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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Nomination Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Akron Opera House
other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 151 Reed Street not for publication N/A
city or town Akron vicinity N/A
state Iowa code IA county Plymouth code 149 zip code 51001

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this x 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 x meets _____ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant _____ nationally _____ statewide x locally. (____ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Bruce W. Bennett, Deputy SHPO May 17, 2012
Signature of certifying official Date

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- 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): _____

Signature of Keeper

Patrick Andrews

Date of Action

7/11/2012

Akron Opera House
Name of Property

Plymouth County, Iowa
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(do not include previously listed resources in count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Footlights in Farm Country: Iowa Opera Houses, 1835-1940

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

"N/A"

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/ theatre
RECREATION AND CULTURE/ music facility
COMMERCE/TRADE/ department store
COMMERCE/TRADE/ specialty store
SOCIAL/ meeting hall

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/ theatre
RECREATION AND CULTURE/ music facility
RELIGION/ church

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and early 20th Century Revivals

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE
walls brick
stucco
roof SYNTHETICS/rubber
other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Akron Opera House
Name of Property

Plymouth County, Iowa
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

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.

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 a 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.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

PERFORMING ARTS

COMMERCE

Period of Significance

1906 - 1938

Significant Dates

1906

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Griffith, Frank Whitcomb

Huxtable, John A.

Primary Location of Additional Data:

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

Other

Name of repository:

Akron Opera House
Name of Property

Plymouth County, Iowa
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>14</u>	<u>699455</u>	<u>4744695</u>	3	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
2	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Timothy J. Blum, Treasurer, Karen Taylor-Mortensen, Board Member/Photographer e-mail hbytm@netllcwb.net

organization Akron Opera House date January 20, 2011

street & number 151 Reed Street telephone 712-568-2614

city or town Akron state Iowa zip code 51001

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps: A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A **sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs: Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

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

name Akron Opera House c/o Timothy J. Blum e-mail hbytm@netllcwb.net

street & number 151 Reed Street telephone 712-568-2614

city or town Akron state Iowa zip code 51001

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
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Section 7 Page 1 Property name Akron Opera House

County and State Plymouth County, Iowa

7. Narrative Description

The Akron Opera House is a Late 19th and 20th Century Revival three-story building located on the corner of Reed Street and 2nd Street in Akron, Iowa. Akron is located in the northwest part of the state on the banks of the Big Sioux River, the border between Iowa and South Dakota. It is one block east of the railroad tracks and depot. The railroad line is the Dakota & Iowa Railroad owned and operated by L.G. Everist, Inc. in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The depot is currently used as a dance studio. The river is about one half block beyond the tracks.

The tallest and most prominent building on downtown Akron's main street, it was originally constructed as an opera house/commercial building in the tradition of such buildings in the late 1800's and early 1900's across the Midwest.

The Akron Opera House is a focal point in downtown Akron. The building has been the venue for theatre and commercial businesses since its opening in 1906.

The opera house is a rectangular three-story building situated on the northwest corner of the first intersection east of the railroad at the west end of the three block business district.

Dimensions of the building are 46 feet by 90 feet with a front height of 48 feet. A fire escape on the east wall accesses the balcony and second floor levels. Another fire escape exits back stage.

The Late 19th and 20th Century Revival building features include round windows, brick quoining on the corners, commercial storefront windows with large glass panels, cast iron columns, and flat brick arches at the door. The opera house has a flat roof with a two-foot cornice. The cornice corbels out at the top and is covered with an elastic coating that extends continuously from the roof covering, insuring a water-tight seal between the roof and walls. The exterior street-facing walls (south and east) are tan brick. The west and north sides of the building are common red brick.

The first floor contains space for a multi-commercial area with street front entry on both the south and east with store-front glass panels.

The interior first floor includes two commercial business spaces entered from the front.

The basement also was suited for business use with a stairwell entrance from the east sidewalk.

A grand staircase in the center of the front of the building originally accessed the theatre level and a box-office. Rooms to the front of the second floor, under the balcony, faced the street and were occupied as a land-office. A stairway on each end of the box-office hall led to the balcony.

Interior features of the main floor of the theatre include a raised stage with a proscenium arch and a pressed tin ceiling. There are also three tiered risers at the back of the main floor. The ceiling height on the main

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Section 7 Page 2 Property name Akron Opera House

County and State Plymouth County, Iowa

Narrative Description (continued)

floor is 22 feet. Historical documents claimed a seating capacity of 600, half of which was in the balcony.¹ Present day capacity is a comfortable 350 with removable chairs on the main floor and risers.

The 22 foot stage has a 30 foot ceiling with a depth of 28 feet. There were originally four dressing rooms, two on each side of the stage with one above the other. The stage had professionally hand-painted scenery on three drop curtains. The Flour City Scenic Company of Minneapolis painted the scenery for the curtains.²

The balcony is also three tiered as it rises to the south end of the building. Three round windows on the south and two on the east side allow outside light into the theatre.

The building was heated by steam heat and illuminated by acetylene gas lights.³ Although it had been built in 1905, newspaper articles as soon as 1912 indicated that electricity already had replaced the gas lights. Later, gas furnaces replaced the steam heat.

Alterations

Improvements were made in the significant years, 1905-1938, such as switching from gas lights to electricity in 1911.⁴ As use of the theatre diminished by 1938, alterations occurred. According to an article in *The Akron Register-Tribune*, dated August 31, 1939, the stage floor was removed by the owner J. K. Beckman and reused to build a cattle chute on a farm near Alton, Iowa.⁵ During following years businesses downstairs used the theatre area for storage. After its last known public use in June of 1938, a boxing match,⁶ and after the last business tenant, attorney John F. Stecker moved out of the second floor office space in September of 1940, many alterations were done.⁷ The grand staircase in the center front was removed and replaced by a staircase inside the west wall. The staircase to the balcony on that side was closed off to facilitate the new stairs. The stacked dressing rooms on each side of the stage were removed. Two of the four window sashes on the east dressing rooms remain. The north outside was covered with stucco to cover the brick. The fire escape was taken down. Sometime preceding 1938 the basement entrance from the east sidewalk was bricked over and closed with the sidewalk covering the entrance. A single door and stairway on the north side of the basement became the only entrance to the basement.

1 *The Akron Register-Tribune*, (March 22, 1906). Akron's New Opera House.

2 *The Akron Register-Tribune*, (February 22, 1906). The Theatre Opened.

3 *The Akron Register-Tribune*, (March 1, 1906). Akron's New Opera House.

