



**KANSAS  
STATE  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY**



6425 S.W. 6th Avenue  
Topeka, Kansas  
66615-1099  
PHONE# (785) 272-8681  
FAX# (785) 272-8682  
TTY# (785) 272-8683



**KANSAS HISTORY CENTER**

Administration  
Center for Historical Research  
Cultural Resources  
Education / Outreach  
Historic Sites  
Kansas Museum of History  
Library & Archives

**HISTORIC SITES**

Adair Cabin  
Constitution Hall  
Cottonwood Ranch  
First Territorial Capitol  
Fort Hays  
Goodnow House

**CERTIFICATION OF STATE REGISTER LISTING**

The Register of Historic Kansas Places includes all Kansas properties nominated to the National Register as well as lower threshold properties which are listed on the state register only.

Property Name: Strong City Auditorium

Address: 501 Cottonwood, Strong City, KS 66869

Legal:

County: Chase

Owner: City of Strong City

Address: PO Box 208, Strong City, KS 66869

National Register eligible   X  

State Register eligible   X  

This property was approved by the Kansas Historic Sites Board of Review for the Register of Historic Kansas Places on August 18, 2001.

I hereby certify that this property is listed on the Register of Historic Kansas Places.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State Historic Preservation Officer

8-18-01  
Date

9/95

NPS Form 10-900  
(Oct. 1990)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration 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 an 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 Strong City Opera House

other names/site number Strong City Auditorium; Strong City Theatre

2. Location

street & number 501 Cottonwood  not for publication

city or town Strong City  vicinity

state Kansas code KS county Chase code 017 zip code 66869

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 for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State of 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 certifying official/Title \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State of Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	Signature of the Keeper _____	Date of Action _____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other, (explain): _____	_____	_____

Strong City Opera House  
Name of Property

Chase Kansas  
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 the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

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

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation & Culture/Opera House

Recreation & Culture/Auditorium

Recreation & Culture/Theatre

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Vacant

Work in progress

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: Limestone; rectangle

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone/limestone

walls stone/limestone

roof asphalt shingles

other

**Narrative Description**

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

Strong City Opera House  
Name of Property

**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 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)

entertainment/recreation  
architecture  
performing arts  
social history

**Period of Significance**

1900 - 1906

**Significant Dates**

4/19/1901 - Grand Opening

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

**Cultural Affiliation**

undefined

**Architect/Builder**

John Frew - Architect; P.J. Norton -  
General Contractor; The Rettiger  
Brothers - Stone Masons

**Primary location of additional data:**

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

Name of repository:

Chase County Historical Society &  
Museum

Strong City Opera House  
Name of Property

Chase Kansas  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property \_\_\_\_\_

Please Help  
with This!

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

1	Zone	Eastings	Northing
2	Zone	Eastings	Northing

3	Zone	Eastings	Northing
4	Zone	Eastings	Northing

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 Donna F. Rettiger/City Clerk

organization City of Strong City date \_\_\_\_\_

street & number 4th & Chase P.O. Box 208 telephone 316-273-6345

city or town Strong City state KS zip code 66869

**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 SHPO or FPO.)

name City of Strong City

street & number 4th & Chase P.O. Box 208 telephone 316-273-6345

city or town Strong City state KS zip code 66869

**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 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 Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

Narrative Description SECTION 7

The Strong City Opera House (c.1900) is located on the northwest corner of Cottonwood Street & 5<sup>th</sup> Street, Strong City, Chase County, Kansas (pop. 633). It sits only one block north of K-177, a designated scenic byway. The two-story, native limestone building was built by architect John Frew and based upon the Kansas City Plan. It has a hipped roof, which was originally covered in tin. The grand front entrance featured stairs leading north and south to accommodate large crowds. The building has an eastern façade orientation with overall measurements of fifty feet north to south and eighty feet east to west.

The exterior of the building was laid with hand cut, native Chase County limestone furnished by P.J. Norton and the Rettiger Bros. Norton and Rettiger developed a quarry southeast of Cottonwood Falls and provided stone for numerous bridges and buildings across the country including the Winner Bridge across the Missouri River at Kansas City, Mo. Most notable was the stone furnished for the east wing of the State House at Topeka, Ks. Nearly all the stone used in building the State House, was furnished from quarries in Chase County, including the foundation stones each weighing 13,000 pounds apiece. P.J. Norton also worked under the Lantry Bros. on a seven-year project filling in the forty acre China Basin in San Francisco, California, to make terminal grounds for the Santa Fe railroad tracks.

