

ITALIAN HALL
(Societa Mutua Beneficenza Italiana)
400 block of Seventh Street between Elm & Pine Streets
Calumet
Houghton County
Michigan

HABS MI-425
MI-425

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

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ITALIAN HALL

(Societa Mutua Beneficenza Italiana)

HABS No. MI-425

- Name: This and earlier structures on the site were always popularly known as "Italian Hall," and it remains so known today. According to a photograph of the building, taken at the time of its erection in 1908, the cornice proclaimed the building to be that of the "Societa Mutua Beneficenza Italiana." It is the recommendation of this historian, however, that its popular name "Italian Hall" be taken as its official HABS name.
- Location: 400 block of Seventh Street, between Elm and Pine Streets, on the west side of the street, 58' north of the northwest corner of Seventh and Elm Streets, Calumet Village, Houghton County, Michigan.
- Present Owner: Delbert Masser, 325 Fifth Street, Calumet, Michigan.
- Present Use: Vacant.
- Significance: Italian Hall, built in 1908 to the design of Paul Humphrey Macneil, was the site of the 1913 Christmas Disaster. In July of 1913 the miners struck the mining companies of the Michigan copper range. At Christmas the women's group of the strikers' organization held a party for their children. They rented the Italian Hall, a large second floor public meeting room owned by an Italian mutual benefit society. During the party, someone yelled, "fire." There was no fire. However, many of the large crowd, about four hundred, rushed for the exit stairs. The exit doors at the bottom of the stairs opened inward. People could not get them open and they began to pile up in the stairwell. About seventy-four persons died, over half of them children. The event led to even greater bitterness between union and company partisans. Woody Guthrie wrote the song "Copper Country 1913 Massacre," about the Italian Hall disaster. Architecturally, the Hall itself remains in quite good condition with stenciled decorations, tin ceiling, and impressively complete stage and machinery.
- Historian: Kevin Harrington, 1975.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical history

1. Date of erection: 1908 per the cornerstone. Also, a press notice of 1913, referred to the building as having been erected five years earlier, i.e., 1908.

2. Architect: Paul Humphrey Macneil.

3. Original and subsequent owners, occupants, and uses: See the following chain of title for the Italian Hall, located on lot 9, block 31 of the plat of the Village of Red Jacket, now Calumet, in Houghton County, Michigan. The lot, as do all others in block 31, measures 58' x 118'.

April 3, 1882
TAX DEED
Liber B, p. 297, of Deeds
The Auditor General of the state of Michigan
- to -
Rufus R. Goodell
for ?
re: the parcel in question

February 10, 1890
WARRANTY DEED
L 29, p. 349, of Deeds
Catherine Foley
- to -
Antonio Marchetti, bachelor;
Berndino Lancina and Catterina, his wife;
Leone Pasginelli and Pia, his wife;
Peter Pinochi, bachelor;
Vital Coppo and Lucia, his wife;
Marco Curto and Angelina, his wife;
James Lisa and Marta, his wife; and
Frank Baggione and Catherina, his wife.
for \$1000.00
re: the parcel in question

February 10, 1890
QUITCLAIM DEED
L 29, p. 352, of Deeds
Catherine Foley
- to -
Antonio Marchetti, et al
for \$600.00
re: the parcel in question

March 10, 1890
QUITCLAIM DEED
L 29, p. 353, of Deeds
Catherine Foley, widow of Michael Foley
- to -
Antonio Marchetti, et al
for \$1.00
re: the parcel in question

October 10, 1890
QUITCLAIM DEED
L 63, p. 126, of Deeds
Antonio Marchetti, et al
- to -

	Societa Italiana di Mutua Beneficenza (SIMB) for \$1600.00 re: the parcel in question
October 10, 1905 QUITCLAIM DEED	L 67, p. 93, of Deeds Rufus R. Goodell and wife - to - SIMB for \$1.00 re: the parcel in question
January 13, 1906 MORTGAGE	Liber NN, p. 182, of Mortgages Italian Mutual Benefit Society - to - Merchants and Miners Bank for \$5000.00 re: the parcel in question
February 25, 1908 DISCHARGE OF MORTGAGE	Liber SS, p. 703, of Mortgages Merchants and Miners Bank - to - Italian Mutual Benefit Society (IMBS)
August 6, 1908 MORTGAGE	Liber JJ, p. 393, of Mortgages SIMB - to - Merchants and Miners Bank for \$12,000.00 re: the parcel in question
April 5, 1913 LEASE	L 10, p. 142, of Miscellaneous Records SIMB - to - The Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company consideration and term not determined re: the storefront on the north ¼ of lot 9, block 31
February 21, 1923 DISCHARGE OF MORTGAGE	Liber J-3, p. 388, of Mortgages Merchants and Miners Bank - to - SIMB
February 6, 1926	L 114, p. 92, of Deeds SIMB