4 *The Akron Register-Tribune*, (January 11, 1911). Electric Lighting Soon, (1911) Electric Plant Now In Operation, Now in Opera House.

5 *The Akron Register-Tribune*, (August 31, 1939). Local News Notes.

6 *The Akron Register-Tribune*, (June 9, 1938). Local News Notes.

7 *The Akron Register-Tribune*, (September 26, 1940). Local News Notes.

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Section 7 Page 3 Property name Akron Opera House

County and State Plymouth County, Iowa

Narrative Description (continued)

Most of the windows on the east and the front of the building were boarded in for ease of maintenance and to save heat. It is not known if the original sashes still remain on the theatre floor since the inside has been plastered over, but it is unlikely. Sashes on inside windows in the office areas still remain. Window wells and windows in the basement were bricked up for the same reason. In approximately 1946 a family moved into the front office area of the second floor and it was converted into a residence.

A garage owned by the property owner to the north of the building was added in the 1970's and the roof was attached to the north wall of the opera house. The arrangement with the owner allowed him to not build a wall on that south end of his building and in return the owner covered the back entrance to the basement of the opera house. The steps leading down to the basement door were then covered to keep out rain and snow.

In 1970 Richard Jacobs, a drama teacher at Akron Community Schools, renovated the theatre as a school/community project.⁸ Volunteers rebuilt the stage, and cleaned out the entire second floor including a colony of bats and their droppings. The stage was rebuilt with materials salvaged from the razed Trinity Lutheran Church. Theatre seats were obtained from the Hollywood Theatre being razed in Sioux City, Iowa. A fire escape was located and re-installed from the balcony and main floor. On September 4, 1970 the renovated theatre hosted its first production since the 1930's, *Paint Your Wagon*.⁹ A new stage curtain was sewn by Anna Taylor (another new stage curtain was sewn in 2009 by the daughter of the 1970 seamstress, Karen Taylor-Mortensen).

A stairway was installed behind the stage to the ground floor area which previously housed a grocery store. That area was then remodeled with a bathroom, two dressing rooms, and a lounge, or "green room" for the actors. Bathrooms were installed in the front of the second floor where an office space had previously been. A small kitchen and lounge or waiting area was also placed in this area. In 1999 the roof was repaired and covered with a rubber covering to waterproof it.

In 2006 a fundraiser raised money to replace the theater seats on the mezzanine level with new seats that can be disassembled to be rearranged or stored.

In 2007 a chair-lift for handicapped accessibility to the theater was purchased through the help of a grant from the Akron Community Foundation.

In 2010 new flats and stage background were installed, plus new carpet on the entry stairs and the hallway between the box-office and the theatre. A new front door was also installed.

⁸ *The LeMars Daily Sentinel*, (January 14, 1970). Akron School Drama Club Restores 1906 Opera House.

⁹ *The Akron Register-Tribune*, (September 3, 1970). Grand Re-opening, *Paint Your Wagon*.

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County and State Plymouth County, Iowa

Narrative Description (continued)

Integrity

All seven aspects of integrity (location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association) are retained to a good degree by the Akron Opera House.

Location: The building is in its original location.

Design: The design of the building is both functional and pleasing to the eye. The loss of the central stairwell entrance also resulted in the loss of the box-office and one stairway to the balcony. The box-office was replaced, possibly during the renovation in 1970. The integrity of the theatre itself has been retained including the stage, proscenium, balcony, pressed tin ceiling and interior woodwork and doors, with the exception of interior window sashes on the main floor and the backstage dressing rooms and window sashes. Soaring forty-eight feet into the air, it is the tallest building in town. Store-fronts on the first floor are used for commercial space while the brick front above that level is pleasantly imposing.

Setting: The building is set in the business district of the downtown, a short block from the railroad depot and tracks. It is the most imposing and tallest building on the main street.

Materials: The front of the building is the original pressed brick. The brick on the windowless west wall is covered with concrete stucco. The north and east brick walls remain the same as when it was constructed with the windows enclosed but still visible to the street. The interior materials are the same as originally constructed, wood floors and lath and plaster walls. The pressed metal ceiling panels have been retained.

Workmanship: Workmanship, both on the outside and interior of the building, has been maintained to a high degree with few changes to the aesthetic appearance presented. Craftsmanship of the original builders was high and comparable to the best of the quality of workmanship during that period.

Feeling: Because of the building's appearance and its use as a theatre and meeting place, upon approaching and entering the building a person has the feeling of stepping back in time to the early 20th century. It is easy to imagine the soft flicker of gaslight while you sit next to friends and neighbors and listen to the orchestra warm up. When the curtain opens and the players perform without microphones, the feeling of going back in time is complete.

Association: By stepping into the building patrons complete the association of the original guests with those of today. The Akron Opera House is being used today for the same purpose as it was in 1906. No other building in town has for so long preserved this degree of integrity associated with its original purpose.

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Section 8 Page 5 Property name Akron Opera House
County and State Plymouth County, Iowa

8. Narrative Statement of Significance

The Akron Opera House is locally significant culturally under Criterion A as a theatre and commercial space. The opera house embodies the heyday of rural community opera houses. Although a portion of the first floor of the opera house is now used for religious purposes, the building qualifies for registration under Criterion A for its history within its period of significance and as such meets Criteria Consideration A. Its period of significance, 1906-1938, was chosen because it opened in the spring of 1906 and was last used for community purposes in 1938. This nomination meets the registration requirements in Section F of the multiple property document.

At the turn of the century opera houses were built all across Iowa and the Midwest as rural communities developed places to house cultural activities. According to *Footlights in Farm Country*,¹⁰ smaller Iowa towns developed what were termed a phase II theatre, which was designed for dramatic entertainment that included circuit Repertoire Theatre. Most of the activity occurred between 1890 and the early 1940's. When a theatre troupe arrived in town the event was often heralded with a parade and advertised by playbills displayed in store windows and hand delivered to residents. The opera houses featured traveling troupes of musicians and actors, who rode the railway trunk lines on their way to performances in San Francisco, Denver, Minneapolis, Chicago, Omaha, and other large cities. Small towns like Akron offered a source of revenue along the way, and opera houses were built to bring culture to these communities. Akron was one of the small, rural communities located on the Pembina-Sioux railroad.

A certain magic happened when players came to town and mingled with the locals. Community members could see famous people and taste the culture of large cities. The opera houses of rural communities were also part of the lifeblood of the community, a place for gathering and socializing.