The limestone of Chase County possesses many rare qualities, which are not equaled by any other stone in this or surrounding states. Its high degree of hardness, its strength, its ability to resist deterioration when exposed to the weather, its natural beauty of color, and the exactness with which it may be cut and dressed all make it one of the best building materials to be found. The sheer cost of such extraordinary hand cut stone would simply be impossible to reproduce today, not to mention the lack of skilled tradesmen available for such a massive undertaking.

The eastern side of the building is shorter than the western, giving it the appearance of a raised entrance. The stairway leading up to the entrance approaches from both the south and north sides to a nine foot by five foot landing. The raised stairs allow for a large fascia, below which was used to advertise upcoming entertainment. A Palladian inspired window rests atop the grand double door entrance and is offset by seventeen geometrically cut limestone trim. Above the arched entry sits a recessed limestone dedication marker with the words "Auditorium 1900." The word Auditorium is raised and arched to mimic the arch of the window atop the entrance. The date 1900 is chiseled into the stone. On either side of the front entrance are double windows symmetrically placed in alignment and on either side of the overhead arch. The 4/4 double hung windows are original, and the lintels and thresholds of the windows are offset limestone, as they are on the rest of the building.

The west side of the building has a centrally located back door with wooden steps leading up to it. There are two second story windows with two first story windows

directly beneath them. Each of these, again, is an original 4/4 double hung sash window. Below the first story windows are two small square basement windows.

The north side of the building is unique in that it has a balcony exit and a stage exit. The balcony exit sits at the east end on the main floor. The stage exit is at the west end. Original stairs have long since been removed. Beneath this exit is another 4/4 double hung window. Between the two exits sit three more 4/4 double hung windows equally spaced with three more windows of the same directly below. The balcony exit also has a small square four pane window directly above it.

The south side has a balcony exit with a window above it exactly opposite of that on the north side. Directly beneath the balcony exit is a 4/4 double hung window. West of that window is a nine foot by nine foot overhead door, that replaced an original 4/4 window at sometime. Four windows run across the main floor level equidistance of one another. On the lower level is double door basement entry, which originally led into the ballroom.

The interior of the auditorium was so constructed that every movement on the stage could be seen by the entire audience. Acoustics were said to be so perfect that every sound could be heard throughout. The ceiling has pressed tin and was painted in an artistic manner. Chairs are mahogany color in the parquet, while those in the parquet circle, are of the same pattern except finished in oak. The seating capacity of the building is said to be 1000. Numerous doors were incorporated into the design to allow for rapid exit in case of emergency.

The Strong City Opera House/Auditorium is both an excellent example of early 20<sup>th</sup> century stonemasonry and historical performing arts.

## Narrative Statement of Significance SECTION 8

The Strong City Opera House/Auditorium (c.1900) is being nominated to the National Register under criteria A and C for its historical association with the growth and development of Strong City and for its architectural significance as an example of a limestone, turn-of-the-century Opera House. The Strong City Opera House is one of very few remaining true opera houses in Kansas and the Midwest region. The building was operated as an opera house until about 1920, at which time it was sold to the city and used as a Community Building. In 1925, it was leased to D. L. Underwood and operated as a movie theatre. It operated continually as a movie theatre until 1990. Bill Yeager purchased the building in 1985, with the hopes of restoring it to its former glory. Unfortunately, he was never able to accomplish this and in fact, the building rapidly deteriorated under his ownership. In 2000, the City of Strong City purchased the building with the hopes of saving it from demolition and someday restoring it.

The Strong City Musical & Literary Association, Inc. was formed on January 4, 1900. The main objective of the group was to obtain funding through the sale of shares in order to construct an Opera House in Strong City for which the citizens of the area had been yearning. The architect, John Frew, drew the designs and determined the cost estimate of \$4000 for the new building. The Association sold shares at \$10 a share to raise approximately \$6000. The building was designed on the Kansas City Plan and dimensions of the building are 50 feet wide by 80 feet long.

In late January of 1900, the Lantry Brothers, local stonemason contractors, donated 5 lots at the corner of Cottonwood Avenue and 5<sup>th</sup> Street for the construction of the new opera house. The Lantry Brothers also purchased several shares of stock and were instrumental in getting the project off the ground.

