

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

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

1. Name

historic Oak Ballroom (CX06-3)

and/or common NA

2. Location

street & number NA NA not for publication

city, town Schuyler NA vicinity of

state Nebraska code 31 county Colfax code 37

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name City of Schuyler

street & number 1020 "A" Street

city, town Schuyler NA vicinity of state Nebraska

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Colfax County Courthouse, Register of Deeds

street & number Southeast corner "C" & E. 11th Street

city, town Schuyler state Nebraska

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date On-going  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Nebraska State Historical Society

city, town Lincoln state Nebraska

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The Ballroom has 5,000 square feet of wooden dance floor, in addition to promenades, the bandshell and stage area, dressing rooms, lunch and bar room, foyer, and ticket and check rooms. Pedestal tables and benches are constructed of the oak wood. The bandshell and stage area is located along the southwest interior wall of the building. The raised stage is framed with a stilted segmentally arched opening and features half timbering, fiberboard panels with diamond shaped motifs and a natural oak balustrade. The ballroom walls are finished with cement wainscotting and painted fiberboard framed with "half-timbering". Modest designs of geometric shapes are found throughout the fiberboard panels. The bellcast gable roof provides an interior circumferential aisle which gives support spaces for the ballroom including seating areas (wooden booths) and rest rooms (lower level). The peripheral aisle of the interior and the projecting pavilions have a low, flat roof of painted fiberboard with modernistic designs similar to that of the ballroom auditorium. Many of the original light fixtures designed for the Ballroom are still extant today (ie. in the bar-room). The northeast wall of the auditorium area features the large rubblestone fireplace with a mural above depicting a wagon train on the old Morman Trail. (see photo #6). The mural was painted in gold leaf by Jim Ridgeway and was installed in 1960.

The Oak Ballroom was built in 1935-37 as a project of the Works Progress Administration. Emiel Christensen served as architect with R. P. Basta acting as supervisor. The name Oak Ballroom was derived from the huge natural timbers and beams cut from native oak trees in Butler and Colfax counties.

At present, temporary hanging panels are being used as sound baffels to help in the acoustics of the auditorium area. Steel rods, which span the entire width of the truss system, were installed for additional support.

# 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) Entertainment
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** 1935-37      **Builder/Architect** Emiel Christensen, Architect

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

Architecturally significant, the Oak Ballroom represents an exceptionally unique vernacular product of the English Tudor style, also incorporating design elements characteristic of rustic architecture found in the Adirondack mountains during the late 19th century. The building stands as a major landmark in the area, designed by a renowned, local architect-builder. Situated on the banks of Lost Creek, the Ballroom is the focal point of Schuyler's city park. The building has played a regionally important entertainment and cultural role in the surrounding community. Constructed as a relief project of the Works Progress Administration, the building represents the Depression years of the 1930's and the relief role played by the federal government during that period.

The Oak Ballroom, though not fifty years old, is a regionally significant historic property due to both its architectural design and historic associations, not only with the town of Schuyler but also to Colfax and surrounding counties. The Oak Ballroom, known as the Grande Dame of the Midwest Ballrooms, stands as a landmark in the Schuyler community, serving as a social center and community gathering place for the four county area, namely Colfax, Platte, Butler and Dodge counties.

The building's significance to the community's entertainment and cultural development is considerable. The ballroom served the area not only for dances, but also for banquets, receptions and displays. In later years, due to the lack of bookings for big bands and the decline in the number of dances, the ballroom was rented out for other activities including school proms, wedding and anniversary receptions, agriculture seminars, fashion shows, the Red Cross bloodmobile drives, and other organizational banquets and activities.

The Oak Ballroom represents an exceptionally unique local or vernacular interpretation of the English Tudor style of architecture. To date, a building of this type has not been found elsewhere in the four county region, and perhaps, in central eastern Nebraska. In the Schuyler Sun, April 15, 1937, it states: "Its architectural design and type of construction are different from anything found outside of resort centers and these features have attracted visitors many of whom have said the structure is unlike anything they have seen."