The financial risks of operating theatres led owners to incorporate the theatre into a commercial building. Akron's opera house was built to accomplish this purpose in the first floor and basement commercial space, while the second and third floors were devoted to live entertainment. Glenn and Poole in *The Opera Houses of Iowa* estimate that Iowa's rural communities built over 1200 opera houses, of which fewer than 300 exist today.¹¹

According to *The Opera Houses of Iowa*, the term "opera house" in the 1900's was a more general term for "theatre", but the term "theatre" was not used because for some audiences, the term carried negative connotations as sinful activity. In some communities, "theatre" was explicitly prohibited. So instead,

10 *Footlights in Farm Country: Iowa Opera Houses, 1835-1940*. "National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form".

11 Glenn, G.D. & Poole, R.L. (1993). *The Opera Houses of Iowa*. Pg. 4 Ames, Ia: Iowa University Press.

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Section 8 Page 6 Property name Akron Opera House
County and State Plymouth County, Iowa

Statement of Significance (continued)

communities built "opera houses."

Evidence of an opera house built in 1893 by Miles R. Tuttle is found in newspapers.¹² That building may have been located at 221 Dakota Street as indicated in a 1902 newspaper article.¹³ Use of that opera house was reflected in newspapers from 1893 through 1906. Use of the old opera house overlapped with use of the new opera house for a year and then no further mention was made of it.

It was reported to be 46 x 70 feet in dimension, and that the upper part of the building was to be used for the opera house. No existing building in town now fits this description so it is likely that the building no longer exists.

In 1905 a lot 46 feet by 118 feet located on the northwest corner of the intersection of 2nd Street and Reed Street in Akron, Iowa was owned by Boyson Ross, H.G. Clark, and C. G. Brady. The Big Sioux River, marking Iowa's border with South Dakota, flowed 1 ½ blocks west of that lot.

The Pembina-Sioux Railroad tracks and depot, the railroad between Pembina, North Dakota and Sioux City, Iowa, was one block west of the lot.

The American Life Insurance Company of Des Moines, Iowa approached the owners with an offer. If the residents in and around Akron bought enough life insurance from their company, the company would build an opera house on that lot.¹⁴ By the summer of 1905 enough insurance had been purchased for the deal to come to pass and construction started.

One of the vice-presidents of the American Life Insurance Company was E. P. (Emmet Perry) Barringer, a businessman and banker from Ruthven, Palo Alto County, Iowa. While in the Iowa State House of Representatives in about 1902, he was one of the original incorporators of the insurance company. Mr. Barringer co-owned the American Colonization Company in Saskatchewan, Canada and was a vice-president and general manager of that corporation. He also founded the Ruthven Savings Bank, the First National Bank of Ayrshire, and was a director of the First National Bank of Emmetsburg.

The American Life Insurance Company of Des Moines was founded in 1899 in Des Moines, Iowa and operated into the mid 1920's. No evidence has been found regarding when they ceased business or sold to another company, although financial statements were published in Des Moines newspapers during those years of operation. E.P. Barringer was listed as vice president and W.B. Hanes was 2nd vice president.

12 *LeMars Semi-Weekly Sentinel*, (January 31, 1893). Akron News.

13 *Akron Register-Tribune*, May 22, 1902, p. [8], "Opera House property for sale."

14 *The Akron Register-Tribune*, (May 4, 1905). Local News.

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Section 8 Page 7 Property name Akron Opera House
County and State Plymouth County, Iowa

Statement of Significance (continued)

Evidence has been found that the American Life Insurance Company of Des Moines assisted the town of Merrill, Iowa (about 20 miles southeast of Akron) in a similar venture to build an opera house in 1902.¹⁵ That building has since been torn down. It was similar in size and shape to the one in Akron with commercial space on the first floor and the opera house and balcony above. It originally had a grocery store and a drug store in the commercial space. The layout of the opera house was similar but the dressing rooms were in the front of the building on the second floor instead of backstage where they were located in the Akron building. The building was not as high and judging from that and the shape of the roofline, the balcony probably was not as large either.¹⁶ Both buildings in Merrill and Akron were sold to local businessmen shortly after their completion so that the insurance company did not maintain liability for them for long.

Although during the first decade of the 20th century dozens of opera houses were built in Iowa, no evidence has thus far been found to indicate that the American Life Insurance Company of Des Moines was involved in the construction of any others. Research indicates that most communities funded the building of opera houses through the sale of stock for the enterprise or through the investment of individual businessmen in the communities.

Frank Whitcomb Griffith, a Fort Dodge, Iowa architect was chosen to design the building.¹⁷ The theatre was one of his first designs. He was active as an architect until his death in 1953 and the firm he founded still exists in Fort Dodge today as The Griffith Company.

According to architectural historian Richard Carlson:

"Frank Whitcomb (or Whitcombe) Griffith (1878-1953) was born in Wisconsin, but by 1900 he was living with his parents and siblings in the Hyde Park area of Chicago, near the University of Chicago. Frank worked as a draftsman in that year, presumably for a Chicago architect or architectural firm, although his employer's identity is not known. In 1902, he married University of Chicago alumna Alice Duval Robertson, a native of Fort Dodge, Iowa. By 1905, the couple had moved to Fort Dodge, where Alice's parents were still living. Frank practiced briefly as an architect around 1905. His only known designs from this period were the Akron (Iowa) Opera House, designed in 1905; and a telephone exchange building for the Central Mutual Telephone Company in Rockwell City, Iowa, designed in 1906. It is not known presently known whether the last two named buildings were built, and, if they were, whether they remain standing. By 1910, Frank W. Griffith had become superintendent of a stucco mill, perhaps that of United States Gypsum, for which he worked as superintendent or manager from at least 1915 to 1921. His wife Alice died in 1912. In 1914, Frank Griffith married Gladys Wells, a graduate of Wellesley College and a grand-niece of Leland Stanford, founder of Stanford University. (She was living in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1912, where she did settlement house work, so it's not clear

15 *The LeMars Semi-Weekly Sentinel*, (October 14, 1902). Our County News, Merrill.

16 *Merrill Centennial 1872-1972* (1972). Merrill Centennial Committee.

17 *The American Contractor*, July 8, 1905, p. 16.