WARRANTY DEED	- to - Italian Benevolent Society Building Association for \$5000.00 re: the parcel in question
January 6, 1928	L 114, p. 365, of Deeds Italian Benevolent Society Building Association
WARRANTY DEED	- to - Columbia Hall Association for \$1.00 re: the parcel in question
September 27, 1943	L 116, p. 294, of Deeds Columbia Hall Association
WARRANTY DEED	- to - Bart Cresto and wife for \$2500.00 re: the parcel in question
March 3, 1945	L 139, p. 297, of Deeds Bert Cresto and wife
WARRANTY DEED	- to - Emil Ozanich and wife for \$2400.00 re: the parcel in question
November 12, 1945	L 142, p. 634, of Deeds Emil Ozanich and wife
WARRANTY DEED	- to - Calumet Aerie # 352, Fraternal Order of Eagles (FOE) for \$3200.00 re: the parcel in question
September 21, 1972	L 32, p. 259, of Deeds FOE
WARRANTY DEED	- to - Delbert Masser for \$2000.00 re: the parcel in question

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: The general contractor was P.J. Donahue, and the (known) subcontractors were as follows:

Carpenter: Chas. A. Anderson

Plumbing: Peninsula Heating and Plumbing Co.

Heating: Wm. Boone
Plastering: Fred Roehm
Wiring: Hosking and McClure

(Note re: source: The contracting information was pulled from the identifying caption for a thermofax-copy of a photograph of the building. Delbert Masser owns the image. The caption read as "Building of the 'Societa Mutua Beneficenza Italiana' Calumet, Mich. Cost Complete \$25,000.00 Paul Humphrey Macneil, Architect and Supt. P. J. Donahue, General Contractor Chas. A. Anderson, Sub-Contractor, Carpenter Peninsula Heating and Plumbing Co., Plumbing Conservators Wm. Boone, Heating Contractor Fred Roehm, Plastering Contractor Hosking & McClure, Wiring Contractors)

5. Original plans and construction: Italian Hall was built by the Societa Mutua Beneficenza Italiana of Calumet, Michigan, for its benefit and use. On the first floor were two shop fronts with living space at the rear. In the southern half was the saloon of one "Vairo" who was probably a member of the mutual aid society, since his tavern had inside access to the stairs to the hall above. Vairo's shop was there at the time of the 1913 disaster. The original tenants of the north shop are unknown. On April 5, 1913, the store was let to the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company. It was being used as the local A & P at the time of the disaster, later that year. These shops were typical commercial establishments in that each had a centered, recessed entrance, flanked on each side by plate glass, shop windows. Behind the selling space were rooms in which stock could be stored and where the owner and his family could live. Each shop had access to and use of the half of the basement under it. Above the stores, on the second floor was the hall itself. A wide stair, in the west wall, running along the south side of the building, gave access to the hall. The hall, with balcony, well-equipped stage, kitchen, refreshment room, coatrooms, toilets, and dressing rooms was well designed to serve the wide range of uses to which it was put. In addition to the activities of the Mutual Benefit Society, the hall was also regularly rented to other groups in the community for their use.

6. Alterations and additions: The greatest change to the structure was the elimination of the two storefronts, and their replacement with a single center entrance on the first floor. This was probably done in either 1961 or 1966, when the Fraternal Order of Eagles obtained mortgages from the Merchants and Miners Bank.

