

# KANSAS

Kansas State Historical Society  
Cultural Resources Division

KATHLEEN SEBELIUS, GOVERNOR

## REGISTER OF HISTORIC KANSAS PLACES

### CERTIFICATE OF LISTING

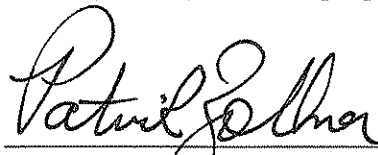
Established by K.S.A. 75-2721, the Register of Historic Kansas Places is the state's official list of properties deemed significant in our past. All Kansas properties nominated to the National Register of Historic Places are also listed in the state register.

Property Name: Dighton Opera House  
Address: 140 South Lane Street, Dighton, Kansas  
County: Lane

Owner(s): Walter Owen Herndon and Patricia Ann Herndon Revocable Trust (Owner)  
Address: 146 E. Long (& 140 S. Lane), Dighton, Kansas

This nomination was approved by the Kansas Historic Sites Board of Review for the Register of Historic Kansas Places on May 3, 2008.

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

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Patrick Zollner, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

5/7/08  
Date

# 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

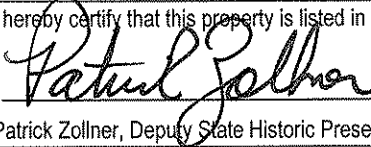
Historic name Dighton Opera House  
Other name/site number 101-0990-0001

## 2. Location

Street & number 140 South Lane Street  not for publication  
City or town Dighton  vicinity  
State Kansas Code KS County Lane Code 101 Zip code 67839

## 3.,4. Certification

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

  
Patrick Zollner, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

5/7/08  
Date

## 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	
<u>1</u>		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
<u>1</u>		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)

COMMERCE / TRADE: Department Store

RECREATION / CULTURE: Auditorium, Theater

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

VACANT/ WORK IN PROGRESS

---

**7. Description**

---

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> & EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY AMERICAN

---

MOVEMENTS: Commercial Style

---

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation: Concrete

---

Walls: Brick

---

Roof: SYNTHETICS: Fiberglass and Polyester Reinforced

---

Other:

---

**Narrative Description**

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

---

---

**8. Statement of Significance**

---

**Applicable Criteria**

(Mark "X" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for the State Register)

- 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 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.)

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

ENTERTAINMENT / RECREATION

---

SOCIAL HISTORY

---

COMMERCE

---

**Period of Significance**

1907-1950

---

**Significant Dates**

1907, 1950

---

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

---

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

---

**Architect/Builder**

J. L. Heckenlively - Architect

---

H. N. Duckworth - Builder

---

**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 # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

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

Name of repository:

Kansas State Historical Society

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreeage of Property** Less than one acre

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1	4	3	7	2	1	8	0	4	2	0	6	0	9	0																
Zone	Easting					Northing					3	Zone					Easting					Northing									
2																4															

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 Walter Owen Herndon and Patricia Ann Herndon Revocable Trust (Owner)  
Organization \_\_\_\_\_ Date July 12, 2007  
Street & number 146 E. Long (& 140 S. Lane) Telephone 620-397-2273  
City or town Dighton State KS Zip code 67839

**Property Owner**

Name Same as above  
Street & number \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
City or town \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip code \_\_\_\_\_

Register of Historic Kansas Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 7 Page 1

Dighton Opera House  
Dighton, Lane County, KS

---

**NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION**

The Dighton Opera House (1907) is a large two-story L-shaped brick building located on the southwest corner of Long Street (Highway 96) and Lane Street in the heart of Dighton's downtown commercial district. The building's storefronts open onto both Long Street and Lane Street. The building wraps around the Old First National Bank giving the appearance of the two being one complete building. Together they form the largest and oldest block of buildings in downtown Dighton.

*Exterior*

The exterior of the structure is a common red brick. On the west (side) and south (rear) elevations it is tied together with interlocking header courses every sixth stretcher course. On the street-facing exterior walls the bricks are corbelled out at the top as a belt course. The belts are corbelled out in one-inch increments creating a decorative pattern. Most second-story windows have been removed and destroyed, and the openings have been boarded up.