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Section 8 Page 8 Property name Akron Opera House
County and State Plymouth County, Iowa

Statement of Significance (continued)

how she and Frank met.) Frank Griffith had had no children with Alice, but with Gladys he had two sons, Stanford W. Griffith and Frank W. Griffith Jr. Possibly by 1925, and certainly by 1929, Frank W. Griffith had returned to architectural practice. The only building design attributed to him during this period was South Junior High School in Fort Dodge in 1929 (possibly designed in conjunction with another Fort Dodge architect, E. O. Damon, Jr.). It is not known whether Griffith continued to practice architecture during the Great Depression and World War II. Starting after the war, however, he found constant work as an architect, apparently with significant assistance from his son Stanford. Among his designs from this period were the Thompson Hybrid Corn Company plant in Belmond, Iowa, in 1946; the Lutheran hospital in West Fort Dodge, which opened in 1949; the parsonage of the Emanuel Lutheran church in Dayton, Iowa, completed in 1949; Union Memorial Church in Milford, Iowa, in 1949; Mallard Methodist Church in Mallard, Iowa, in 1950; an addition to the Glidden, Iowa, schools in 1950; and Garner Memorial Building in Garner, Iowa, which opened in 1953. In 1952 and 1953, at least, he was in business as Frank Griffith and Son, presumably with his son Stanford. Frank Griffith's plans for Christ Lutheran Church in Gladbrook, Iowa, had just been adopted at the time of his death in September 1953. After his death, Stanford Griffith continued the firm under the name The Griffith Company. This architectural firm appears to have remained in business up the present at 709 Kenyon Road in Fort Dodge."

John A. Huxtable was the general contractor for the building. The Plymouth Hotel, the oldest commercial building in Akron at the time, was located on the site and was torn down in preparation for the new theatre. The \$18,000, three-story building was completed early in 1906. The grand opening was on February 15, 1906 when "Home Seekers," a comedy drama was presented to a live audience.¹⁸ The first opera production was a musical comedy entitled "The Rajah of Altara," performed on February 28, 1906. The grand opening was attended by vice-presidents W.P. Hanes and E.P. Barringer of the American Life Insurance Company, who proclaimed in part, "we congratulate the people of Akron and vicinity upon the fine theatre they have thus secured, which has been so much needed for a number of years, and hope they will find much satisfaction in the advantages it affords."¹⁹

E.H. Youngstrom was the first theatre manager of the opera house and was followed by H.G. Clark soon after the opening and then A.J. Claeys in 1910 and finally E.F. Cobb and Ray Smith in later years. Although the theatre was the impetus and purpose for the building, commercial ventures occupied space in the basement, on the first floor, and in the office spaces on the second floor.

The Akron Opera House Barber Shop, Ervin & Hitzeman Proprietors, opened in the basement. Attorney W.T. Kidd occupied one second floor office. The other was the land office of Johnson and Yeaton. The Union County Investment Company opened a general store on the first floor under the trade name of "The Pricemakers," with L.N. Crill general manager, William Simeon manager of groceries and meats with

¹⁸ *The Akron Register-Tribune*, (February 26, 1906). Home Seekers Opens Opera House.

¹⁹ *The Akron Register-Tribune*, (February 26, 1906). The Theatre Opened.

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Statement of Significance (continued)

Antoine Smythe as the local store manager. Over the next fifty years commercial occupants were Dudley's, Silverberg's, K&K, Harvey's Hardware, Wilfred Dirks Hardware, Akron Auto Supply, and Attorney John F. Stecker, the last second floor occupant to move out in 1940.²⁰

From the time of its opening in 1906 until the last known public event, a boxing match, in 1938,²¹ the opera house was used for a multitude of community activities, both recreational and social. Starting in 1906 and ending in 1934, the Akron High School held its commencement exercises at the theatre. For many years in conjunction with graduation, a class play was also presented. Carrie Nation, the famous hatchet wielding, temperance crusader, was booked for a presentation in 1910.²² Traveling plays and concerts were presented through the 1920's. Dances, moving picture shows, church bazaars, declamation contests, basketball games, political speeches, wrestling matches, revival meetings, and federal court witness interviews were presented or conducted until the late 1930's. During this significant period of time (1906-1938) the Akron Opera House was the central meeting place and entertainment venue for the entire community. Because of its size and optimum location it was an integral fixture in the community and the thread that bound its citizens together.

As the years passed, movie houses, The Empress and then the Norka, were built. Still later a newer high school was built with a gymnasium, and the American Legion Hall was built with a dance floor. Uses for the opera house declined with these new community additions and it was finally abandoned as the community meeting place and closed and used for storage for the stores on the first floor. In 1946, John Klein Bekman, who bought the building from its original owners in 1913, rented the front offices of the second floor to a family who lived there until 1970. Their years living in the theatre were recounted in a book written by Reverend Dennis J. Johnson, one of the children in the family.²³ Elmer K. Bekman inherited the building in 1955 upon the death of John. He then sold it to Vern Davis in 1959, who sold it to Kenneth and Alice

²⁰ *The Akron Register-Tribune*, (September 26, 1940). News article, no title.

²¹ *The Akron Register-Tribune*, (June 9, 1938). Boxing Match Slated.

²² *The Akron Register-Tribune*, (February 29, 1940). Thirty Years Ago, Carrie Nation to Speak.

²³ Johnson, Dennis J., (2007). *Main Street Memories, A Boyhood Remembered, Growing up on Main Street in Akron, Iowa, 1938-1960*, Sunray Publishing.

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Statement of Significance (continued)

Harvey in 1968 and then it was purchased by the Akron Community Theatre (now known as The Akron Opera House) in 1974. It is still owned and operated by the Akron Opera House.

The first floor commercial space has been occupied for the most part to this day with the present occupant being the New Horizons United Church of Christ.

In 1970 the opera house was rediscovered and restored. Since that time it has been used primarily for its original purpose, a theatre. *Paint Your Wagon* was the first production in 1970 and since that time dozens of plays and musicals have been performed, most using local talent. Programs this season include three local shows and three brought in from outside the community.

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9. Major Bibliographical Sources

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"Footlights in Farm Country: Iowa Opera Houses, 1835-1940." National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form.

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10. Geographical Data

Verbal boundary description: The south 98 feet of Lot 1, Block 4, Akron, Iowa. Tax Parcel # 231331005. The building is bounded by 2nd Street on the east and Reed Street on the south.

Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the Akron Opera House.

