Register of Historic Kansas Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating individual properties and districts. The format is similar to the National Register of Historic Places form. 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. Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Potter’s Opera House
other names/site number Potter’s Hall; Coolidge Masonic Lodge; 075-1140-00002

2. Location

street & number 110 Walnut Street
not for publication

city or town Coolidge

state Kansas code KS county Hamilton code 075 zip code 67836

3-4. Certification

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

____________________________________
Signature of certifying official

Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

X private

public - Local

public - State

public - Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

X building(s)

district

site

structure

object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing Noncontributing

1 buildings
district

site

structure

object

1 Total
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Property</th>
<th>Hamilton Co., KS</th>
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<tr>
<th>Name of related multiple property listing</th>
<th>Number of contributing resources previously listed in the State Register</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Enter &quot;N/A&quot; if property is not part of a multiple property listing)</td>
<td>0</td>
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**6. Function or Use**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historic Functions</th>
<th>Current Functions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recreation and Culture: Music Facility, Theatre</td>
<td>Vacant/Not in Use</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social: Meeting Hall</td>
<td>Vacant/Work in Progress</td>
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**7. Description**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Architectural Classification</th>
<th>Materials</th>
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<tr>
<td>Late Victorian: Italianate</td>
<td>foundation: Stone: Limestone; Concrete</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other: Vernacular 2-story limestone</td>
<td>walls: Stone: Limestone</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>roof: Asphalt</td>
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<td>other:</td>
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**Narrative Description** *(Describe the current physical appearance of the property.)*

(Built in 1886, the two-story Potter Opera House is located at 110 Walnut Street in Coolidge, Hamilton County, Kansas. It is situated at the southeast corner of Walnut Street and Wheeler Avenue on a parcel measuring .378 acres. It was once surrounded by other buildings of similar construction and character, but most are now gone. The Silver Star Hotel, for example, was one of the most significant neighboring buildings that was razed in the 1960s. Only a few commercial buildings from the city’s heyday in the mid-1880s remain.)*

**Summary Paragraph** *(Briefly describe the overall characteristics of the property and its location, setting, and size.)*

The building measures 26’ by 60’ and was constructed of locally quarried limestone. It features a hipped roof, which is covered with asphalt shingles. It is possible the building originally featured a third story, although newspaper accounts are conflicting and there is no photographic evidence of its original appearance.*
The west (front) elevation features a recessed center entrance with double wood doors. Two storefront columns flank the entrance and large storefront windows have been boarded and sheet rocked. The first-story limestone on either side of the storefront is tooled and stylized, and this type of masonry is not found elsewhere on the building. Above the storefront on second story are two segmental-arch windows. The south window retains its original two-over-two, double-hung wood sashes, but the north window has been replaced. Between the windows is what appears to have been a door opening that has been filled in with limestone. These three openings feature raised stone sills and raised segmental arch lintels. Originally, the west elevation contained a flat roof porch that extended outward from the building.

The north (side) elevation faces Wheeler Avenue. The first story has no window or door openings, although one opening at the northwest corner has been filled in with limestone. This opening could have been a window or a door. A raised stone (check material) course separates the first and second stories. There are six segmental-arch windows on the second story. The windows retain their original two-over-two, double-hung wood sashes.

The east (rear) elevation has a single door located in the center of first story that is flanked by two rectangular windows. There is one segmental-arch window, with two-over-two double-hung wood sashes, on the second floor. There is an outline of a door opening on the second story that has been filled in with stone. It is assumed that the sealed openings were sealed during the years when the building functioned as the Masonic Lodge.

The south (side) elevation has only one arched window on the second floor. It contains two-over-two double-hung wood sashes.

The building’s foundation is limestone. The solid foundation is more than a foot deep and approximately 22 inches wide. In about 1993 when the current owner purchased the building, concrete was poured against the foundation to stabilize the structure. This concrete foundation rises approximately 24 inches above the ground; footers are approximately six inches deep and extend approximately 24 inches away from each elevation.

**Interior**

Overall, the building has an open floorplan on both the first and second floors to accommodate a variety of needs. Many ornamental architectural features still exist such as door knobs and door hinges.

The main entrance to the first floor is through the inset double doors on the west elevation facing Walnut Street. Above the doors is a functional transom window. The storefront windows have been removed and replaced with framed-in sheetrock. The original storefront framing and cast-iron supports remain. The first floor generally features one large space, a small bathroom at the rear along the east wall, and an enclosed staircase to the second floor along the south wall. A wall was added to enclose the staircase. The date of this alteration is unknown but likely was done during the mid-20th century. The floors are the original five-inch fir planks currently covered with carpeting. The walls are smooth-finished plaster. The first-floor ceiling is made of painted tongue-and-groove wood slats that measure approximately two inches wide. Access to the unfinished basement is through a cutout in the floor at the southwest corner of the first floor.

