



KANSAS STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

CENTER FOR HISTORICAL RESEARCH

120 West Tenth ▪ Topeka, Kansas 66612-1291 ▪ 913/296-3251
FAX #913/296-1005

KANSAS MUSEUM OF HISTORY

6425 South West Sixth ▪ Topeka, Kansas 66615-1099 ▪ 913/272-8681

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: Sedan Opera House

Address: 200-204 East Main Street

Legal: The South 54 feet of Lots 18, 20, 22 and 24, and the West 2 feet on Lot 16, including the West Half of a stone wall which is centered on the East line of the above described property, all in Block 14, Sedan, Kansas

County: Chautauqua County

Owner: City of Sedan

Address: 109 North Chautauqua, Sedan, Kansas 67361

National Register eligible _____

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 28, 1993.

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

Ramon Powers
State Historic Preservation Officer

Date Sept. 7, 1993

The Sedan Opera House (c. 1904) is being nominated to the Register of Historic Kansas Places for its historical association with the growth and development of Sedan. The Sedan Opera House functioned actively as a community meeting place and performance hall from its construction in 1904 until 1919, and later as a commercial block. Today the building houses the Emmett Kelly Museum.

The Sedan Opera House is a two-story, limestone building that maintains a southern facade orientation. Rusticated, limestone block quoins articulate the facade corners, rusticated limestone block pilasters articulate the four facade bays. The limestone used for the quoins is a reddish hue, the limestone used for the building is more grey. The first level of the building is painted white. The building has no entablature, presenting a slightly unproportioned appearance. The original pressed metal cornice was removed in 1927 after it was damaged in a windstorm and never replaced.

The building is fenestrated by its original 4/4, double hung windows on all four elevations of the second level. The facade's two center windows on the second level are comprised of two 4/4, double hung units surmounted by a fanlight. Limestone lintels and sills surround each window. Two exterior facade entrances lead to the second level.

Eight-over-eight, double hung windows fenestrate the facade of the first floor level. The first floor windows were modified and two wide doors added after 1937, to accommodate the GMC and Pontiac car dealership that utilized the building.

The interior of the building retains its original floor plan. The second level retains its open space, with the iron pillars supporting the ceiling, but the stage has been removed. The balcony is intact, but sagging. The maple floors are extant.

Suspended ceilings have been installed in the three, first level rooms that house the Emmett Kelly Museum. The concrete floors have been painted and the walls replastered in these rooms. A fourth room on the east side of the building is unfinished and looks as it did when the building was constructed in 1904.

The opera house was built on the site of two earlier opera houses that were both destroyed by fire. The first Sedan Opera House was built in 1885 and burned in 1890, the second opera house was built in 1895 and burned in 1903.

After the fire that destroyed the 1895 opera house, a commentary from a local newspaper reflected the functional importance of the opera house to Sedan. "A large public hall in Sedan is as much a necessity as is the courthouse. The town needs one continually. It is a public benefit and a public need. It is used by churches, the schools, political parties, commercial clubs and everybody. It is one of the strong features of any town to have a house or hall large enough for public gatherings." (Weekly Times Star, 12 February 1904)

The construction of the new opera house was funded by the Ancient Order of United Workmen (AOUW). The AOUW was a fraternal insurance order that had purchased the lot where the opera house was to be constructed from Eli C. Ackarman in March 1904. When built, the AOUW retained ownership of the second floor, where the presentation hall was, and sold the first floor to Ackarman. In 1919, the AOUW sold the second floor of the building to Ackarman.

Construction of the Sedan Opera House began in February 1904 and was completed by July of that year. "In helping the rebuilding, the city council advanced five years rent in the amount of \$250." (Sedan Times Star, 8 January 1904)

"Work on the rebuilding of the opera house is progressing splendidly under the direction of A. J. Dennick, superintendent. About twelve or fifteen men are working and the progress toward completion can be easily noted from day to day. The floor joists are all in place and the second walls will now begin to go up. They were to be torn down, except the west side, which was intact.

"The house will be one of the strongest ever seen. Three stone walls clear across the building will support the floor. The heavy twelve inch joists are strapped with iron bars to the walls and two inch steel rods run through the house north and south. New stone columns are being put up in place of the old ones which were damaged by fire.

"The general plan of the house has been often explained in the paper. It will be 50 x 100 feet. The stage in the west end, the balcony and other details are familiar to the public mind. There will be a flat floor space 62 x 64 which will seat upwards of 600 people. The capacity of the house before was only 300. Now there will be a balcony supported by an iron truss instead of columns. Everything about the house will be modern and up-to-date." (Weekly Times Star, 15 April 1904)

"It is probable that telescope seats, one of the latest and most comfortable kind of chairs, will be placed in the parquet. The stage is large enough for the stage settings of traveling companies, thus making it quite an improvement over the old one. The front has been finished in a unique design.

"Mr. Dennick says that acoustic properties of the house are going to be excellent. One of the best places to hear and see will be in the first rows of the gallery. This is a structure that Sedan may well be proud of, and her citizens will certainly enjoy many first-class entertainments under its roof." (Weekly Times Star, 15 July 1904)

"The Woman in Red" was the first play presented at the new opera house in August 1904. The play was performed by the Lyceum Stock Company, the scenery was furnished by the Kansas City Scenic Company. The opera house hosted many plays, vaudeville acts, lyceums, graduations, meetings and other gatherings between 1904 and 1919, when the AOUW sold its interest to Ackarman. In 1921, only two events occurred at the opera house, one was the Peru Dramatic Company's presentation of "A Little Clodhopper" and the other was the annual chrysanthemum show sponsored by the Christian Church. (Sedan Times Star; 7 April 1921, 24 November 1921)

After 1919, clubs and organizations began to meet at various restaurants, churches, the courthouse and the school auditorium instead of the opera house. In 1921, the American Theater movie house was built in Sedan. In addition to showing the latest movies, the American Theater offered musical productions and hosted the annual businessmen's lyceum lecture course. The lecture course originated around the turn of the century at the Sedan Opera House. The American Theater showed the latest moving pictures and was heavily patronized.

Eli Ackarman operated an implement and storage business in the lower floor of the opera house from 1904 until 1928. Ackarman rented the building to G. Carlin Bain from 1928 through 1946. Bain opened the Square Deal Produce on the first floor of the building in 1928. In 1937, Bain opened a GMC and Pontiac car dealership in the building, the interior space was basically unchanged for this business. Bain bought the building from Ackarman's daughter Beth in 1946.

After World War II the first floor of the building was used as an armory for the Tank Company and the 353rd Infantry Regiment Reserves, and the second floor was used as a roller skating rink. The rink was owned by three different people and operated until the late fifties. It was during this period that the stage was torn down and the chairs taken up. The remains of the upper part of the stage is still visible along the side walls. The maple flooring is intact but damaged in a few places as a result of roof leakage. The original balcony is extant but appears unsafe.

Bain sold the building back to Beth Ackarman Dungan in 1961, and the building was used for storage. In 1980, Beth and Horace Dungan sold the building to the City of Sedan for \$10,000 in cash and a gift of \$10,000.

The Emmett Kelly Museum moved into three rooms on the building's first floor in 1980. Emmett Leo Kelly (1898-1979) created Weary Willie the Clown, the famous sad clown. Kelly was born in Sedan, but moved to Missouri with his parents while still a young boy. Kelly entered the circus in the 1920s, joining Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey in 1942. Much of the material in the museum relates to Kelly's career with Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey.