FINAL

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.

istoric name Vurpillat's Opera House	
other names/site number N/A	
2. Location	
treet & number Corner of Market and Main Streets	N/A not for publication
city or town Winamac	N/A_ vicinity
state <u>Indiana</u> code <u>IN</u> county <u>Pulaski</u> code	
3. State/Federal Agency Certification	
As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in this toric Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36CFR Part 60. In my meets	the National Register of y opinion, the property significant
Signature of certifying official/Title Date	
State or Federal agency and bureau	
4. National Park Service Certification	
hereby certify that the property is: currently entered in the National Register. currently See continuation sheet. Signature of the Keeper signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
☐ determined eligible for the National Register	
See continuation sheet.	
determined not eligible for the National Register	

Name of Property			County and State		
5. Classification					
Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply) ⊠ private Category of Property (Check only one box) ⊠ building		Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count Contributing Noncontributing			
☐ public-local ☐ public-State	☐ district ☐ site	1	0	buildings	
public-Federal	☐ structure	0	0	sites	
	□ object	0	0	structures	
		0	0	objects	
		1	0	Total	
Name of related multiple p		Number of contribe	uting resources previo	ously listed	
N/.	Α	0			
6. Function or Use					
Historic Functions (Enter categories from instruction	ns)	Current Functions (Enter categories from ins	tructions)		
RECREATION/CULTU	•	VACANT			
COMMERCE/TRADE	, -				
COMMERCE/TRADE					
COMMERCE/TRADE					
RECREATION/CULTU	RE Auditorium				
7. Description				.,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,	
Architectural Classificati (Enter categories from instruction		Materials (Enter categories from ir	structions)		
19th & 20th c. REVIVALS: Second Empire		foundation	STONE: Lir	mestone	
		walls	BRIC	K	
		roof	STONE:	Slate	
		other	METAL:	Tin	
			METAL: Ca	set Iron	

Narrative Description

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

Vurpilla Name of	t's Opera House Property	Pulaski IN County and State
8. Stat	tement of Significance	
(Mark "x	able National Register Criteria " in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property onal Register listing.) Property is associated with events that have made	Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions) ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION
	a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.	ARCHITECTURE
□В	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.	Period of Significance 1883-1915
	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.	Significant Dates
	a Considerations	Significant Dates
(Mark "x"	in all the boxes that apply.) Property is:	1883 1915
_ A	owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.	Significant Person
⊓В	removed from its original location.	(Complete if Criterion B is marked above) N/A
□ C	a birthplace or grave.	Cultural Affiliation
_ D	a cemetery.	N/A
_ 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.	Architect/Builder
		Rhodes, James, architect
		Vurpillat, Frank, builder
Narrati (Explain t	ve Statement of Significance he significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)	
	r Bibliographic References	
	lraphy books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on is documentation on file (NPS):	one or more continuation sheets.) Primary location of additional data:
	ninary determination of individual listing (36 67) has been requested	☐ State Historic Preservation Office
_ previ	ously listed in the National Register	☐ Other State agency
□ previ Reg	ously determined eligible by the National ister	☐ Federal agency
_	gnated a National Historic Landmark	☐ Local government
□ recoi	rded by Historic American Buildings Survey	☐ University
recor Reco	rded by Historic American Engineering ord #	☐ Other Name of repository:

	•	
10. Geographical Data		
Acreage of Property less than one acre		
UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)		
1	Zone Easting See continuation sheet	Northing
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 Lynda Irving, County Historian		<u></u>
organization Pulaski County Historical Society	date	01-06-2001
	telephone	(219) 946-3432/
city or town Winamac	•	(219) 946-3135 zip code 46996
Additional Documentation		
Submit the following items with the completed form: Continuation Sheets		
Maps		
A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the A Sketch map for historic districts and properties have		us 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 Pulaski County Historical Society		
street & number PO Box 135	telephone	
city or town Winamac	state Indiana	zip code 46996

Pulaski

County and State

IN

Vurpillat's Opera House

Name of Property

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.

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Vurpillat's Opera House Pulaski County, Indiana

Narrative Description

In 1882 Joseph D. Vurpillat commissioned his brother Frank Vurpillat, a master carpenter, to erect a "brick block" in Winamac, Indiana. It's situated on the northeast corner of Main and Market streets north of the courthouse square on lot 110 of the original town plat. Designed by James Rhodes, the architectural style is Late Victorian, Second Empire mansard.