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Photographs

Photo Log Sheet

The following information is common to all the photographs:

Property Name Akron Opera House
County and State Plymouth County, Iowa
Name of the photographer Karen Taylor-Mortensen
Location of digital files Reed Street Imaging, Akron, IA
Digital ink and paper used Epson Ultra Chrome ink, Epson Premium Glossy Paper

Photographs

Photo #1 - Date of photograph October 17, 2010
Front of building, camera facing north

Photo #2 - Date of photograph October 18, 2010
Front of building (left) and east elevation (right), camera facing northwest

Photo #3 - Date of photograph October 18, 2010
East elevation (left) and north elevation (right), camera facing southwest

Photo #4 - Date of photograph October 17, 2010
North elevation (left) and west elevation (right), camera facing southeast

Photo #5 - Date of photograph October 16, 2010
Main hallway at top of stairs, camera facing east

Photo #6 - Date of photograph October 16, 2010
Main floor showing stage and original proscenium, camera facing north

Photo #7 - Date of photograph October 16, 2010
Main floor and balcony seating area as seen from the stage, camera facing south

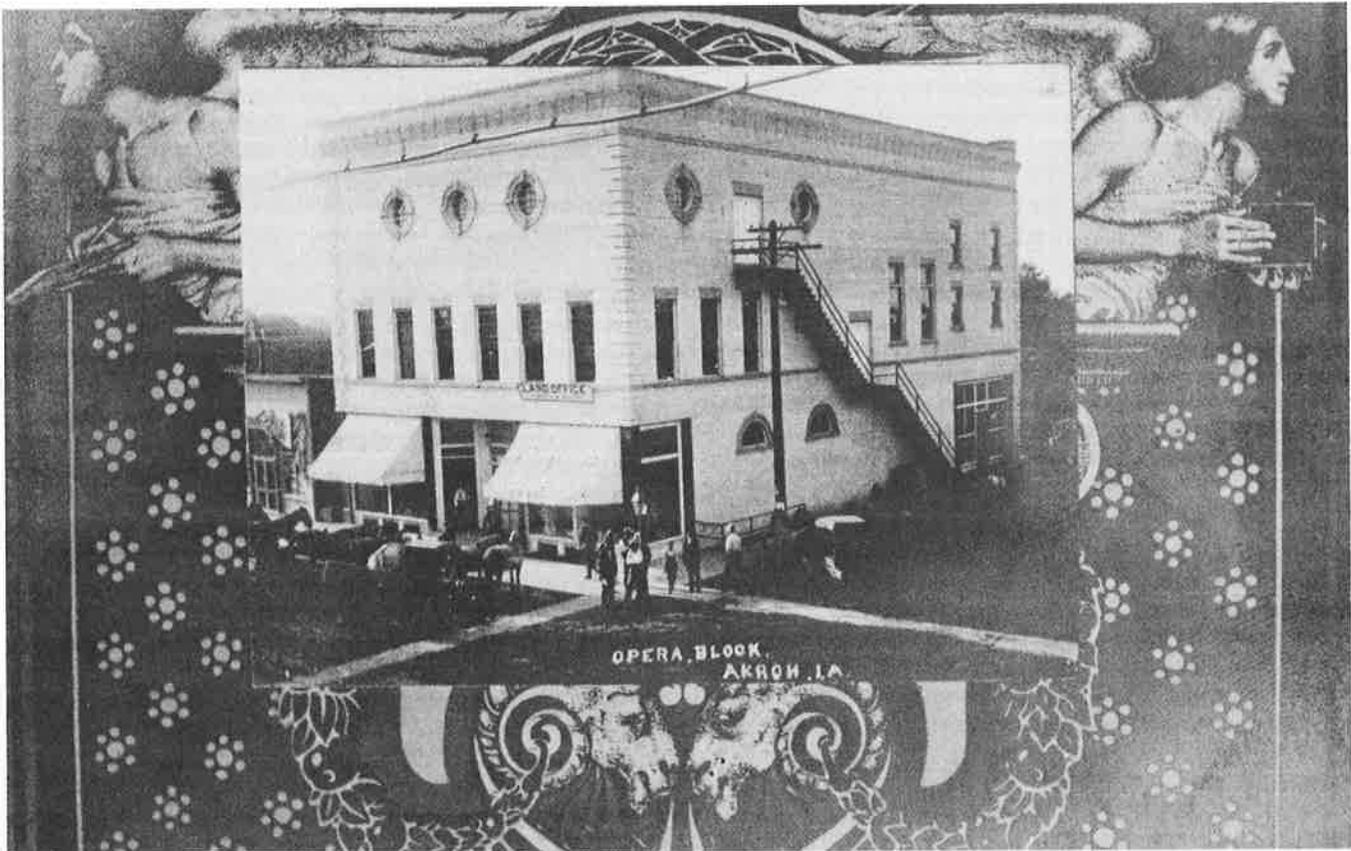
Photo #8 - Date of photograph October 16, 2010
Detail of original tin ceiling, camera facing northwest

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Early view of the opera house around the time of its grand opening in 1906. From the archives of the Akron Register-Tribune.

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A very clear photograph with a large poster advertising "The Lunatic", a farce presented on May 9, 1908. The awning on the front right displays the initials of the Union County Investment Company, the first occupant of the commercial space on the first floor. A barber pole and a "baths" sign denote the entrance to the basement barber shop. The land office on the second floor shows the proprietors to be Johnson and Yeaton. From the archives of the Akron Register-Tribune.

