**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**
**INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

*(Type all entries – complete applicable sections)*

1. **NAME**
   - COMMON: CENTRAL CITY OPERA HOUSE
   - AND/OR HISTORIC: CENTRAL CITY OPERA HOUSE

2. **LOCATION**
   - STREET AND NUMBER: Eureka Street
   - CITY OR TOWN: Central City
   - STATE: Colorado

3. **CLASSIFICATION**
   - CATEGORY: Building
   - OWNERSHIP: Public
   - STATUS: Occupied
   - ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC: Yes

4. **OWNER OF PROPERTY**
   - OWNER'S NAME: University of Denver
   - STREET AND NUMBER: University Park

5. **LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**
   - COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC: Gilpin County Courthouse
   - STREET AND NUMBER: Eureka Street
   - CITY OR TOWN: Central City

6. **REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**
   - TITLE OF SURVEY: Little Kingdom Council Survey
   - DATE OF SURVEY: 1971
   - DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: State Historical Society of Colorado Library
   - STREET AND NUMBER: 200 Fourteenth Avenue
   - CITY OR TOWN: Denver

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**Notes:**
- Form 10-300 (July 1969)
- United States Department of the Interior
- National Park Service
- National Register of Historic Places
- Inventory - Nomination Form
- Entry Number: JAN 1 8 1973
- Received: JAN 25 1972
The Opera House is of Renaissance Revival architectural style. Its walls are four feet thick and made of stone except for the use of brick near the roof of the building. The condition of the building is good and little changed from the original except for new furnishings and the touching up of the interior paintings.

The north facade features a double pitched shed roof, a false mansard roof, flanked by two hipped roofs. Centered is a hooded, labeled oculus-shaped vent with crown. The roof has boxed cornices and the words "Opera House" are centered near the roof of the building.

The facade is symmetrical. There are four arched double hung 4/4 windows with radiating voussoirs at the balcony level. A curved wooden balcony is centered, supported by 3 elaborately cut out brackets. It has a wooden balustrade with turned balusters and five posts with onion-shaped finish.

The ground slopes downward from west to east, creating the need for additional steps at each of the four doors. The center portion above the balcony is set in slightly, while the center section below the balcony projects slightly. The two centered double-door entrances with lunettes are set into semicircular Roman arch vaults with radiating voussours and keystone. There are wrought iron lamps on either side. The side wings have double doors set into segmental arched vaults, also with radiating voussiers and keystone.

A courtyard is enclosed on three sides by the west face of the building and an L-shape wing added in the late 1940s. The west face is a windowless stone wall except for the brick construction beginning about ten feet from the roof. There is a fire door at the balcony level. A wooden three-landing staircase with simple turned wooden balustrade leads to the ground from the balcony. Elaborate cut-out brackets support the upper landing. Another fire door is near the center at ground level.

A rock flowered courtyard is found at the east side of the building. There are two long balconies on the east face of the building for fire doors, one at balcony level and one on the "ground level" of the building (which is above the ground due to the slope of the land). The two balconies are connected by a one-landing staircase and a short stairway to the ground. The stairs and the balconies have a wooden post balustrade. The wider upper balcony is supported by eight cut-out curved brackets while the slightly narrower lower balcony is supported by six similar brackets. There are two small windows servicing the back stage area and a small stage door to the rear of the building, accessible by a small stairs.

The Interior:

In the five ceiling multicolored paintings by Mr. Massman of San Francisco classical motifs are worked into a large-scale geometrical pattern around a central medallion that dominates the ceiling. The central medallion features the sky. Architectural moldings are simulated in the painting. Four smaller circular medallions have acanthus leaf roundels.

The ceiling has been restored by Allen True, a prominent Colorado muralist. Centered is a large, early style chandelier, not the original.

The corner interstices have classical foliate motifs. On the front ceiling above the stage are two putti flanking a cartouche. Large scale foliate forms border the stage with three diamonds with stylized classical (continued)
motif. On each side of the stage, set apart from the border are two classical draped figures with Pegasus on one side.

The curtain is not the original, and appears representative of early 1900 movie house style. It has painted folds and tassels with a symmetrical garland and putti among swags, stars, and a central gate.

Entering the narrow lobby, the visitor faces the underside of the staircase to the balcony level which is approached by two short flights on either side. The small lobby also includes ticket office, wide step, entrances to the main floor, and sculptures.
### Statement of Significance

This sturdy stone structure is the oldest and the first permanent opera house in the state. It was built by funds raised through the Gilpin County Opera House Association, a county citizens' group, whose immediate objective was to erect an edifice which would permit the proper staging of grand opera. Opening night was March 4, 1878, and Central City became the cultural capital of Colorado until 1881 when the Tabor Grand Opera House in Denver was completed.

After that, a group of Little Kingdom subjects kept the opera house (which never was a money-maker) open by luring important theatrical companies to Central City after they had played at Denver. Thus prominent nineteenth century actors including Fannie Barlow, Edwin Booth, Madame Januscheck, Joseph Jefferson and others sang and spoke their parts within its walls.

The building was repaired in 1896 (when electric lights were installed) and was renovated in 1903, through the efforts of Peter MacFarlane, one of its original contractors, no structural changes were made. On July 4, 1910, MacFarlane, who was by then the principal owner of the building, opened it as a motion picture theater and used it in that fashion until it closed in January 1927.

In May 1931, MacFarlane's heirs presented the old opera house to the University of Denver, and it was restored throughout the following year by the newly formed Central City Opera House Association. It opened again on July 16, 1932, with Lillian Gish portraying Camille before a host of Colorado cultural enthusiasts, music lovers, and socialites. Since that time it has served as the hub for a nationally recognized summer opera and theater festival, and many of the greatest names in those areas have played to its audiences.

Its unique and colorful architecture makes it one of the most popular attractions in "The Little Kingdom."
9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES


Daily Central City Register, October 8, 1870 - August 14, 1872, passim.


10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

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LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES

DEGREES MINUTES SECONDS

- NW: 39° 48' 4.5" N 105° 30' 47.5" W

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: Approximately an acre

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

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11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: Perry Eberhart
Liston E. Leyendecker, Historian & Research Associate

ORGANIZATION: Little Kingdom Council, c/o Central City Opera House Association
: Society of Colorado

STREET AND NUMBER: Suite 636 University Building
: 200 - 14th Avenue

CITY CODE and State: Denver, Colorado 80202

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National [ ] State [ ] Local [ ]

Name: Stephen H. Hart
Title: Colorado State Liaison Officer
Date: 7 December 1971

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

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

ATTEST: Keeper of The National Register

Date 1/18/73
Central City Opera House
Central City, Colorado
U.S.G.S. Special Map
1906, Scale 1:12000