B. Historical events and persons associated with the building:

As mentioned above, the hall was let to a variety of community organizations for their use. The most notable event was the 1913 Disaster. In July of that year a general strike was called in the Michigan copper range by the Western Federation of Miners. No mine company was willing to recognize the union. Some workers wished to return to work. Others sought to prevent them from doing so. The National Guard was called out and strikebreakers Waddell-Mahon were hired; moreover, the Ascher Detective Agency and private police were organized to protect company property. Up until December 24, 1913, none of this was unusual in American labor relations. On Christmas Eve the Women's Auxiliary of the Western Federation of Miners arranged and held a Christmas Party for the children of strikers in the Italian Hall. During the

party, the cry of “fire” was heard, and disaster ensued. Over four hundred children and adults were in the room when the verbal alarm was sounded. The door at the bottom of the stairs opened inward. The first people to reach the bottom could not get the door open. As more people followed in fear, those at the bottom were suffocated. Over seventy people died. Since many died some time after the date of the disaster, the precise number has never been determined. Seventy-four seems the best present estimate, though numbers from seventy-one to over eighty are suggested. Memory of the event continues to live in the community. There is on the building today a recent piece of soaped graffiti, which reads: “Thugs yelled fire and there were dead babies.” People speak of “The Strike” and the disaster in the same manner that the searing memory of a presidential assassination holds the rest of the nation. One of the reasons that the event lives on is that no determination of the culprit has ever been made. A coroner’s inquest and a congressional investigation were unable to do so, and for many this has been interpreted as a whitewash. Woody Guthrie, although he never was in the Copper Country, wrote a song about the disaster many years after (in the 1920s) usually called “Calumet 1913 Massacre.”

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General statement

1. Architectural character: The building is a good example of mixed commercial and recreational structures of the era. The hall itself, comprising most of the second floor, is an effective use of readily available materials. The impression is of an earnest, if somewhat naive, elegance.
2. Condition of fabric: Fair.

B. Description of exterior

1. Overall dimensions: The two-story building is rectangular in overall plan, measuring approximately 58' x 100'. The façade is visually divided into seven bays.
2. Foundations: Rubble masonry.
3. Walls: Brick bearing wall, unpainted, the front (east) wall bricks on the second floor are a sort of muddy, reddish mauve, hard fired to give a sheen. On the first floor of the front wall the bricks (of an addition dating to around 1961) are a hard finish yellow. The side and back walls are regular brick red.
4. Structural system, framing: The exterior walls are load bearing masonry entities. There is a rubble and brick masonry wall running along the long (east-west) axis of the building, which helps to support the first floor shops and apartments, and the hall on the second floor. The roof is carried by several very large I beams, which are borne by the exterior walls. The ceiling for the hall on the second floor is also suspended from these I beams. These beams span the entire 58' width of the structure.

5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads: There are the largely rotted remains of two bulkheads at the rear (west) of the building, giving separate access to the basement of each shop. Also on this rear wall there are the remains of two stoops, likewise each giving access to each shop. On the street, (east) there is a recessed entryway at the center of the building (ca.1961 addition) and the steps at the left side (southeast), which lead up to the entry to the hall above.

6. Chimneys: There is one chimney, about midway in the south wall. There are two chimneys, no longer used, along the north wall. All are made of brick.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The center door, which may have been a door to one of the two original shop fronts, is made of wood, with a beveled glass pane in the top half. The door to the hall, in the south end of the east wall, is a wooden, double door, with five horizontal panels in each door. The doorway is framed by brick pilasters on the sides, with Jacobsville sandstone capitals and impost blocks supporting a Jacobsville sandstone arched overdoor. There is a piece of plywood in the half-round opening. All other exterior doors are made from wood.

b. Windows and shutters: There are no shutters. All windows are double hung, rectangular, with a single light in each sash. Of the seven arched windows on the east facade on the second floor, the southernmost has been blocked up. Over these windows there is a molded brick drip cap, which repeats the arches of the windows. On the first floor, two irregular octagonal windows have been placed about midway in each of the former shop fronts.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: A slight slope from the east and west ends to a low point, about two-thirds of the way back from the front (east) facade. It is covered with felt paper and tar.

b. Cornice, eaves: On the south, west and north walls, the brick walls terminate squarely, and at right angles. On the east (main) wall, there was a cast metal cornice, which was seemingly supported by pilasters with Doric capitals at either end of the wall.

c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: None.

C. Description of interior

1. Floor plans: The basement plan is quite open. Brick partition walls enclose the boiler. A passage has been opened from one side of the basement to the other. Various wooden partitions or their parts remain. The first floor was originally divided in the middle on the east-west axis, with a shop on each side, with living quarters for each at the rear. Since then it has been remodeled a number of times, and now a bewildering array of rooms remain (Figs. 1-3).