The block is 46 by 90 feet, fronting south, three stories high with a partial basement. It was built of brick with a limestone foundation and slate mansard roof, with metal decorative details. The roof has a slight pitch, peaked in the center, which allows water to drain to the sides and then toward the north end of the building. Originally a tin roof, it is now tar and seal.

Exterior

The southern facade (Photo 1) faces the courthouse square and fronts on Main Street. The foundation, which is random laid limestone, cannot be seen from the street. The ground floor has been changed with non-historic materials, the original windows and doors replaced with modern plate glass and the brick partially covered with metal sheathing and plywood. The only original architectural element visible is a cast iron fluted column on the southwest corner at the store entrance, however other columns are hidden under the more recent remodeling. The entrance is inset at an angle with modern plate glass doors. There are five one over one double hung sash windows on the second floor (Photo 6). They have decorative pressed metal window hoods with Greek rosette medallions at the peak of the window hoods. The southeast, southwest and northwest corners on the second floor have small square decorative panels (Photo 7). On the third story, the base of the mansard roof flows into an integrated gutter (Photo 6) of pressed metal with intermediate cornices. There are larger corbel brackets that complete the guttering at the corners. The second empire roof has four dormer bays. The central dormer features three narrow double hung arched windows capped by a triangular Greek pediment with a tin acrotria at its peak. The pediment is further embellished with decorative pilasters and pressed tin geometric figures. Two circular convex elements are missing from the peak. The other three dormers contain double hung, arched windows with surrounds similar to the large dormer.

On the west side (Photos 2, 3) two of the original windows on the ground floor have been bricked over. There is one store front on the north end of the building. The opera house entrance on the west side has suffered extensive changes with the possible exception of the door which may be original. It has fourteen small inset panels plus a four light panel near the top of the door (Photo 8). Over the door and hidden from the outside by modern wood paneling are two stationary windows each approximately 48 x 24 inches placed one over the other. The lower one retains the original clear glass in a two light, side by side configuration. Although this part of the building has been extensively remodeled and has lost its original style, much of the original

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facade is still intact and can be recovered. There are eleven double hung sash windows and their surrounds on the second floor identical to those on the south facade. The west side of the Second Empire roof has five dormer bays identical to the three smaller bays on the south. There are also two slender exterior brick chimneys. A window near the southwest corner has been extended through the guttering to accommodate a cast iron fire escape which was placed there after 1910 and removed during the 1980's.

The north end of the building is brick (Photo 4). The ground floor adjoins a modern bank building. Near the center of the second floor there is a one over one double hung sash window which is hidden from view by the adjacent bank building. The second and third floors are extremely simple with a faded Mail Pouch advertisement that can be viewed from Market Street.

The east side of the opera house (Photo 5) adjoins a two story brick building which was erected in 1904 to accommodate Indiana's new fire laws by providing a second exit for the opera house. The third floor has five one over one double hung sash windows with flat brick arches. The fire escape door exiting onto the roof of the adjacent brick building is protected by an enclosed shed-like structure. There are also three brick chimneys evenly spaced along the wall. All windows on the third floor have been covered with plywood.

The exterior of the second and third floors seems to be almost original in appearance with the exception of a missing chimney on the northwest end and two missing windows which were not replaced after the 1915 fire destroyed the southwest corner of the empire roof (Photo 2). These missing windows disrupt the symmetry of the mansard roof in that area. Another peculiarity of this building is that the mansard roof is on the south and west facades only. Adjacent buildings present when the opera house was built in 1882 may have dictated its appearance.

Interior

Two business rooms are on the first floor. The room fronting south is 45° x 65° and the one fronting west is 24° x 45° . At the present time they are connected by a doorway which was added in 1969. There is access to the second floor via a stairway in the northeast corner of the larger south business room. The first floor has been gutted and remodeled several times and all original appearance has been lost. There is some water damage in the southeast corner of the ceiling in the south room due to a leaky roof.