English architecture has its own history of building styles. This was due to several reasons: England, being isolated from the rest of Europe has a tradition unlike that of continental building. Its architectural forms developed somewhat independently; climate conditions and availability of materials also influenced architectural styles. The Oak forests that covered large parts of England made wood construction a popular building mode, producing notable architectural achievements. During the late 15th and early 16th century, many country houses were constructed

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using local materials, usually of stone or "half-timbered." (Alexander, 1976, p. 240). In America, these "country homes" gained popularity because of their "picturesque" effect and the sense of tradition and cultural values they held with "olde England." As early as the 1880's, American architects were devoting their attention to the English Tudor house. The most prominent feature of the English Tudor style of architecture is the half-timbering. In the old country, the half-timbering was part of the actual support system and gave the feeling of rugged, hand-hewn strength, and "honest" construction. In the English Tudor Revival buildings, the half-timbering became a decorative element, being applied over the frame support system. Decorative as it was, the half-timbering in these Revival houses still gave the illusion of "honesty" in their construction. Other features of the Tudor Revival style include large medieval chimneys, numerous prominent gables, and windows with small pane arrangement (Labine, Poore, 1982, p. 5).

The plans for the Oak Ballroom were drawn by Emiel J. Christensen, Columbus architect. His plan for the Ballroom incorporated the need to use the least expensive and most available materials, as well as unskilled WPA labor. Mr. Christensen's experience created an architectural plan for a building out of the raw materials of the Platte Valley lowlands. The oak trees were selected from the hilly areas of east Butler county and in the west central portion of Colfax county. Stones for use in the foundation and walls were taken from the ruins of the Wells, Abbott, Nieman mill which was destroyed by fire in 1933.

The idea of rustic architecture became popular during the late 19th century in the Adirondack mountains in New York. William West Durant, president of the Adirondack Railroad and developer of the North Woods, conceived the idea of rustic luxury (Foley, 1980, p. 57). Construction of Durant's first camp began in 1876-77, and by 1903 he had established a distinctive school of Adirondack architecture. Hallmarks of the style include the combining of log construction and Swiss Chalet design elements with an emphasis on comfort and a healthy respect for the natural environment (Gilborn, 1976, p. 25). Emiel Christiansen's design of the Oak Ballroom may well be reminiscent of this rustic architecture with the Ballroom's design elements being similar to that of the camp lodges found in the Adirondack mountains. The use of natural or "organic" materials in the Ballroom's construction gives the building its rustic character and reflects the architects desire to utilize available and plentiful resources. The fad of rustic furniture spread to America during the 19th century with an emphasis on a return to simpler life. Many rural Americans, from a lack of money, constructed organic wooden furniture for use in their homes (Bishop, 1973, pp. 166-167). Furniture designed in this rustic style, i.e. the oak pedestal tables, is found in the interior of the Oak Ballroom (see photo #8).

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Emiel Christensen was born in Washington county, Nebraska, April 23, 1895. Mr. Christensen received his architectural schooling at Washington University in St. Louis. Following World War I, he was employed with architectural firms in Omaha, Nebraska and Jacksonville, Florida. In 1928, Mr. Christensen set up his own architectural office in Columbus, Nebraska. He is best known for his work involving projects dealing with small community planning and the conservation utilization of the natural environment of Nebraska, especially dedicated to the creative use of leisure time for all people. His involvement in professional organizations include: Coordinator of Community Services at the University of Nebraska, member of the American Society of Planning Officials, the community Planning Association of Canada, the Architectural Forums Editorial Advisory, Nebraska Chapter A.I.A., and consulting architect to Farm Journals and periodicals. His involvement in civic activities includes: Past President, Columbus Rotary Club; Past Commander, Hartman Post American Legion; County Director of C. W. A. Program; County Red Cross War Fund Chairman for Platte County and County Red Cross Disaster Chairman (University of Nebraska, 1958, p. 1).

Historically, the Oak Ballroom signifies the relief role played by the WPA as a result of the great depression of the 1930's. Although the WPA projects of the 1930's are generally less than 50 years of age, the passing of time has revealed to us the importance of this program during the Depression years and the mark it left in American history (Sherfy, Luce, 1979, p. 2, 3). A product of the New Deal, the WPA was of great significance to a depressed nation in that it was a major federal work program for the unemployed. The years of the 1930's found the entire nation facing the depression. Nebraska, and other neighboring states of the Great Plains, struggled against additional stress as a result of severe drought and dust bowl conditions. Nearly one hundred and fifty men were unemployed in Colfax County during some of the years in the 1930's. Under the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the government established the Works Progress Administration (later the Works Projects Administration) whereby the unemployed were put to work building roads, public buildings and parks. The Lincoln Sunday Journal and Star, June 26, 1938 spoke of the WPA project in Schuyler: "From a tract of wasteland has been developed a beauty spot that is looked upon by everyone in Schuyler, as well as those in the surrounding country, as one of the most worthwhile undertakings ever sponsored by any community, aided by the federal government."