2. Stairways: There are two stairs to each half of the basement, one from within the building and one from outside. The only stair on the first floor is the six-foot wide stair that leads from the outside double door on the east facade of the building to the Hall on the second floor. There are six stairs on the second floor leading from the main level of the hall up to the balcony, from the main level of the hall down to the refreshment room, located below the stage, from the kitchen, on the same level as the hall, down to the refreshment room, located below the stage, from the main level of the hall up seven steps to the stage, and two leading from the stage to two (2) dressing rooms, located over the kitchen. All stairs are made of wood and are relatively narrow (ca. 2 ½ -3") except the stairs to the stage, which are relatively wide (ca. 4 ½ - 5").

3. Flooring: The basement floor is made of poured concrete. On the first floor, there is wood flooring throughout, except much has had linoleum carpet laid over it. The floors of the second-floor toilets, vestibule to the fire escape, and kitchen are made of poured concrete. All other flooring on the second-floor level, as well as the stage and balcony levels, is 24" hardwood with no finish. The flooring in the refreshment room and in the two dressing rooms above the kitchen is 3" sub-flooring.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: On the first floor, the walls are generally plastered and painted. There are molded tin ceilings, painted (and now peeling) throughout. On the second floor, there is board and bead wainscoting in the hall and balcony, as well as the vestibules. Above this, the walls are made of plaster and have been painted. The cornice and ceiling of the hall and balcony are made of pressed tin, most of which is painted white. The cornice itself and one framing device of the ceiling are painted a muddy red-brown. The ceiling of the stage could not be adequately observed since there is no longer electricity serving the building, and it was not possible to see clearly beyond the various scrims (?) of raised and lowered scenery of the stage. The ceilings in the kitchen, refreshment room and vestibules are also made of pressed tin, which has been painted, but less elaborate than that seen in the hall. The ceiling of the dressing rooms is painted plaster.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The doors of the basement and first-floor levels are all made of wood. Similarly, the doors of the second floor are made of wood; the second-floor doors are characterized by five horizontal panels. The double doors from the ticket room vestibule swing both ways. The doors from the hall through the fire escape vestibule to the kitchen are over-sized doors.

6. Decorative features and trim: There is fine stenciling in the balcony below the cornice and above the dado. There is also a bit of stenciling in the women's toilet, where a medicine cabinet has been removed. There is a good wood railing with turned balusters and two engaged and four freestanding ionic columns at the hall side of the balcony. The stage has engaged ionic piers marking the proscenium, with a simple entablature over.

There are the remains of many units -- drawers, cabinets, and shelves for the storage of costumes at the periphery of the refreshment room.

7. Hardware: The door handles and their plates on the second floor are oval. The outside door handles on the street (east) facade are also handsome.

8. Mechanical equipment: The stage of the hall is remarkably well equipped. There are nearly a dozen risers, and adequate space in the fly for them to rise into. Several still have their old painted scenery panels attached. The asbestos curtain also remains.

D. Site

The building faces east on the west side of a north-south street. On the lot to the south is a car dealer parking lot. To the north is a now empty lot, with some vestiges of the building that used to be on that site. At the rear (west) is an alley.

a. Historic landscape design: Historically this building has been at the edge of the masonry built up district and the beginning of the wooden residential district of Calumet. The buildings that used to exist on either side were commercial, as is the one across the street today. However, farther up the block and to the rear the buildings are nearly all houses.

b. Outbuildings: None

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Primary and unpublished sources

A copy of a photograph of the Hall, with a caption mentioning the cost, architect, and suppliers, is held by the building's current owner, Delbert Masser, 325 Fifth Street, Calumet, Michigan.

B. Secondary and published sources:

A slide and tape discussion of the disaster has been prepared by the Houghton County Historical Society, Lake Linden, Michigan. The Daily Mining Gazette has continuous coverage beginning 25 December 1913. This and such other Copper Country newspapers as The Copper Country Evening News, and The Calumet News, provided generally "establishment" coverage of the event. They are available in the archives of Michigan Technological University, and on microfilm at the Michigan State Archives in Lansing. The Western Federation of Miners published a Miners Bulletin, in English, with columns in Finnish and Italian. The Citizens Alliance published Truth. The Alliance, an association of local businessmen, attempted to mediate between management and strikers, but without success. All of these would have presented their own versions of the event, as well as of the subsequent investigations.

Accounts of the strike are also given in the following sources:

Angus Murdoch. Boom Copper. Calumet: Roy W. Drier and Louis G. Koepel, 1964 (first published 1943). See especially, chapter XX, "Thirty-nine little white coffins," pp. 219-229.