The west outside entrance and stairway (Photo 8) to the second floor are used in common with the opera house. The second story has a center hallway with two banks of offices. There are seven original doorways topped by transoms opening into the hallway. However, several smaller more modern doors were added when some offices were transformed into apartments during the 1940's. Some partitions and half walls were added at that time to accommodate more tenants. The majority of the doors are paneled with the exception of two office doors which still retain a

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single light in the upper half and panels in the lower. Some original hardware is still in use, particularly on the opera house stairway paneled doors. The woodwork in this area is very plain and the entire second floor is in need of extensive repair due to water damage and owner neglect. It is likely that this floor has been unused, except for storage, since 1960.

The staircase leading from the second floor to the opera house (Photo 9) has tongue and groove beadboard wainscoting. One section of original banister remains on the first landing. There are two steps and another smaller landing before turning 90 degrees to ascend to the third floor. There the stairwell is protected by a tongue and groove knee wall along the north and west edges of the stairs. Two decorative balusters support the knee wall (Photo 10). The opera house is 45' x 90' taking in the entire floor. Approximately midway between the floor and ceiling, the south and west walls angle inward slightly to show the pitch of the mansard roof. The focal point is the stage (Photos 11, 12). Approximately 20 feet deep, it sits at the north end of the room. The front of the stage is decorated with raised millwork, faux finished to have the look of oak with a deeper inset resembling birdseye maple. Doric columns resting on milled platform bases are on either side of the stage retain the original paint finish of gold and white striping. Rounded wood moldings painted the same gold as the columns act as a double frame for the proscenium of the stage. The stage is centered between two symmetrical convex staging areas (Photo 13) featuring arched doorways. One original tongue and groove arched door is intact. Inside each area there are stairs leading to the stage and another set of stairs leading to the top scenery slots which are still in place. A rear staircase leading from the northeast corner of the stage to the second floor has been removed to accommodate changes on the second floor. A floodlight trough runs across the front of the stage and the brick wall is visible at the back of the stage. Interior furnishings have been removed. Changes on the third floor are minimal, the exceptions being the introduction of electric lighting which replaced gaslight around 1898, and additional fire exits. The primary fire exit was cut into the east wall 11 feet north of the main opera house stairway in 1904. This fire exit, opening onto the roof of the adjacent two-story structure, utilizes a stairway in that building. Although the stairway is blocked from use at this time it is still intact and exits on Main Street on the east side of the Vurpillat Opera House. Another fire escape utilizing an existing window on the west side of the seating area was installed after 1910. The window was extended to floor level and an iron ladder attached to the outside of the building descended to the sidewalk on Market Street.

Narrative Statement of Significance

The Vurpillat opera house meets the National Register criteria A and C in the themes of entertainment, recreation, commerce and architecture. Built in 1882 the opera house fulfills criteria C as an excellent example of the Second Empire or French Mansard style of architecture

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which flourished briefly in Indiana after the Civil War and is becoming increasingly rare in the state. It is also indicative of a general feeling of economic well being and growth in Winamac. Not only was there a need for business rooms and professional offices, the people felt prosperous enough to attend plays and other entertainment. The opera house became a central gathering point for community activity, whether it was recreational, social, political or commercial.

Historical Significance

On Jan. 28, 1882, an article appeared in the local newspaper heralding "another grand improvement for Winamac, and one worthy of its enterprising owner." The improvement was a Second Empire brick building and the owner was Joseph D. Vurpillat, a French Canadian immigrant who had come to Monterey, Indiana with his parents in 1850. From the age of seven until his death at 84, he remained a continuous resident of Pulaski County except for two years spent in Logansport, Indiana while he was a child. As a young man he entered the mercantile business in Winamac, first in partnership and later for himself. It was while he was in the hardware business in 1882 that the three-story building known as Vurpillat's Opera House was erected. He later entered politics and was elected county treasurer in 1890 serving two terms in that office. After leaving the public arena in 1894, he re-entered the business sector and enjoyed continued success until his retirement in August 1905. He remained in Winamac until his death on July 4, 1927. Today, his greatest contribution to Winamac still stands on the corner of Main and Market Streets - the Vurpillat Opera House building.

