was laid out as a town by the Union Pacific railroad in 1879. A depot was first opened in August of that year. However, crop failures soon drove most of the first farmers out of the area. In 1886 when the area began to boom again, cattle in the county were worth far more than the crops produced. Gove County was organized in 1886 with a population of "3,032 bona fide inhabitants." In 1887 population increased more than a third and production tripled.

Early in March, 1887, the Grainfield Town Company, which had taken over the site from the railroad, was reorganized with seven principal partners. Their first step was to build a structure which would not only provide storerooms and a meeting hall, but also impress on the passerby that Grainfield was an attractive, permanent town. On March 25th the local newspaper announced simply, "a large brick block will be built on Main Street this season with store rooms below and opera hall above."

Late in April specifications were published for bids to construct the Opera House basement. J. B. Beal, chairman of the building committee, noted that the town company would furnish the stone and lime on the site. Stone for the foundation was hauled in by the carload on the Union Pacific Railroad. The new building was located two blocks north of the depot, approximately in the center of town.

M.P. Kavanaugh completed excavation for the Opera House cellar by May 6. Three stone masons from Bunker Hill (a town 100 miles east of Grainfield on the Union Pacific line) began work on the basement walls early in June. At the same time a brick kiln northwest of town was "fired up." Bricklaying began about the middle of August and was finished October 7. Then the iron front was put in and the roof laid. Fred Boyer was in charge of the carpenter work. When the building was finished, even the editor of the Grinnell Golden Belt, the newspaper of Grainfield's neighbor and rival, had to admit, "the Grainfield Opera House is undoubtedly the finest building between Salina and Denver."

Early in 1888, the Grainfield Cap Sheaf moved into the north half of the building. Rafferty Brothers moved their mercantile store into the south half

late in February, 1888. A harness shop was housed behind the printing office on the ground floor. Upstairs were offices and meeting rooms. The auditorium was used for performances, dances, and church programs. A private school was once held upstairs and the first high school classes in town were held downstairs on the north side.

Early in the twentieth century, a grocery store operated in the building. Enlargement of the north and west entrances probably occurred during the 1920's when the Shaw Motor Company used the whole ground floor. At the present time the north half of the Opera House is vacant. The south half is used as shop and storage for Walt's Home and Auto. The Masonic Lodge occupies one of the second floor rooms on the east.

For most of its existence, the Grainfield Opera House has been a community center. It was designed to accomodate a variety of commercial and social uses. The building is associated with the early optimism and subsequent fortunes of Grainfield and the surrounding agricultural territory.

Architecturally, the combination of local materials with a factory-made ornamental front is a design solution reflecting historic circumstances and the ambitions of the town company partners. The iron front was cheap and quickly installed--creating the appearance of sophistication in a frontier town.

Mesker Brothers was one of the leading producers of galvanized iron fronts in America. Ben and Frank Mesker opened their foundry in St. Louis in 1881. Throughout their career, they used a distinctive fleur-de-lis motif in their ornamental designs in contrast to another brother, George, of Evansville, Indiana who used a morning glory motif. The Grainfield Opera House front was probably ordered from a catalog, shipped in sections on the railroad, and then assembled and attached to the masonry block by local workmen.

THIS STATEMENT REFLECTS CURRENT KNOWLEDGE AND MAY BE SUBJECT TO FUTURE AMENDMENT.

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Bibliography:

Bulletin: Association for Preservation Technology. Lee Nelson, ed. V.IX, No. 4 (1977), p. 3.

Grainfield Cap Sheaf. weekly. 3-11, 3-25, 4-29, 6-3, 11-11, 11-25. (1887).

Grainfield Centennial publication. comp. Eileen Reynolds, Erma Johnson, H.H. Sutcliffe, Marcella Zerr, Beverly Summers, Denice Hartman. (Wakeeney, KS.: Western Kansas World, 1979).

Harrington, W.P. History of Gove County, Kansas. reprinted for Gove County Historical Association. (Scott City, KS: News Chronicle Printing Co., 1973).

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
__EXCELLENT	__DETERIORATED	X UNALTERED	X ORIGINAL SITE
__GOOD	__RUINS	__ALTERED	__MOVED DATE_____
X FAIR	__UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The old Grainfield Opera House is a two story brick structure with an ornate cast iron front. It is located on the southwest corner of Main and Third Streets, facing east. The building is 50 feet wide and 100 feet long. Stone foundation walls are two feet thick and are capped by a dressed water table. Behind the parapet of the ornamental front, the metal-sheathed roof is nearly flat in the center with pitched sections on three sides.

Stone in the Opera House foundation has the streaked cream and brown color of the post rock strata found east of Grainfield. Brick in the walls is relatively soft; at the building corners weathering of individual bricks has exposed a coarse aggregate.

A complete metal facade was provided for the Opera House. At ground level there is a double store front. This floor is divided in half by an interior brick fire wall. Each store front has double entrance doors with display windows on either side. Columns, sills, and lintels are cast iron with the maker's name (Mesker Bros., St. Louis) on the columns. Above the first floor the five bay front is made of galvanized iron with an ornamental fleur-de-lis motif. At the first floor level the facade is anchored into the masonry wall. The upper part of the facade appears to be attached to a frame substructure.

An enclosed wooden stair on the south exterior wall of the building leads from the street to the second floor auditorium. On this side the upper windows are small; they have stone lintels and sills. A single double-hung window at ground level has what was probably the original 4-over-1 sash. There are two chimneys in this wall.

In the rear of the building there are entrances to the cellar and to the ground floor. An open wooden stairway leads to a second floor door. There is a wood beam extending from the wall above the door for lifting material to the second floor. Windows in this wall have brick arches over the openings and stone sills. Built-in roof gutters empty into drainpipes attached to the rear wall. There is a wooden privy behind the building next to the alley.

On the north both door and window openings have dressed stone lintels with keystone accent and stone sills. The upper windows are full size; both windows and the door at ground level on this side are paired. There are three chimneys in the north wall.

Much of the interior of the opera house is intact. There are original wooden floors, lath and plaster partition walls and wooden ceilings.

Alterations:

This building presents substantially the same appearance as it did when completed in 1887. In the south half of the store front, windows have been boarded up. A stained glass panel in the center of the second floor facade has been removed. Missing details from the northermost bay of the second story facade include medallions, a column cap, and part of the column base.

The roof has been coated with tar or asphalt. At the southwest corner of the building, a concrete wall approximately 8' tall and 10' long has been poured to buttress the brick walls. Rear doors to the cellar and first floor have been enlarged. A window opening in the north wall has also been widened and the opening beside it filled with brick.

Inside, only the upstairs meeting room has been renovated. The floor has been carpeted, walls paneled, and an acoustical tile ceiling installed.

The nominated property occupies Grainfield City Lots 1, 2, and the south four feet of Lot 3, Block 25. The property is approximately 50 feet by 100 feet in size.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(see attached sheet)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1

QUADRANGLE NAME Grainfield QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24

UTM REFERENCES

	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
A	14	373310	4313016 5
B			
C			
D			
E			
F			
G			
H			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

(See attached sheet)

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Julie A. Wortman, Architectural Historian
~~Dale Nimz, Historic Preservation Department~~

ORGANIZATION Kansas State Historical Society DATE 10-1-80

STREET & NUMBER 120 West 10th TELEPHONE 913 296-3251

CITY OR TOWN Topeka STATE Kansas 66612

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 Joseph W. Snell

TITLE Executive Director, Ks. State Historical Society DATE 10-14-80

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