

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received NOV 25 1986

date entered DEC 29 1986

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Camden Opera House Block

and or common

2. Location

street & number

not for publication

city, town Camden, N/A vicinity of

state Maine code 23 county Knox code 013

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Camden Village Corporation

street & number

city, town Camden, vicinity of state Maine

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Knox County Registry of Deeds

street & number

city, town Rockland, state Maine

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town state

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Camden Opera House Block is a multi-purpose brick structure, 3½ stories tall, overlooking the town common near the center of Camden's small business district. The building's dimensions are 60'X140', the shorter measurement belonging to the facade. Its low hipped roof and hipped dormers, and very restrained brick ornament--round and flat window arches, round-arched entry with moulded brick, wide frieze of yellow brick with dentils--characterize the transition between the Romanesque Revival of the 1880s-90s and the more austere neo-classicism of the 1890s-1910s that often appealed to builders of public and institutional buildings.

The building was constructed to house two stores, a post office and certain town services on the first floor, an Opera House and rooms for the Camden Business Men's Association on the second floor, and rooms for the Camden Board of Trade on the third floor. Today one store remains on the ground story, all other first-floor spaces having been purchased by the town. Camden originally had its assessor's offices, lock-up, and steam fire engine housed in the rear of the building. Today it maintains its town office in the former post office space, and its police station in the original town space in the very rear. This rear space was made over into the town office in 1932 by Portland architect E. Leander Higgins, and the present police station retains much Colonial Revival woodwork from this remodelling. The original store space near the rear corner of the building is now a town meeting hall, and is connected with both the police station and town office.

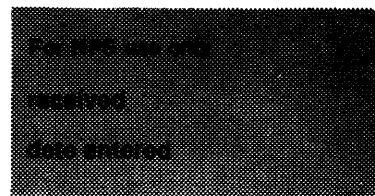
The Opera House and Business Men's Association rooms remain on the second floor. The third floor space (forward of the two-story Opera House) is now the Odd Fellow's Hall.

The building's exterior walls are of common red brick on a granite foundation, with moulded brick around windows and the Opera House entrance in the center of the facade. A wide frieze of yellow brick runs below the eave. The mortar joints were probably coated with red mortar originally, as a recent total repointing with Portland cement mortar preserves the red color. The brick has been sandblasted within the last decade, but damage appears to be minimal. The window sills and a string-course above the first floor are of local grey granite.

The facade window sash were originally 1/1, and most of the remainder were multi-paned. Most of these have been replaced by modern metal thermal-paned windows which reproduce the original muntin configurations using metal strips between the panes. The new windows do not noticeably reduce the pane dimensions in any opening. A few wooden windows survive in the unheated spaces--primarily the attic and stairwells. the original storefront in-fill on the facade has been replaced with modern glass and metal in-fill, but the openings retain their

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CAMDEN OPERA HOUSE BLOCK
Continuation sheet

Item number

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original configuration and overall character. A pediment was added over the entrance to the right of the arched entry in the east facade in 1932. The storefront on the side of the building near the rear retains its original in-fill of glass, cast iron, and wood. The facade of the town hall space (now the police station), also dating from 1932, retains its wooden multi-paned sash.

None of the ground floor interiors, with the exception of the police station and the lower lobby of the main staircase (remodelled in 1932), retain early finish. the original jail cell in the rear of the town hall space remains, however, and is used as a safe. All of the interior spaces above the first floor are well-preserved. The woodwork throughout is late-19th century stock millwork (door and window mouldings, chair rail, baseboards, railings, etc.), and is mostly painted. A long flight of stairs bisected by a wooden rail connects the first-floor entrance lobby with a large lobby on the second floor. Behind this lies the main floor of the Opera House and various related anterooms, including a dressing room with c. 1945 furnishings. A fire in 1945 damaged the Opera House interior, and was probably the reason why the original ornate plaster decoration about the presidium arch has now given way to a simple wide moulding, and the two upper boxes that once flanked the arch are missing. the original two lower boxes, almost level with the stage, survive unaltered. The original flat floor was probably replaced with the present tilted one at the same time. An original wrap-around balcony completes the space.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1893, 1932 **Builder/Architect** Elmer I. Thomas (1893); Leander Higgins (1932)

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Camden Opera House was one of the major buildings erected in Camden following a fire in 1892 which leveled the town's business district. It is a notable work by Maine's first university-trained architect, Elmer I. Thomas, one of the state's foremost designers. The sophisticated arrangement of fenestration and contrasting building materials creates a powerful composition.

The Camden fire of 1892, largely confined to the commercial district, destroyed over 50 businesses. As virtually all of these had been housed in wooden buildings, laws were passed immediately after the conflagration mandating brick as the material of reconstruction. The largest and most expensive brick block to go up in the fire's aftermath was the Opera House, owned by the Camden Village Corporation, which sold bonds to finance its construction. The building's programme was unusually varied for the period, calling for two stores, the post office, town services, two businessmen's organizations, and an Opera House (used both for entertainment and for town meetings) under the same long roof.

Camden Village and its environs had "succeeded" from the larger town of Camden just one year previous to the fire, forcing its rival village, Rockport, to reluctantly form a separate town government. There had thus been a need for a building to house town services and a proper town meeting place prior to the fire. Rockport had built a fine large wooden Opera House to host its own town meetings just prior to the conflagration, doubtless to the chagrin of its rival town.

Elmer I. Thomas of Lewiston (1863-96) received the Opera House commission. Thomas was in the midst of a meteoric state-wide practice at the time, and had designed a series of important buildings all over the state. Thomas often indulged in fairly delicate Colonial Revival or Neo-Classical ornamentation, and used a colorful and varied brick palette. The Opera House commission offered no opportunity to use expensive material or ornamentation, but by introducing a hipped roof and dormers, Thomas gave the building a very progressive look for the mid-coastal Maine of 1893, complimenting its progressive multi-use programme.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Camden Herald, February 23, 1984; June 12, 1986.
 Elmer I. Thomas file, Maine Historic Preservation Commission.
 Picturesque Camden and Its Environs, Camden: 1899.
 The Camden Directory, 1894-95, A. B. Sparrow, ed., Shirley Village, Mass, 1894, pp. 6-9.
 History of Camden and Rockland, Maine, Reuel Robinson, Camden: Camden Publishing Co., 1907.
 pp. 493-505.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property Less than 1 acre

Quadrangle name Camden

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

1	9	4	9	4	6	6	0	4	8	9	4	8	5	0
Zone		Easting						Northing						

B

Zone		Easting						Northing						

C

Zone		Easting						Northing						

D

Zone		Easting						Northing						

E

Zone		Easting						Northing						

F

Zone		Easting						Northing						

G

Zone		Easting						Northing						

H

Zone		Easting						Northing						

Verbal boundary description and justification

Assessor's Map 3, Lot 16

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code

state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Gregory Clancey/Edited by Roger G. Reed, Architectural Historian

organization Maine Historic Preservation Commission date September, 1986

street & number 55 Capitol Street, Station #65 telephone 207/289-2132

city or town Augusta, state Maine 04333

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service

State Historic Preservation Officer signature *E. S. Fitts*

title S.H.P.O. date 11/17/86

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

for Allouez Byer **Entered in the National Register** date 12.29.86
 Keeper of the National Register

Attest: _____ date _____

Chief of Registration