The roots of the opera house go back to the construction of the Chicago and Cincinnati Railroad in 1860-61. Not only did the railroad expand commercial opportunities, it also influenced the growth and appearance of the community. One of the many benefits of the railroad was the importation of brick. The first brick building in Winamac was the courthouse whose construction had been delayed until the railroad was available to bring in the necessary material. Completed in 1862, the courthouse was followed by a private dwelling, the jail, and, in 1872, a simple twostory business building which is still in use. Because all brick had to be imported, it was not a popular building material until 1879, when a period of rapid growth and expanding economy prompted the erection of the first large business block in Winamac. It prospered and led to further competition among the young entrepreneurs of Winamac. In December 1880 a fire destroyed the Carper House, a large hotel built to accommodate railroad passengers, and a year later J. D. Vurpillat seized the opportunity to purchase the burned area from William Spangler. On Dec. 15, 1881, he put his dreams into action. He chose James Rhodes as architect. Rhodes had designed the new Frain Hotel (erected immediately after the Carper House burned and cater-cornered to it), and Vurpillat was impressed with the appearance of the Second Empire style. The plans for the opera house were finished and on display at Vurpillat's hardware store by January 28, 1882 and in March ground was broken. He chose local artisans to lay the foundation and his brother, Frank Vurpillat, to finish the woodwork. Brick masons began work July 15, 1882 and by October slaters were busy on the mansard roof. Ed Guss, another local

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man, was employed as plasterer. Plate glass, costing nearly one thousand dollars, arrived in November. By January 6, 1883, carpenters had the two mammoth business rooms completed and ready to be occupied with the Citizen's Bank on the west and J.D. Vurpillat's hardware store on the east. When the bank relocated after 1900, the dividing wall was removed and the entire first floor was taken over by Vurpillat's store, which had expanded its stock to include dry goods. It remained in use, first as a general and dry goods store and later as a drug store, until the building was vacated in 1998. It has been empty since that time.

While the ground floor rooms were being used, the second and third floors were still being finished inside. The work went quickly and by April, Vurpillat had installed a gas plant in the basement and lighted the building.

The second floor offices filled with professionals – doctors, dentists, chiropractors, lawyers, photographers, and some county officials who found the courthouse too crowded. One local newspaper, The Democratic Journal, also had offices there for several years after 1883. One exception was during the mid 1890's when the "Tippecanoe Athletic Association" leased the whole floor. The removal of second floor partitions caused concern that the upper floor was being weakened. It was explained that only a few short cross partitions were being removed, and the long partitions, the real supports, remained in place. As Mr. Vurpillat was also putting in some iron posts, the public was assured that the top floor would be stronger than before. When the Association moved the second floor was returned to its original configuration. Eventually in the 1940's some of the offices were partitioned and plumbed and made into apartments. The second floor has been used for storage since 1960.

The entire third floor was the opera house. The hall seated 600, the last few rows of seats each being slightly elevated above the one in front so that the rear part of the audience had a good view of the stage. This section was commonly referred to as the "hayloft." The hall was lighted by huge gas chandeliers and heated by stoves. The focal point was a large stage flanked on either side by dressing rooms and reached by a rear entrance way. It was also assessable from the seating area. Floodlight troughs were hung suspended in the fly-loft and a depression for the foot-lights was found in the front of the stage. To one side stood the gong used to signal that the curtain was about to go up. Scenery painted by Fields & Phillips, artists, was placed in the slots allotted for it. Occasionally the traveling companies brought their own backdrops and props, including live dogs for <u>Uncle Tom's Cabin.</u> Billed as Siberian bloodhounds they were most likely Great Danes but they added to the drama of the scenes and caught the interest of the audience, most of whom had never seen a bloodhound, anyway.

It was over a year from the ground breaking on March 6, 1882 until the opening of the opera house on May 12, 1883. The first production, <u>The Spectre Bridegroom</u>, opened to fair audiences, and the opera house was seldom closed over the next few years. Entertainment varied from crowd-pleasers James Whitcomb Riley, the Hoosier poet, and Eli Perkins, humorous

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lecturer, to several different versions of <u>Uncle Tom's Cabin</u>, some more pleasing than others. Lincoln J. Carter's scenic melodrama, <u>The Fast Mail</u> with its realistic train of cars shooting across the stage thrilled the crowd, which was far less pleased by the high-ticket price.