Dr. S. B. Koory, Schuyler's country doctor, was a major figure in making the Schuyler Park project a reality. His enthusiasm prompted the beginnings of the Oak Ballroom. Dr. Koory's foresight allowed him to see the benefits of these projects not only to the people of the time but to future generations as well. At the south entrance to the park and Oak Ballroom, a plaque commemorates the vision of Dr. S. B. Koory. The inscription reads: "Dedicated to the memory of Dr. S. B. Koory whose vision and planning made this park possible." Dr. S. B. Koory was born in 1884 in Lebanon, and came to the United States at the age of 16. He attended Creighton University Medical School and graduated in 1907. Dr. Koory died November 6, 1958.

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Historical significance of the Oak Ballroom also lies in its association with the Morman Trail. The Morman Trail passes through the entrance gate to the Oak Ballroom and the Park. A huge mural, above the fireplace in the interior of the Ballroom, depicts a wagon train on the old Morman Trail. The mural was painted in gold leaf by Jim Ridgeway and was installed in 1960 at a cost of \$1,000.

The date of the grand opening was scheduled for May 4, 1937. Over 2,000 people attended to view the building and dance to the music of Lawrence Welk and his Orchestra. Since that opening, the Oak Ballroom has been a community hub. Many "big-name" entertainers appeared at the Oak Ballroom, including Guy Lombardo, Eydie Gorme, Jan Garber, Ray Pearl and others. The Schuyler Sun, April 29, 1937, stated: "The most unique structure of the state." In 1977, the Ballroom celebrated its 40th anniversary. In a letter dated May 4, 1977 (The Schuyler Sun, May 12, 1977) Lawrence Welk wrote to the city of Schuyler:

"What a pleasant few moments I've just spent, turning back the clock of my memory forty years to reminisce a bit about Schuyler and the Oak Ballroom. When we opened the Oak Ballroom, those were pretty lean times for us. (It seems we had an awfully long stretch of "lean times"!) A "Grand Opening" date was a real feather in our cap. Now, forty years later, Schuyler and the Oak Ballroom and Lawrence Welk have all aged a bit. We've had our share of the good times and those not quite so good, and weathered them rather gracefully, I think. Let's hope we will all keep going strong for many 'wunnerful' years to come!"

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than 1 acre

Quadrangle name Schuyler, Nebr.

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UTM References

A 

1	4	6	6	2	0	2	0	4	5	8	8	9	2	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

See continuation sheet.

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

state	NA	code	county	code
-------	----	------	--------	------

state	NA	code	county	code
-------	----	------	--------	------

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Joni Gilkerson, Survey Associate

organization Nebraska State Historical Society

date September, 1982

street & number 1500 "R" Street

telephone (402) 471-3850

city or town Lincoln

state Nebraska

# 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 Mervin W. Knott 12/10/82

title Director, Nebraska State Historical Society

date

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

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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"Oak Ballroom is still 'Wunnèrful'", Omaha World-Herald, May 13, 1977.

"Oak Ballroom's 40th Anniversary", The Schuyler Sun, May 12, 1977, Section C, pp. 1-20.

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Verbal Boundary Description

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Commencing at a point 20 meters west of the west corner of the building, thence running north approximately 40 meters to the access road, thence running directly east approximately 140 meters to just outside the eastern edge of the park walls, thence running south along the wall approximately 95 meters to the southern edge of the Lost Creek, thence west-northwest approximately 140 meters following the creeks route, thence north approximately 60 meters to the point of beginning, including that historically associated real estate which immediately surrounds the building and represents its open space, and which includes the rubblestone park walls and gates, which comprise the entrance gates and serve as an eastern boundary to the city park, remaining as an important and significant landscape feature in the Ballroom's immediate environment, and also that land which includes other important floral and geographical elements, namely the deciduous and coniferous trees and the winding creek which serves as a "natural" southern boundary to the building's immediate surroundings.