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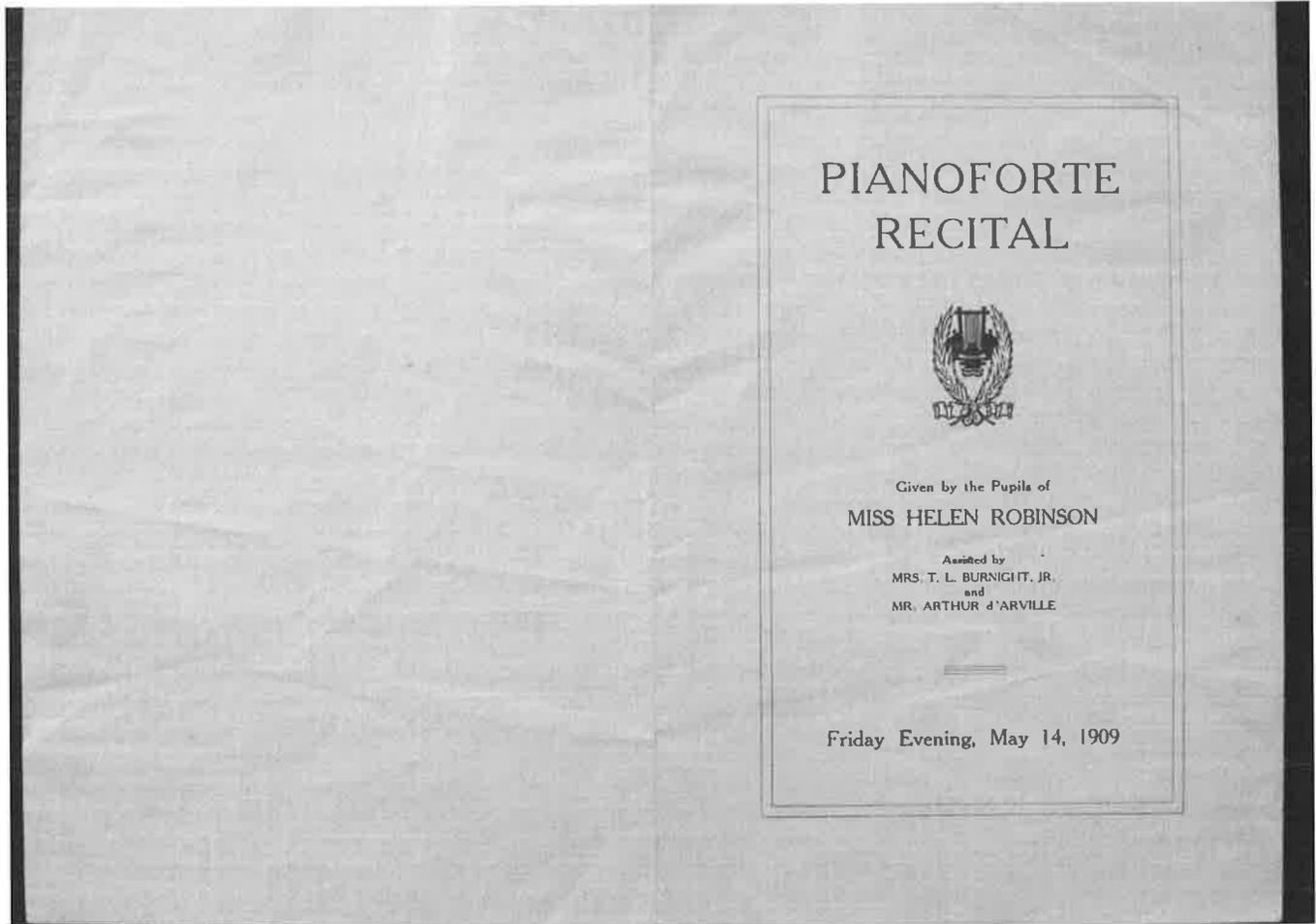
Akron graduating class, 1917, from a postcard reproduction in the Akron Opera House archives. The drapes in the background are believed to be the original ones used during the grand opening of the opera house.

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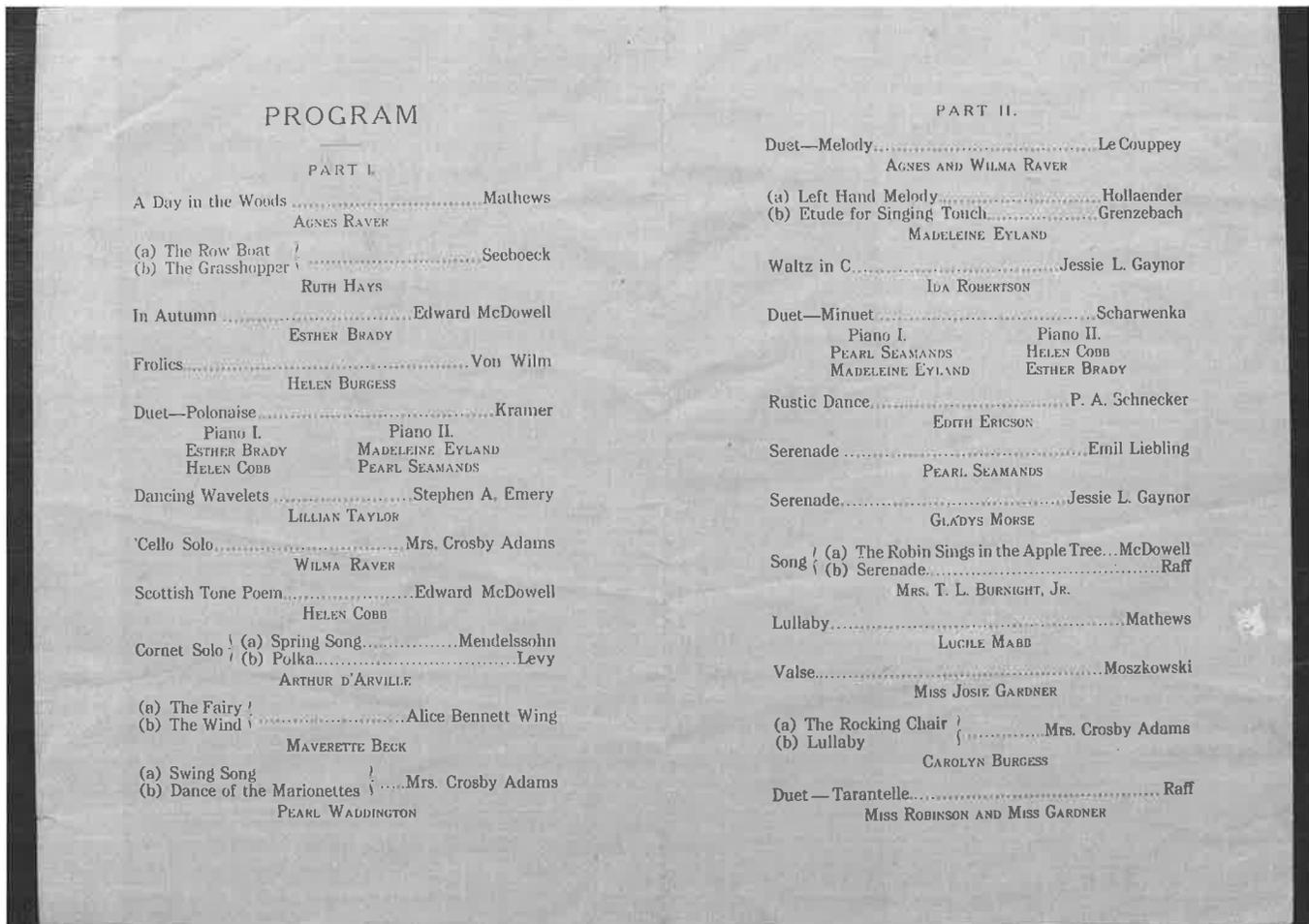
Program cover from a piano recital held in the opera house in 1909. From the Akron Opera House archives.