The second floor is dominated by one large space where events and gatherings were held and where, after they purchased the building in 1892, the Masons held their meetings. The wood staircase from the first floor terminates at the southwest corner where there is a small vestibule, which leads into the hall space. It has an open plan with arched, double-hung windows on the north, east, and west walls. The walls are smooth-finished plaster. A key architectural feature of the second floor space is the stamped metal ceiling, which adorns the entire space. This ceiling has no fewer than five patterns stamped into the metal and finished with white paint. The floor is made of five-inch fir planks that are currently covered with carpeting.

The building has an unfinished, full-height basement with a dirt and stone floor. Historically, one accessed the basement through an exterior cellar-type door centered along the north elevation, but this entrance has been sealed. Today, one accesses the basement through a cutout in the floor and a below-grade staircase at the
southwest corner of the first floor. Examination of the north foundation wall suggests that there were once four
tall window openings — two on each side of the entrance. Like the entrance, these windows have been filled
with stone and no trace of them is evident from the exterior.

The building’s electrical wiring was upgraded in approximately 1995-1996 when Charles Lennen purchased the
building. The kitchen stove and heating units run on propane.

Integrity

The building retains its essential form and characteristics from the late nineteenth century. It is possible the
building originally featured a third story, although newspaper accounts are conflicting and there is no
photographic evidence of its original appearance.
### 8. Statement of Significance

#### Applicable Criteria

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#### Criteria Considerations

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<td>Property is: N/A</td>
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#### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Social History</th>
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#### Period of Significance

1886 - 1961

#### Significant Dates

1886 / Construction
1892 / function changed to Masonic hall

#### Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above)

| N/A |

#### Cultural Affiliation

| N/A |

#### Architect/Builder

| Potter, Garner T. (developer) |
| Unknown (builder) |

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**Period of Significance (justification)**

The building’s period of significance begins with its construction in 1886 and extends to 1961. The building was sold to the local Masonic Lodge, #316 in 1892 and functioned as their social hall until the 1985. Therefore, the Period of Significance extends to 1961 – the fifty-year cut-off.

**Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)**

N/A
Narrative Statement of Significance

Summary (Provide a summary paragraph that notes under what criteria the property is nominated.)

Potter’s Opera House, built in 1886, is one of only a few commercial buildings that remain from the city’s heyday in the mid-1880s. The building is nominated to the Register of Historic Kansas Places under Criterion A in the area of social history. When it was first built, it served an important community function as a place where churches could hold religious services and where school children could attend class. As other buildings were constructed, this building’s function shifted to that of a meeting hall, community center, and entertainment venue.

Elaboration

Today, Hamilton County consists of three communities – Kendall, Coolidge, and Syracuse, the county seat. During the county’s early history in the 1870s and 1880s, however, many communities dotted the landscape. The Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad was constructed through Hamilton County in 1871-72, and with this came a flurry of advertising by the railroad encouraging easterners to relocate to Kansas. A group of families from Syracuse, New York, arrived in the small railroad town of Hollidaysburg (named after railroad president C. K. Holliday) in March of 1873, and soon thereafter renamed the town Syracuse. Like Syracuse, Coolidge developed because of the railroad and was named after another railroad president T. J. Coolidge.¹

It was located along the Arkansas River, and travelers along the Santa Fe Trail had passed through this area during the mid-nineteenth century. The town experienced tremendous growth within just a few years – primarily as a result of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe railroad facilities built there and the nearby cattle trails. The railroad built a roundhouse, machine shops, passenger and freight depots, a hotel, and tenement housing in the early 1880s. Fred Harvey opened a restaurant along the railroad line in 1886, the same year the city was incorporated. Coolidge’s population grew rapidly from just a few hundred to a few thousand residents in less than a decade. (See Figure 1)

The local newspapers of the period – namely the daily and weekly editions of the Coolidge Citizen – recall in vivid detail the excitement throughout the city as it strived to become the “most important railroad town in the upper Arkansas Valley.”² Advertisements lined the columns of the newspapers for builders, contractors, building materials, and architects, not to mention hotels, restaurants, and shops. The town was caught up in and eventually lost a county-seat dispute with Syracuse in 1888. It was within this period of intense and rapid growth that local blacksmith and entrepreneur Garner T. Potter built the town’s first meeting hall and entertainment space.