The single Long Street storefront has been modified. It includes a central single-door entrance flanked by infilled display and transom windows. The second floor includes four tall window openings (with transom openings) defined by stone lintels and sills. The original wood windows were one-over-one and double-hung.

There are four first-story storefronts facing Lane Street. The southernmost bay includes a central single entrance flanked by two tall, narrow windows that have been partially infilled with wood. The openings are arched and feature a keystone. The two central storefronts contained large display and transom windows that have been covered and infilled with modern materials. Lastly, the northernmost bay, which was once inset and is now infilled with wood and a modern door, is the entrance to the second floor opera house. The second floor contains six tall window openings (no transoms) defined by stone lintels and sills. The original wood windows were one-over-one and double-hung.

The south (rear) elevation is the rear of the opera house and faces an alleyway. There is a stepped parapet that is typical of theaters and opera houses. There are three historic wood windows with arched openings and brick sills still intact on second floor. A second floor door is located at the buildings' southwest corner, but the staircase has been removed. This elevation also features a ground floor entrance with an arched opening.

The west (side) elevation is obscured along the first story by a one-story building to which it is connected. The second floor is exposed and includes six arched window openings (no transoms) with brick sills. The original wood windows were one-over-one and double-hung. This elevation features little ornamentation.

*Interior*

The original configuration of spaces, including the auditorium, proscenium, entrance, ticket room, hallways, and lodge hall remains intact. Unfortunately in the 1940s, the original three-foot high stage was removed as were the raked platforms on which the original seating was placed. In 1978, when the windows became a problem by literally falling out onto the street below, the owner at the time removed

Register of Historic Kansas Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 7 Page 2

Dighton Opera House  
Dighton, Lane County, KS

---

all but one double-sash window and destroyed them. All but the one remaining window were boarded up with plywood. The same owner then removed the exterior staircase / fire escape on the rear (south) elevation that lead to the second floor.

Most of the changes to the interior of the second floor are believed to have been made around 1940. The seats were removed from the opera house and by the end of World War II it was used as a dance hall and roller skating rink. Five of the original doors and their hardware remain. Three doors are missing. The lodge hall moulding, trim, and platforms are still in place. The opera house room, the lodge hall, and the one hallway were all painted sea foam green, a popular color in the 1950s. One hallway was painted black sometime in the 1990s when the former owner planned to use it for a dark room. The tin ceiling in the lodge hall, one hallway, and entrance stairwell is intact and the majority of it is in good condition. However, the tin ceiling in the stairwell has sustained water damage to the point it has rusted away in a few places. In the 1990s, the plaster ceiling in the opera house auditorium was also damaged by water leaks causing some of the plaster to collapse. The second floor was closed to the public around 1950, and is currently used only as workspace and for storage. All of the original walls are still in place on the second floor.

The first floor operated as a mercantile and variety store until 1959, when it became a furniture store. By 1974, it had become a pool hall and in 1978, was turned into a tavern, which occupied the building until 1998. In 1978, the original bar from Dighton's American Legion Club was acquired and installed between a kitchen and the public area and is still in place. The kitchen area was expanded in 2003, and it became a family restaurant until 2005. In August 2006, the building again changed hands. The kitchen area is now used for a catering service.

Originally the first floor was one large L-shaped room with entrances on the north (Long Street) and the east (Lane Street). At the south end an 18-foot mezzanine extends across the entire width of the building. The mezzanine remains with approximately half of the western portion being enclosed. A partition was added in the north area in 1934 or 1935 when two different businesses (groceries in the south and a variety store in the north) shared the space. In the southeast corner is a small room under the mezzanine that was originally a storeroom for produce. After 1978, the storeroom was converted to a beauty shop. The connecting doorway was closed up and a bathroom added. From 1978 until 2007 this space was a beauty shop or a barbershop. The door frame is intact.

A small partition was added to the inside of the east entrance in 1978 to serve as a buffer to the weather. Two large plate glass windows in the east entrance area were closed with plywood. The frame work remains. Two other plate glass windows are still in use on the east side. On the north side the original configuration of the windows remains, but the glass is gone and the empty spaces were filled with plywood in 1978.