The first commencement of the Winamac High School was held there in 1890. The school also used the opera house to present plays and other forms of entertainment. Golden Slipper Club gave social dances, The Embroidery Club held meetings, and the Democrats and Republicans held conventions, with speakers ranging from Senators David Turpie and Albert J. Beveridge to William Jennings Bryan. Winamac churches, both separately and together, formed groups and entertained their friends and neighbors with such offerings as Rose of Savoy and the Congress of Nations. Home talent was also enjoyed in the form of the juvenile orchestra and band organized in 1895.

In January 1904 following a tragic theatre fire in Chicago, Indiana lawmakers became more aware of the dangers inherent in facilities having only one exit, and the opera house was condemned as a firetrap. J.D. Vurpillat closed the house temporarily until he was able to build a neat, modern 2-story brick store building adjoining the opera block on its east side. At the same time he redecorated the opera house and built a stairway connecting with the new block and leading to the opera house, thus giving it the required two exits.

That following year Vurpillat sold his mercantile business and retired after being in business in Winamac for over forty years. He continued to take an interest in the opera house, however.

In 1910, prompted by either popular demand or financial considerations - the opera house was being challenged by new-fangled, upstart picture shows - Vurpillat tore out the raised seats in the rear of the hall, extended the hardwood floor and moved the stairway to one side to make a large floor for roller-skating.

The opera house continued to be a focal point of activity until January 15, 1915, when, at 5:30 a.m., the building was discovered on fire. The southwest corner of the third floor was destroyed along with that portion of the roof, and a hole burned through the floor to the second story before the fire could be contained. There had been a dance in the opera house the night before, and it was presumed that the fire started from a stove that sat in the southwest corner of the hall. It may have become overheated after the crowd left or the flue may have been defective. There was even speculation about the ubiquitous cigarette stub. Whatever the cause, water and smoke damage was extensive on all three floors of the building. Only the third floor opera house sustained structural damage and when the corner was rebuilt one window on each side of the corner was not replaced giving the building an asymmetrical look and serving as a visual reminder of the fire. Inside, the block required re-plastering as the water had loosened most of the plaster. Shill's dry goods store on the main floor, while not damaged by fire, was thoroughly soaked by torrents of water that poured down into the room from above. Much of the goods in the

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cloak and suit department were carried outside to escape wetting, but the rest of the merchandise was ruined with the exception of the shoe department. While John Shill's losses were covered by insurance, Vurpillat had allowed the insurance on the building to lapse so that his loss was complete. Repairs were made promptly, and, according to one of Winamac's older residents, amateur boxing and wrestling matches took place in the hall, and there may have been a few more dances and local talent shows, but for all practical purposes the history of the opera house ended with the fire.

The Vurpillat family retained possession and management of the opera house building until January 1945 when it was sold to William Logan. In February 2000 Stuart Gast purchased and donated the building to the Pulaski County Historical Society.

Vurpillat's Opera House is a significant part of Winamac's history, and its restoration would serve as an example for other downtown revitalization projects. The building has been poorly maintained but comprehensive evaluation reports by architects state that it is structurally sound and capable of being restored to its original appearance. At this time the intention of the society is to restore the Opera House to its original function as a community-gathering place. There are numerous possibilities for the other two floors, including historical gallery and museum, local arts and crafts gallery, Visitors Bureau/Chamber of Commerce, or other county development offices, small coffee shop or restaurant, or the restoration of a soda fountain that would have been found in one of the earlier businesses occupying the area. An important consideration of any proposal is its financial viability. Ideally the restored building will support itself.

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Sanborn Map & Publishing Co. Winamac, Ind. New York, 1886, 1893, 1899, 1911, 1933.

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Winamac (Ind.) ExPRESS. 12 Aug. 2000.

Winamac (Ind.) Journal. 14 May 1881-2 June 1883.

Winamac (Ind.) Republican. 7 Jan. 1904-7 July 1927.

Verbal Boundary Description

A part of lot no. 110 as shown upon the original plat of the town of Winamac in Pulaski Couny, Indiana, bounded and described as follows: commencing at the southwest corner of lot no. 110 aforesaid; thence running northwesterly along the west line of said lot and parallel with Market Street in said town, 90 feet; thence running northeasterly parallel with Market Street in said town, 90 feet, and to the south line of said lot no. 110; thence running southwesterly along the south line of said lot and parallel with Main Street in said town, 46 feet and to the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification

This is the legal description of the Opera House building in the deed record.