Potter was a blacksmith by trade and operated a shop that specialized in horseshoeing and wagon, carriage and plow work of all kinds. Advertisements for his business appeared in some issues of the 1886 Coolidge Citizen Weekly. Although his opera house / meeting hall was apparently never formally advertised in the 1886-1888 editions of the newspaper, it received regular mention in the local news and announcements section. Interestingly, the newspaper accounts conflict with one another regarding the appearance of the building. An article in the November 26, 1886 edition of the Coolidge Citizen Weekly describes the building as being under construction, having three stories and measuring 26 x 60 feet. Two months later, in the January 7, 1887 edition, it was again described as having three stories and a basement hotel and was occupied as follows: a basement restaurant; a schoolroom on the first floor; the second floor had a stage and scenery; the third floor was occupied by the I.O.O.F. lodge. However, a lengthy article about the city’s prominent buildings

¹ “Annual Meetings, Directors, and Officers Report.” Topeka: Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway, 1902.
² “Coolidge As It Is! Other Prominent Buildings,” Coolidge Citizen Weekly, 2 March 1888. The local newspapers provide the one of the only options for primary source documentation. Coolidge was not documented by Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, and no historic images of the Potter Opera House have been found.
published March 2, 1888 describes Potter’s Opera House as a “handsome stone structure of two stories and a basement, the second floor fitted up in a unique manner with a stage and necessary paraphernalia…”

When it was first built, it served an important community function as a place where churches could hold religious services and where school children could attend class. Surprisingly, there are few references in the local newspapers to theatrical performances held at the building and those are generally limited to the building’s first year of existence. As construction on the building was being completed in late 1886, the Coolidge Citizen Weekly noted that “arrangements are being made where by Coolidge is to be added to the Western Theatrical Association Circuit,” and that the association’s president Will J. Burgess “has completed arrangements to secure the second floor of the Potter building for giving entertainments of the above description.”³ Two weeks later, the newspaper announced that “Potter’s Opera House will be opened by the 4-11-44 minstrels.”⁴ No other references to this theater association or traveling acts were noted in newspapers between 1886 and 1888.

As Potter’s Opera House was celebrating its opening, the newspaper boasted of local developer E. H. Peck’s plans for a bigger and costlier opera house to be located at the corner of Coolidge and Main. At the same time, Peck, who apparently had considerable local influence, was negotiating with the City of Coolidge to supply the town with water. On December 7, 1887, it was reported that the city council had voted to grant Peck a “franchise for a term of fifty years...for supplying our town with water.”⁵ Peck’s Opera House opened in the summer of 1888 only to burn down after just one performance.⁶

Beyond its sporadic use as an entertainment venue, Potter’s building served an important function early in its history. Before other buildings were constructed in Coolidge, Potter’s building served as a meeting hall, community center, and even hosted school classes and church services. The first floor served as a schoolroom for a time during 1887 until the town’s first school building was built in 1887 and 1888.⁷ Other events held at Potter’s hall included weekly Presbyterian church services, masquerade balls, local political meetings, readings and debates, and suppers.

Coolidge’s tremendous building boom was beginning to wane by the late 1880s. The impact of the slowdown on Potter and his hall is not fully known, but the newspaper indicates by late 1888 the Masons were regularly meeting there. Additionally, Potter took in “a few dimes each evening by converting his hall into a skating rink.”⁸ The Masons purchased Potter’s building on July 1, 1892. Their lodge was located on the second floor, which still reflects their use. Research has not yet uncovered the function of the first floor during the twentieth century. In 1985, Coolidge Lodge #316 merged with a lodge in Syracuse, and they sold the building the following year on November 26, 1986.

Perhaps owing to the late 1880s slowdown, the small town, so dependent on the railroad for its success and development, became involved in a dispute with the AT&SF railroad over local taxes. On September 5, 1890, the railroad removed its division point to Syracuse and its records to La Junta, Colorado. The roundhouse,

³ Coolidge Citizen Weekly, 24 December 1886.  
⁴ Coolidge Citizen Weekly, 7 January 1887.  
⁵ Coolidge Citizen Weekly, 2 December 1887. Water was a topic of considerable concern, and articles appear nearly every edition of the local newspaper about well levels. The newspapers, and E. H. Peck himself, promoted the artesian wells and the supposed abundance of underground sources of water. In 1886, Peck built a massive brick and stone water tower north of the town, which is still partially extant, and laid piping throughout the town in the subsequent years.  
⁶ Coolidge Citizen Weekly, 31 August 1888.  
⁷ Coolidge Citizen Weekly, 7 January 1887 and History of Coolidge, (Kansas) 1866-1986 (City of Coolidge, 1986), p. 33. The two-story stone school building, which is no longer extant, was designed and built by the local firm Covey and Bell. This firm drew up plans and built several buildings in Coolidge during the mid-1880s boom. The Coolidge Citizen Weekly, February 10, 1888 edition, noted that M. A. Bell had previously served as the Superintendent of the cabinet and building department of the Pennsylvania Lumber Company of Ironton, Ohio.  
⁸ Coolidge Citizen Daily, 3 November 1888.
Harvey House Hotel, and a number of residences were removed to Syracuse. Coolidge would never be the same.