C. Harry Benedict. Red Metal: The Calumet and Hecla Story. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952. See especially, Chapter 14, "Labor relations," and subsection entitled "The Western Federation of Miners," pp. 213-234, and 219-232.

Arthur W. Thurner. Calumet Copper and People: History of a Michigan Mining Community, 1864-1970, privately printed at The Book Concern Printers, Hancock, Michigan, 1974. See especially, part 6, "Strife and Decline," pp. 89-98.

Stereopticon views of the Italian Hall, taken just after the disaster, are in the collections of the building owner, Calumet Public Library, Houghton County Museum, and the Michigan Technological University archives, neg. #00823.

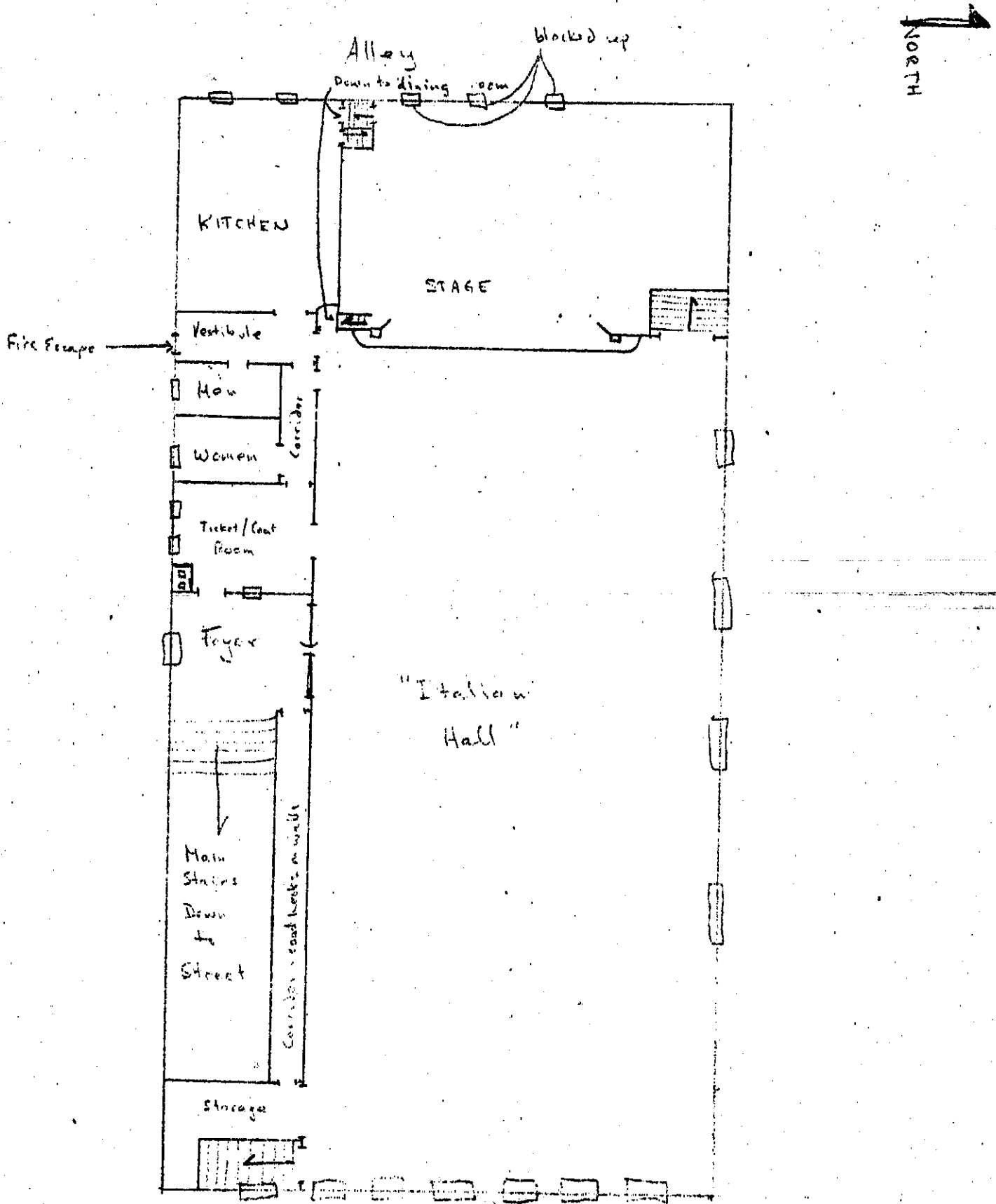
C. Likely sources not yet investigated:

In addition to the local coverage, several national newspapers and magazines covered the strike and disaster. The New York Times, Colliers, and Outlook are all mentioned by Thurner. In addition there are still several people in Calumet who were there or otherwise know intimately one version of the happening.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation was done in the summer of 1975 by Kevin Harrington and Wendy Nicholas for the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), a division of the National Park Service.