On May 4, 1900, the construction contract was let to local stonemason P.J. Norton. Norton acted as the General Contractor and subcontracted the stone work to the Rettiger Bros. Norton and the Rettiger Bros. provided the stone for the building from their quarry southeast of Cottonwood Falls. Chase County limestone has a high degree of hardness, great strength, and resists deterioration. It can also be cut and dressed with great exactness, making it one of the best and most beautiful construction materials. Construction continued on the building through 1900 and early 1901.

On April 19, 1901, The Strong City Opera House had its grand opening. The opening night proved to be a huge success. Entertainment was provided by the famous Modoc Club and John Marshall Band, both of Topeka, KS. Afterwards the ballroom downstairs was opened for dancers. The Santa Fe Railroad made a special one fare round trip rate for the grand opening from all points between Topeka, Newton, Abilene, and Strong City. It was said that the Strong City Opera House could be favorably compared to any others and that Strong City had done itself proud.



The main floor of the building is sloping as is the balcony. Together, they have a seating capacity of 1000. The building was so constructed that every movement on the stage could be seen by the entire audience. The acoustics inside the building were so perfect that every sound could be heard throughout. The stage was large, convenient, and decorated with the latest style of scenery. The ceiling is pressed tin. Chairs in the parquet are mahogany color, while those in the parquet circle, are of the same pattern except finished in oak. The ballroom below was large, well-ventilated and had an excellent dance floor. Unfortunately, through the years, many alterations and remodeling attempts have been done to the former ballroom and it no longer exists as it had. Numerous doors were incorporated into the design to allow for rapid exit in case of emergency.

Through its heyday, the Opera House provided the citizens of Strong City with entertainment such as: The Womanless Wedding, John Philip Sousa Band, Ben-Hur, Damon and Pythias, The Kodak Komedie Kompany's A Mountain Waif, The Kelties, The Monto Cristo play, and numerous musical recitals. The Opera House provided the citizens of Strong City with such cultural entertainment that would have been impossible in most small communities. The Opera House not only provided its own community with culture, but also that of many other communities. The railroad offered stops in Strong City from communities such as Newton, Topeka, Emporia, and others. Cottonwood Falls benefited from the Opera House with the help of a horse-drawn trolley, which connected the two cities and provided transportation to the Strong City Opera House.

When the City purchased the Opera House and made it a community building, the ballroom floor was replaced. In 1921, the ballroom was dedicated on Labor Day with a huge celebration. Dances were frequently held in the community building and it became a popular spot to be. D. L. Underwood leased the upstairs portion of the building to be used as a movie theatre in January 1925. It continued as a movie theatre, and in 1950, Dudley Doolittle took over its operation. When Bill Yeager purchased the building from the city in 1985, it was hoped that he would have the resources and ability to restore it. Unfortunately, it proved to be too great an undertaking and continued to deteriorate. The City declared the building a dangerous structure in December 1999. In an effort to save the building, the city agreed to purchase the building from Mr. Yeager, who was unable to make the necessary repairs. The City hopes to restore it to original or nearly original condition, and once again make it a viable resource of the community.

## **SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

*The Strong City Derrick*; September 1899, January 1900, March 1900, May 1900,  
June 1900, April 1901

*The Courant and Reveille*; April 1901, May 1901

*Chase County Leader*; April 1901, September 1901, October 1901, November 1901,  
December 1901

*Chase County News*; July 1921, August 1921, October 1921, January 1922

Chase County Historical Sketches: Volume II. Chase County Historical Society, 1949.

Kansas State Historical Society, Charter of The Strong City Musical & Literary  
Association, March 5, 1900.

Chase County Centennial 1872-1972, Area Methodist Churches, 1972.

Strong City Council Minutes, 1985.

*Preservation News*, Kansas Preservation Alliance, Inc., 2<sup>nd</sup> Qtr 2000.

Doolittle, Dorothy. "Auditorium" Date Unknown.

"The Strong City Auditorium", Date Unknown, Author Unknown.

## **VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

The nominated property is located on lots 22, 24, 26, 28, and 30 in Block 14, Emslie's Addition to the City of Strong City, Chase County, Kansas. The property is bounded to the east by Cottonwood Street, to the south by 5<sup>th</sup> Street, to the north by property lines, and to the west by an alley.

## **BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

The boundary includes the property that was originally donated by Barney Lantry for the purpose of constructing the Opera House.

PHOTOGRAPHS: Exterior views from July 2001 showing roof collapse. Historic view from 1901. Color views showing exterior and interior from late 1980s. Black and white interior views from July 2000.