In the beginning the building was without electricity or plumbing. The building was cooled by the strategic placement of windows and heated by three fireplaces. Lighting was by means of a gas light plant shared by the opera house, First National Bank, and C. J. Van Keuren's store. In time the gas lights were replaced with electric about 1915, and gas heaters were installed sometime later. There was never any air conditioning on the second floor.

Register of Historic Kansas Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 8 Page 3

Dighton Opera House  
Dighton, Lane County, KS

---

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

*Summary*

The Dighton Opera House (1907) is being nominated to the Register of Historic Kansas Places because it is historically significant for its long association with the community life of Lane County. It was the common setting for all community events including religious district meetings, fraternal organization gatherings, graduations, academic and musical competitions, plays, and debates. It was the place to hear political speeches, community lectures, see a wrestling match or view the latest movie. In short, it was the community information and entertainment center. In addition, the building has housed numerous commercial businesses on the first floor.

*Elaboration*

Constructed in 1907, the building officially opened on April 13, 1908. The building has played a prominent part in the life of the community as a setting for social, school, religious, entertainment, political, fraternal and business activities throughout the years. Designed by architect, J. L. Heckenlively of Springfield, Missouri, and constructed by contractor, H. N. Duckworth of Larned, Kansas, it was a symbol of community pride for decades.

As early as 1901, there was talk of constructing an opera house in Dighton to accommodate the community's need for a meetinghouse. In 1907, C. F. Noll, J. H. Cavanaugh, D.B. King, William Baird, and James Owen (stockholders of the First National Bank) formed a new company and applied for a charter. Architect J. L. Heckenlively from Springfield, Missouri, was hired to draw up plans for a new opera house.<sup>1</sup> H. N. Duckworth was awarded the contract to erect the building.<sup>2</sup> Eleven railroad car loads of brick was shipped in from Coffeyville and work began on June 26, 1907. The *Dighton Herald* reported on February 6, 1908, that the community lodges in conjunction with the Odd Fellows had installed new furniture throughout the building making it one of the nicest halls in western Kansas. The mercantile area was filled with 2000 feet of counters and 1500 feet of extra wide shelving. The seats in the opera house section were on raised platforms, each platform being higher than the proceeding one. The backdrops and curtains met the public's favor. To celebrate the grand opening of the opera house Mr. and Mrs. Frank G. Gregory, well known in Kansas theatrical circles produced the famous play "The Castaway" with a cast of Dighton's local talent.

Local newspapers document nearly every public gathering at the opera house. A sampling of those accounts is included below:

---

<sup>1</sup> J. L. Heckenlively was a well-known architect who designed the Osceola Public School in Osceola, Missouri (1914-1915), the Ridgeway Apartments in Joplin, Missouri (1918)<sup>1</sup>, and Southwest Hospital in Springfield, Missouri (1914) to name a few.  
<sup>2</sup> H. N. Duckworth, an Elk County, Kansas native, established himself as one of the leading building contractors in southeast Kansas during the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Duckworth built the S. P. Gebhart House (1907-1910) in Pratt that is listed in the National Register.

Register of Historic Kansas Places  
Continuation Sheet

Dighton Opera House  
Dighton, Lane County, KS

Section Number 8 Page 4

---

The *Dighton Journal-Herald*, October 11, 1912, reported, "The Democratic Meeting at the Opera House was well attended. Mr. Jovett Shouse, candidate for State Senator was the first speaker. His talk showed that he was kept fully up with the progressive changes in public sentiment along with political lines – even being an advocate of women's suffrage. Congressman Neeley followed with an interesting talk about the workings of Congress and the powerful trusts and combinations which control legislative and administration of government."

On October 18, 1912, the *Dighton Journal-Herald* reported, "The largest crowd of this campaign assembled at the opera house for the Finley-Frizell meeting. E.E. Frizell, is the party's candidate for state senator. Frizell called attention to his 10 years continuous service as mayor of Larned. His remarks were devoted to answering the remarks of his opponent, with especial emphasis on the 'Statement No. 1' proposition. Gordon L. Finley, the republican candidate for Congress in this district began with a few personal remarks. Judge Finley then devoted considerable time to a review of the short comings and failures of the democratic party from a republican view."