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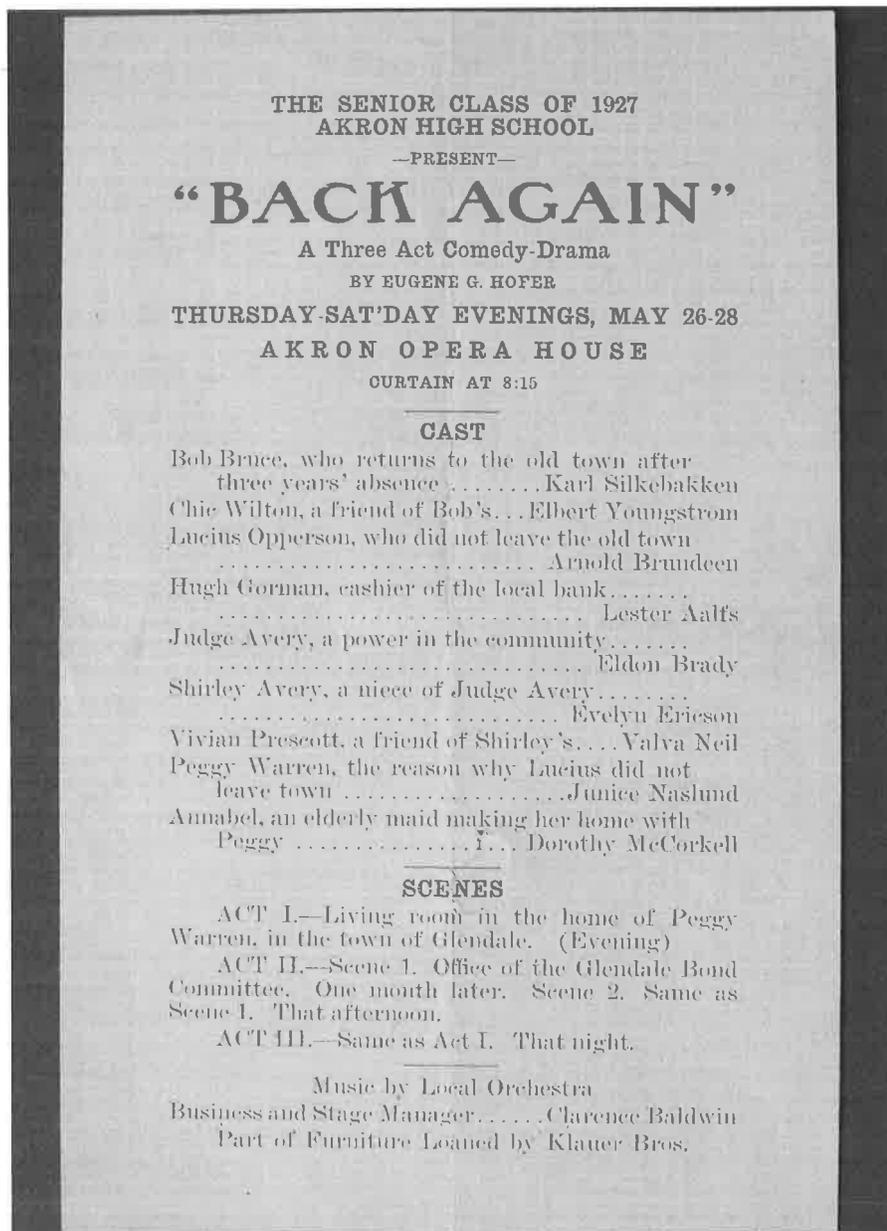
The inside of the program from the piano recital in 1909.

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The senior class play program from the 1927 graduating class, performed in conjunction with graduation. From the Akron Opera House archives.

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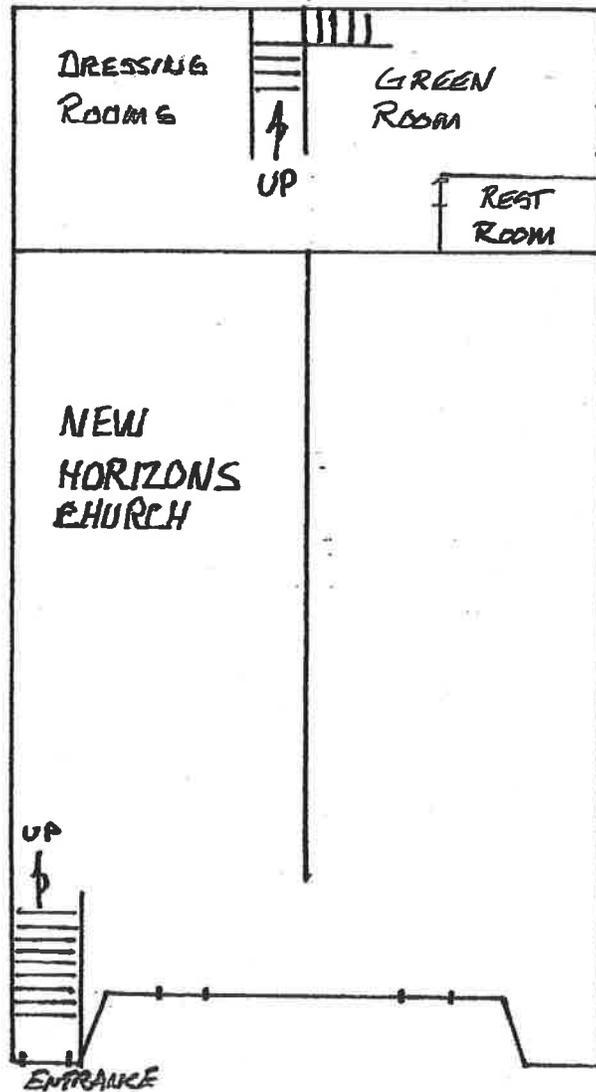
Google(maps.google.com) aerial view of downtown Akron.