By the turn of the twentieth century, many buildings that sat vacant had been demolished or had burned. The few hundred remaining residents depended upon agriculture, and Coolidge became a grain storage depot along the railroad line. This area was hit hard during the 1930s Dust Bowl, but rebounded to a brief period of agricultural prosperity, as evidenced by the mid-century concrete grain elevators next to the railroad tracks. Today, fewer than 100 people remain in Coolidge. The school closed in 1969, and there is no grocery store or even a gas station. Residents trek to Garden City or Lamar, Colorado for most services.

Summary

Built in 1886, Potter’s Opera House is one of only a few commercial buildings that remain from the city’s heyday in the mid-1880s. The building is nominated to the Register of Historic Kansas Places under Criterion A in the area of social history. When it first opened, it served an important community function as a place where churches could hold religious services and where school children could attend class. As other buildings were constructed, this building’s function shifted to that of a meeting hall, community center, and entertainment venue. Its early history embodies the development of Coolidge and the aspirations of its citizens.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form)


Coolidge Citizen Weekly. Coolidge, Kansas. September 17, 1886; November 26, 1886; December 24, 1886; January 7, 1887; January 14, 1887; January 21, 1887; November 11, 1887; November 18, 1887; December 2, 1887; December 16, 1887; January 6, 1888; January 20, 1888; February 10, 1888; March 2, 1888; March 16, 1888; May 4, 1888; May 18, 1888; August 31, 1888.


**Verbal Boundary Description** (describe the boundaries of the property)

Generally, the property is located just 1 block north of HWY 50 on 3 lots at the corner of Wheeler & Walnut.

Legal Description: Lot 1, and pt 2 and 3, Block 7, Coolidge City and Lots 7 and part of 8 South of Opera House.

**Boundary Justification** (explain why the boundaries were selected)

The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the Potter building.
11. Form Prepared By

name/title   Barbara McCullough-Jones
organization  Coolidge Preservation
street & number   1212 W 9th Street
city or town   Tempe
state     AZ     zip code  85281
e-mail   barbimj@gmail.com

name/title   Lori Lennen
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city or town   Phoenix
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e-mail   lorilennen@yahoo.com

name/title   Sarah Martin, National / State Register Coordinator
organization  Kansas Historical Society
street & number   6425 SW 6th Avenue
city or town   Topeka
state     KS     zip code  66615
e-mail

Additional Documentation
Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property’s location.
- **Continuation Sheets**

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11 We are in the process of organizing this project under the name “Coolidge Preservation”. We have secured the URL www.coolidgepreservation.org to introduce the project and to have a means for interested parties to support restoration of the Potter Opera House and other potential projects throughout Coolidge Kansas.
Photographs:

Name of Property: Potter’s Opera House  
City or Vicinity: Coolidge  
County: Hamilton  
State: Kansas  
Photographer: Sarah Martin  
Date Photographed: December 14, 2010

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

1 of 10  West (front) and south (side) elevations, facing NE  
2 of 10  West (front) and north (side) elevations, facing SE  
3 of 10  North (side) and east (rear) elevations, facing W  
4 of 10  Overview of building’s environs, showing the east (rear) elevation, facing W  
5 of 10  South (side) and east (rear) elevations, facing N  
6 of 10  Entrance on west (front) elevation, facing E  
7 of 10  Interior, first floor, facing W toward main entrance  
8 of 10  Interior, second floor lodge space, facing E  
9 of 10  Interior, second floor lodge space, facing NW  
10 of 10  Interior, attic space above second floor ceiling

Property Owner:

(name  Larue Lennen (and daughter Lori Lennen and son Mike Lennen)  
street & number  111 Walnut Street  telephone  620-372-8671  
city or town  Coolidge  state  KS  zip code  67836)
Figure 1: Coolidge plat, 1880s Source: *History of Coolidge, (Kansas) 1886-1986* (City of Coolidge, 1986), 24-25.
Figure 2: Holly East (CO-KS) USGS Quad Map