Many theatrical stock companies performed at the opera house on a regular basis. Among them were Redpath Lyceum Bureau, the Crawford Opera Company, the Garrett Stock Co., the Fred Byer's Stock Co., the Bybee Stock Company, the Grandi Brothers Stock Co., and the Wallace Bruce Players. Claude Morris, a local barber, remembered giving Milburn Stone (of *Guns smoke* fame), a hair cut once when Stone was performing here.

Originally the first floor was one large L-shaped room with entrances on the north (Long Street) and the east (Lane Street). The Long Street storefront was the primary storefront for a mercantile business for many years. A partition was added in the north area in 1934 or 1935 when two different businesses (groceries in the south and a variety store in the north) shared the space. The Variety store became a furniture store in 1959. By 1974, it had become a pool hall and in 1978 was turned into a tavern, which occupied the building until 1998. The Odd Fellow's Lodge Hall was located above this space on the second floor. Access to the lodge hall was through the Lane Street opera house entrance.

The Dighton Opera House is highly visible, being one of the few two-storied buildings in town. It is the second oldest structure in the downtown area and is representative of early 20<sup>th</sup> century commercial architecture. The opera house continues to be a source of historical pride and interest in the community.



Register of Historic Kansas Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 9 Page 5

Dighton Opera House  
Dighton, Lane County, KS

---

**LIST OF RESOURCE MATERIAL**

Lane County Historical Museum (historical photographs, microfilm, and newspapers)

Lane County Register of Deeds

Newspapers

Lane County Herald, 1855-1887

Dighton Journal, 1887-1892

Dighton Herald, 1892-1911

Journal-Herald, 1911-1916

Dighton Herald, 1916-1926

Interviews and oral histories with long time residents, former owners, and employees

Donna & Forrest Schneider (Donna is the granddaughter of Hattie B. McCoy, who owned the property from April 14, 1927 to June 12, 1952) – Donna and Forrest operated the dance hall in the 1940s.

Josephine Boltz – A member of the high school class of 1923, whose graduation exercises were held in the opera house.

Jimmy Murphy & Estel Van Pelt – who worked at Niles Mercantile on the first floor of the opera house building (1940s)

Nina Haag – the ticket booth operator for dances in the 1940s

Delma Towns – who worked at the mercantile during the 1940s

Alvin Johnston – who remembered skating in the opera house in the 1940s

Richard Weiser – owner of the opera house from November 13, 1978 to October 15, 1998

Other Publications

Longstreth, Richard. *The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture*. New York: AltaMira Press, 2000.

Rosin, Elizabeth. *Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas*. National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form. 2004.

Connelley, William. *Standard History of Kansas and Kansans*. Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1918.

Register of Historic Kansas Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section Number 10 & Photos Page 6

Dighton Opera House  
Dighton, Lane County, KS

---

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

The legal description of the nominated property is as follows: South 73 ¼' of Lot 1 and all of Lot 2, Block 4, Schiereck's Addition, Dighton, Lane County, KS

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the opera house building.

**PHOTOGRAPIC INFORMATION**

Property Name: Dighton Opera House  
Location: Dighton, Lane County, KS  
Photographer: Sarah J. Martin  
Date: January 2008

- Photo 1: North elevation along Long Street (HWY 96), facing SE
- Photo 2: Southeast corner along Lane Street, showing rear of building, facing NW
- Photo 3: Storefronts along Lane Street, facing SW
- Photo 4: Overall view, facing NE
- Photo 5: Interior, entrance to opera house off of Lane Street, facing E
- Photo 6: Interior, stairs leading up to opera house, facing E
- Photo 7: Interior, second floor ticket booth
- Photo 8: Interior, second floor, double-door entrance into auditorium
- Photo 9: Interior, inside the opera house auditorium facing the double-door entrance
- Photo 10: Interior, inside the opera house showing the arch and former stage area
- Photo 11: Interior, second floor, Odd Fellows Hall, facing N
- Photo 12: Interior, first floor space that opens onto Long Street, facing N
- Photo 13: Interior, first floor space that opens onto Long Street, facing S
- Photo 14: Interior, first floor space that opens onto Lane Street, facing SW