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1ST FLOOR

By: Tim Blom

JANUARY 20, 2011

Fig. 3

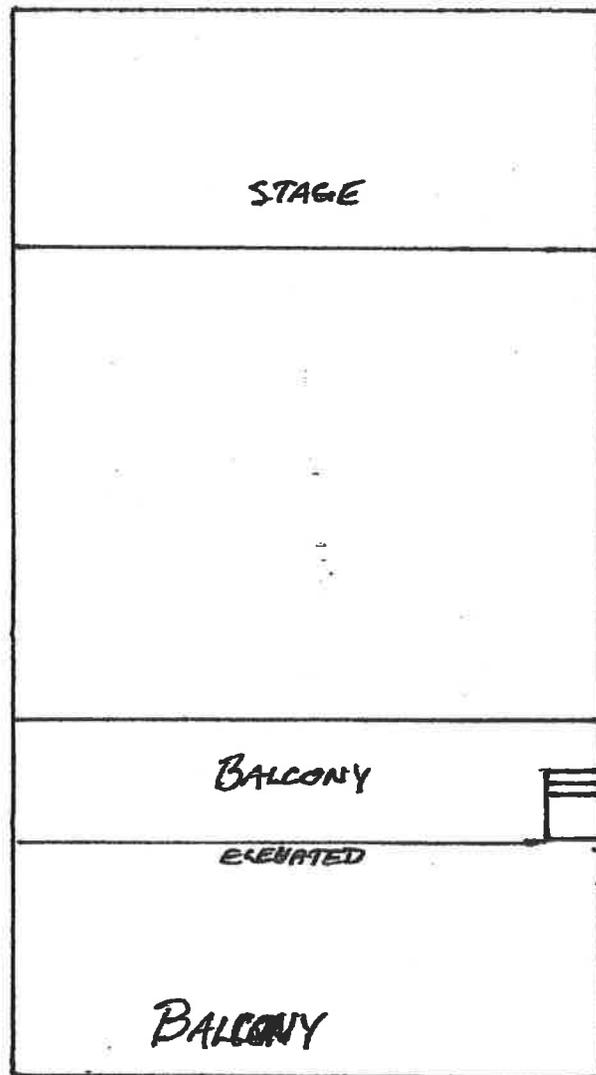
SCALE: 1/16" = 1'

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3RD FLOOR
By: Tim Blom
JANUARY 20, 2011

FIG. 5

SCALE 1/16" = 1'

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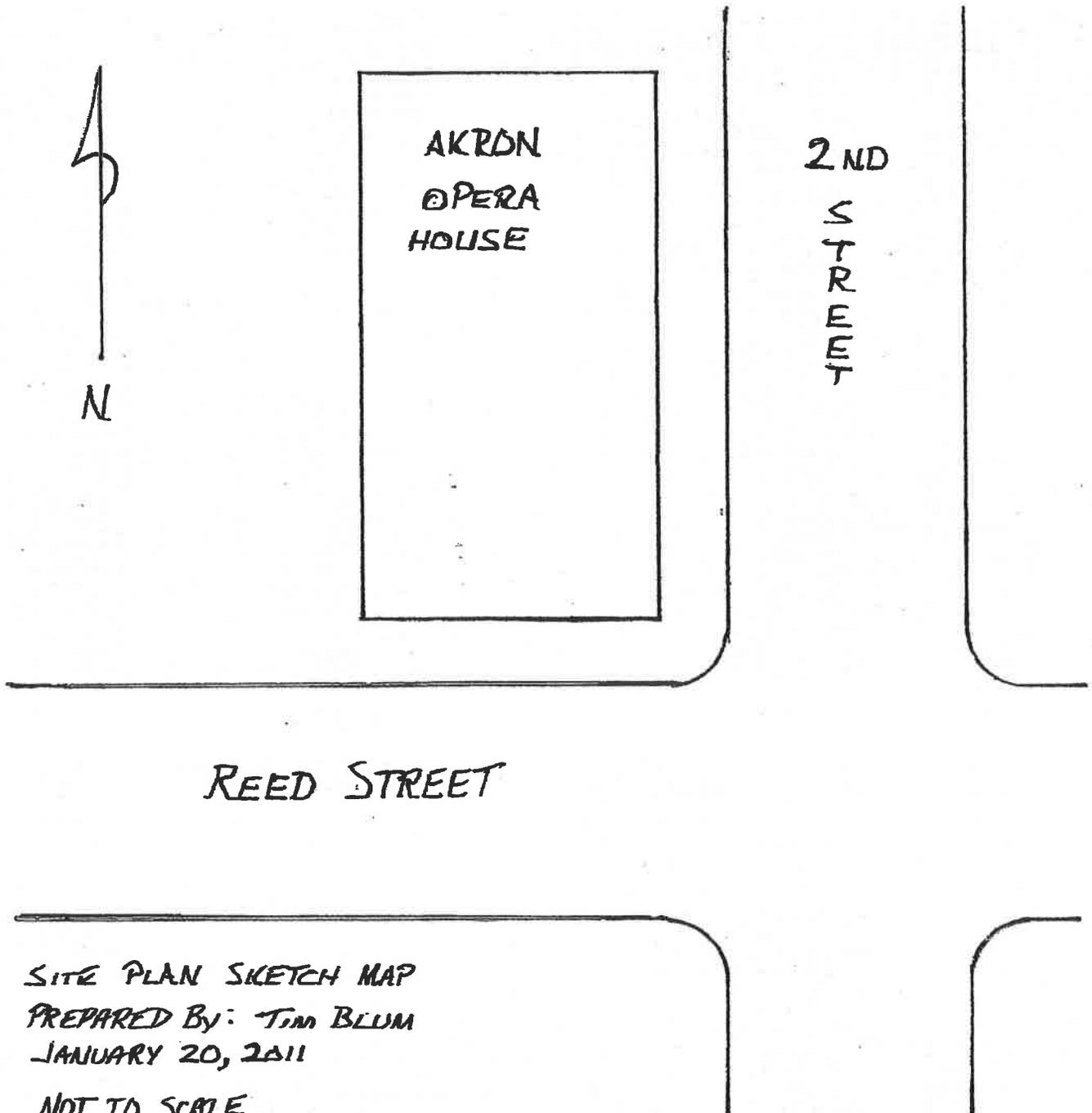


FIG. 6



Ye Olde Opera House



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A three-story brick building with a fire escape on its side. The top of the building has a sign that reads "STANDARD TRACTOR COMPANY". The building has several windows, some of which are boarded up. There are two air conditioning units on the ground floor.

A white garage building with corrugated metal siding. It has a large white garage door and a smaller windowed door. A sign is visible on the wall above the windowed door.

A blue sedan parked on the street in front of the garage building.

STOP

ALMA'S PLACE



CAUTION

High Voltage
Electrical Equipment
May Be Present



TICKETS









Ye Olde Opera House