Photo 1 of 10 – general view looking west toward the city park showing the ballroom in the left background  
Photo by D. Murphy, NSHS, March 1980 (8003/7:6)

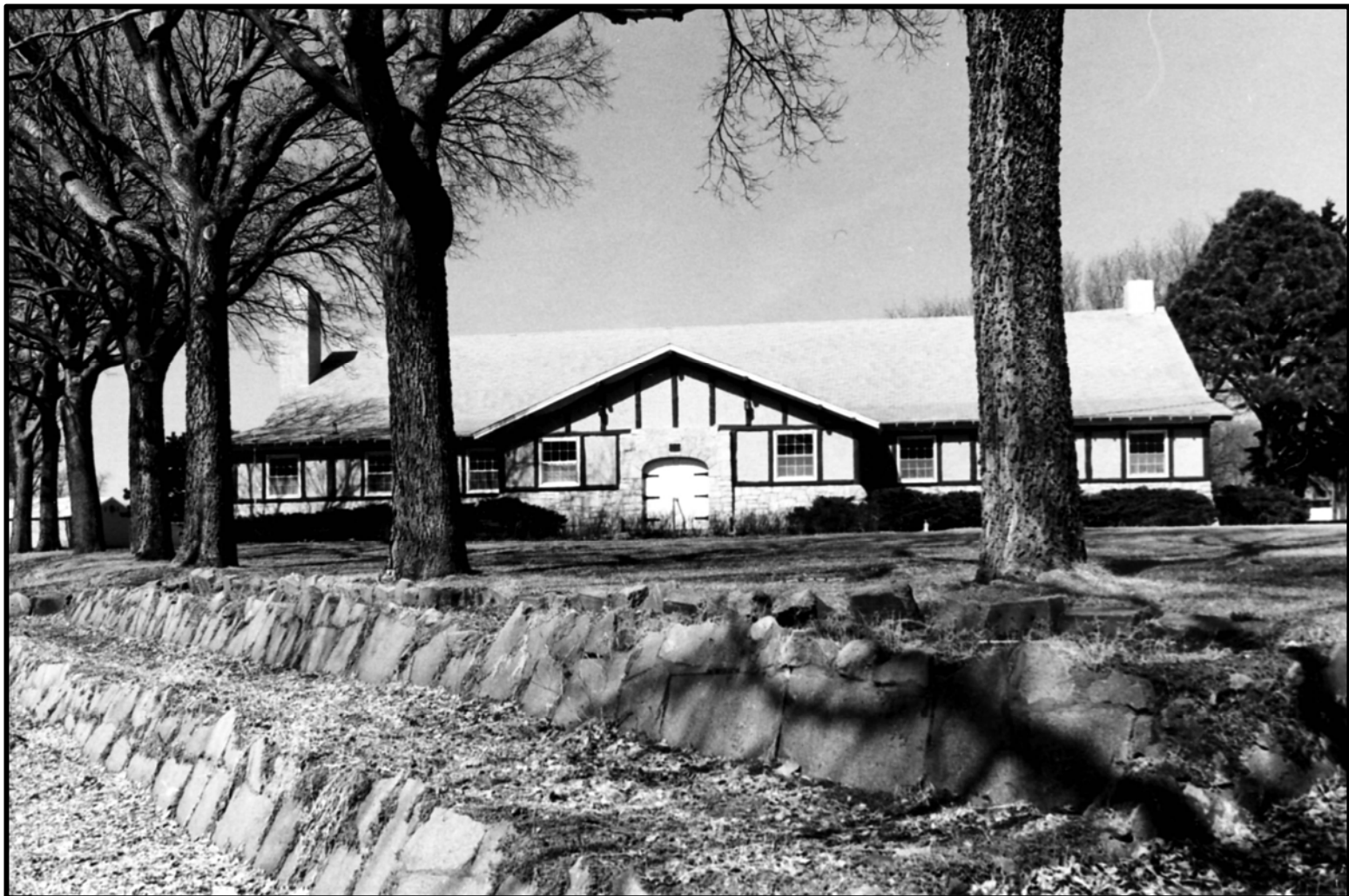


Photo 2 of 10 – view looking northwest showing the southeast façade  
Photo by D. Murphy, NSHS, March 1980 (8003/7:9)



Photo 3 of 10 – view looking northwest showing detail of the front (southeast) entry  
Photo by D. Murphy, NSHS, March 1980 (8003/7:11)



Photo 4 of 10 – view looking north showing the southeast facades  
Photo by D. Murphy, NSHS, March 1980 (8003/7:35)



Photo 5 of 10 – view looking southeast showing the northwest façade  
Photo by D. Murphy, NSHS, March 1980 (8003/7:31)



Photo 6 of 10 – view looking northeast across dance floor toward fireplace  
Photo by D. Murphy, NSHS, March 1980 (8003/8:32a)

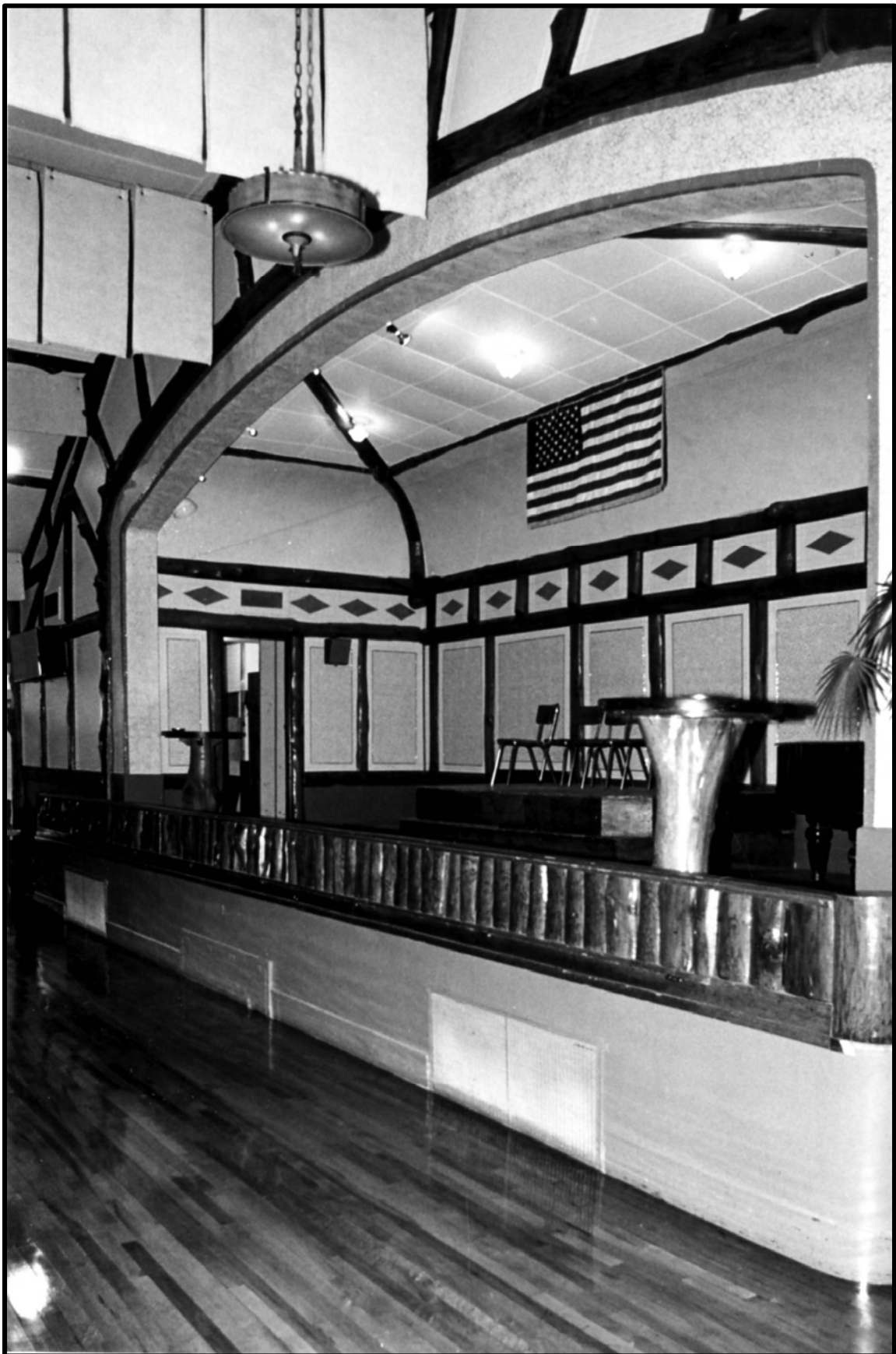


Photo 7 of 10 – view looking south showing bandshell and stage area  
Photo by D. Murphy, NSHS, March 1980 (8003/9:11)





Photo 8 of 10 – view showing detail of oak pedestal table  
Photo by D. Murphy, NSHS, March 1980 (8003/8:34a)



Photo 9 of 10 – view looking west across dance floor toward the bar and lunch room  
Photo by D. Murphy, NSHS, March 1980 (8003/9:5)

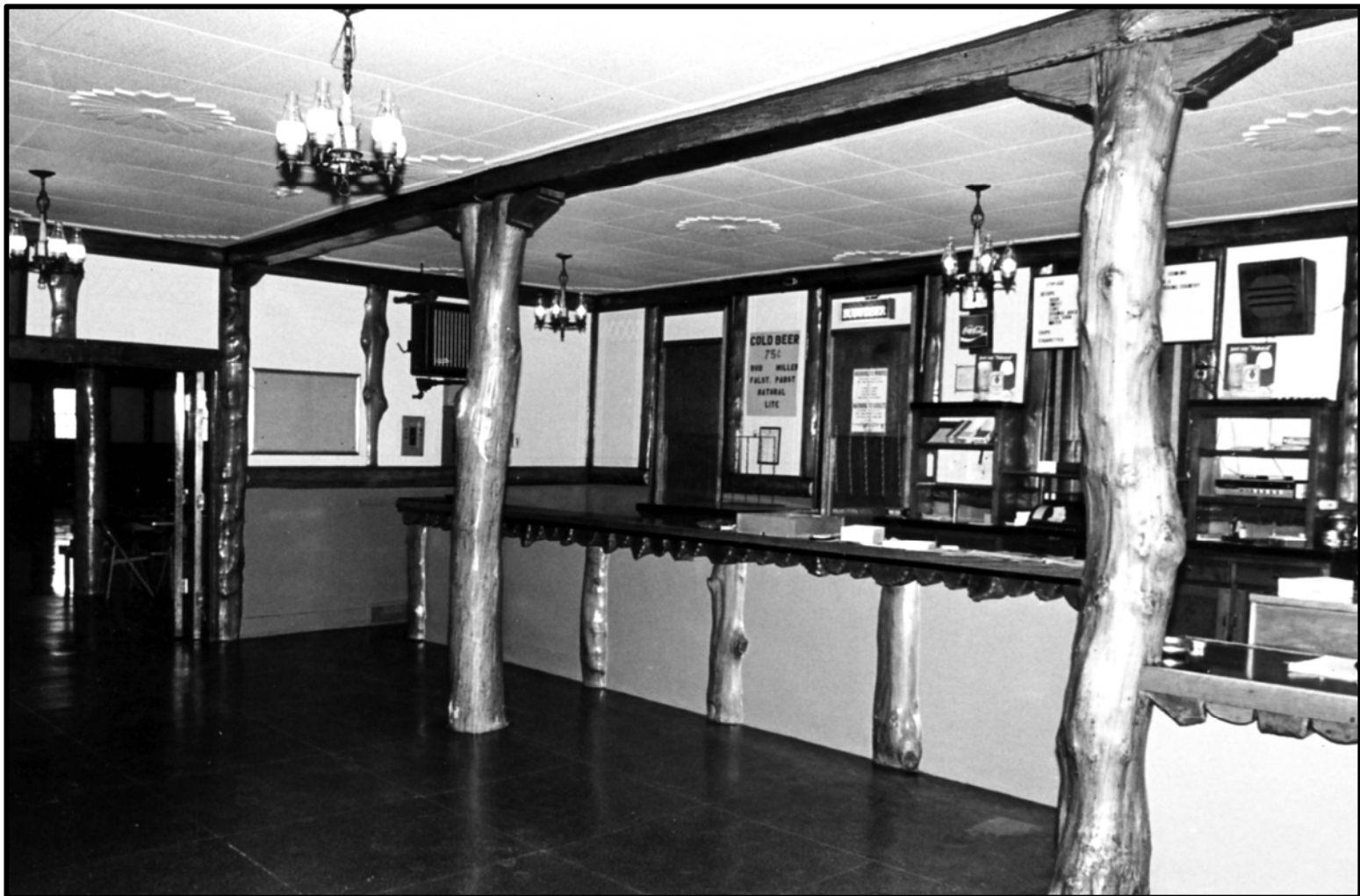


Photo 10 of 10 – view looking south showing bar area  
Photo by D. Murphy, NSHS, March 1980 (8003/9:9)