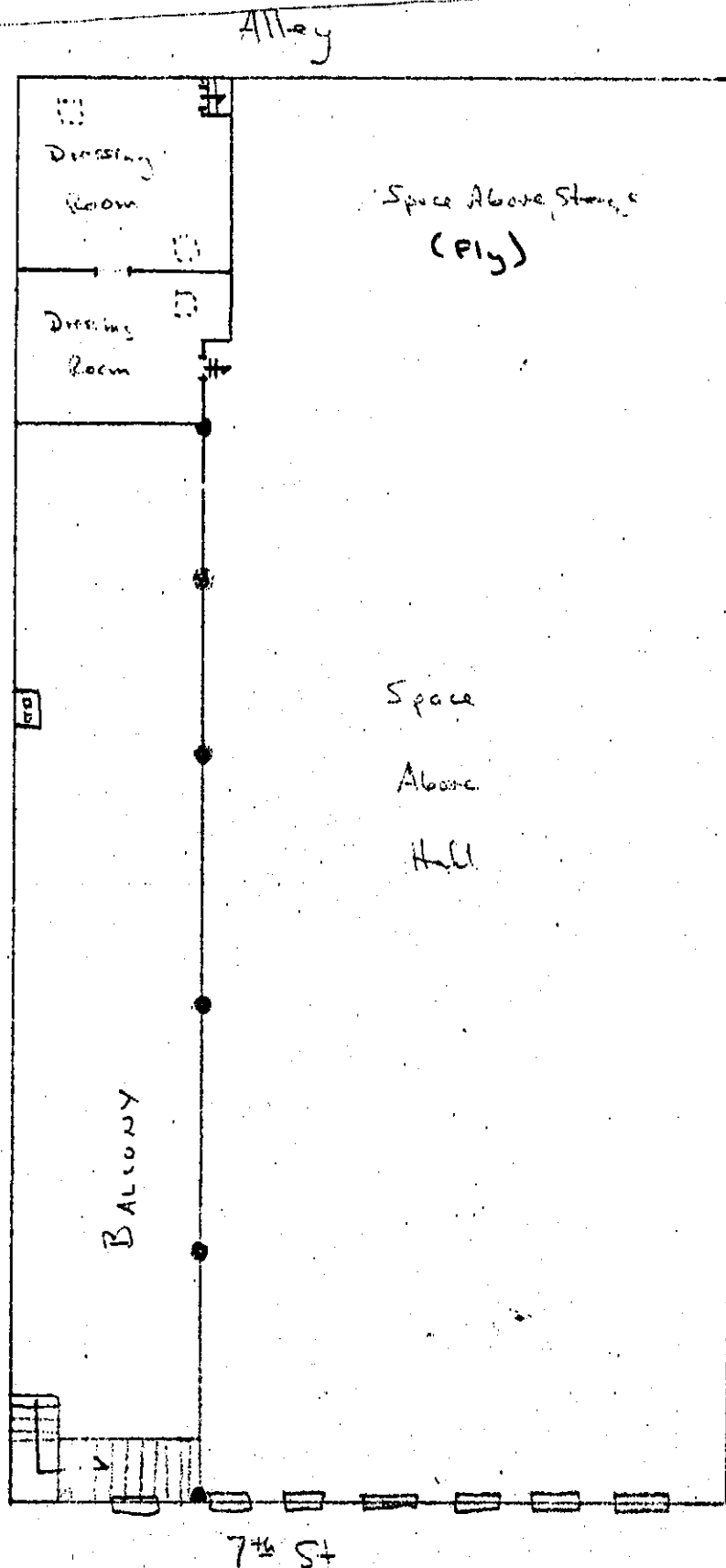
Fig. 1 Second floor plan. Sketch by author. 1975.



Italian Hall - 2nd floor

All stairs are now closed

Fig. 2 Balcony level floor plan. Sketch by author, 1975.



All stair arrows
point down

Italian Hall - Balcony Level

Fig. 3 Dressing area under the stage. Sketch by author, 1975.

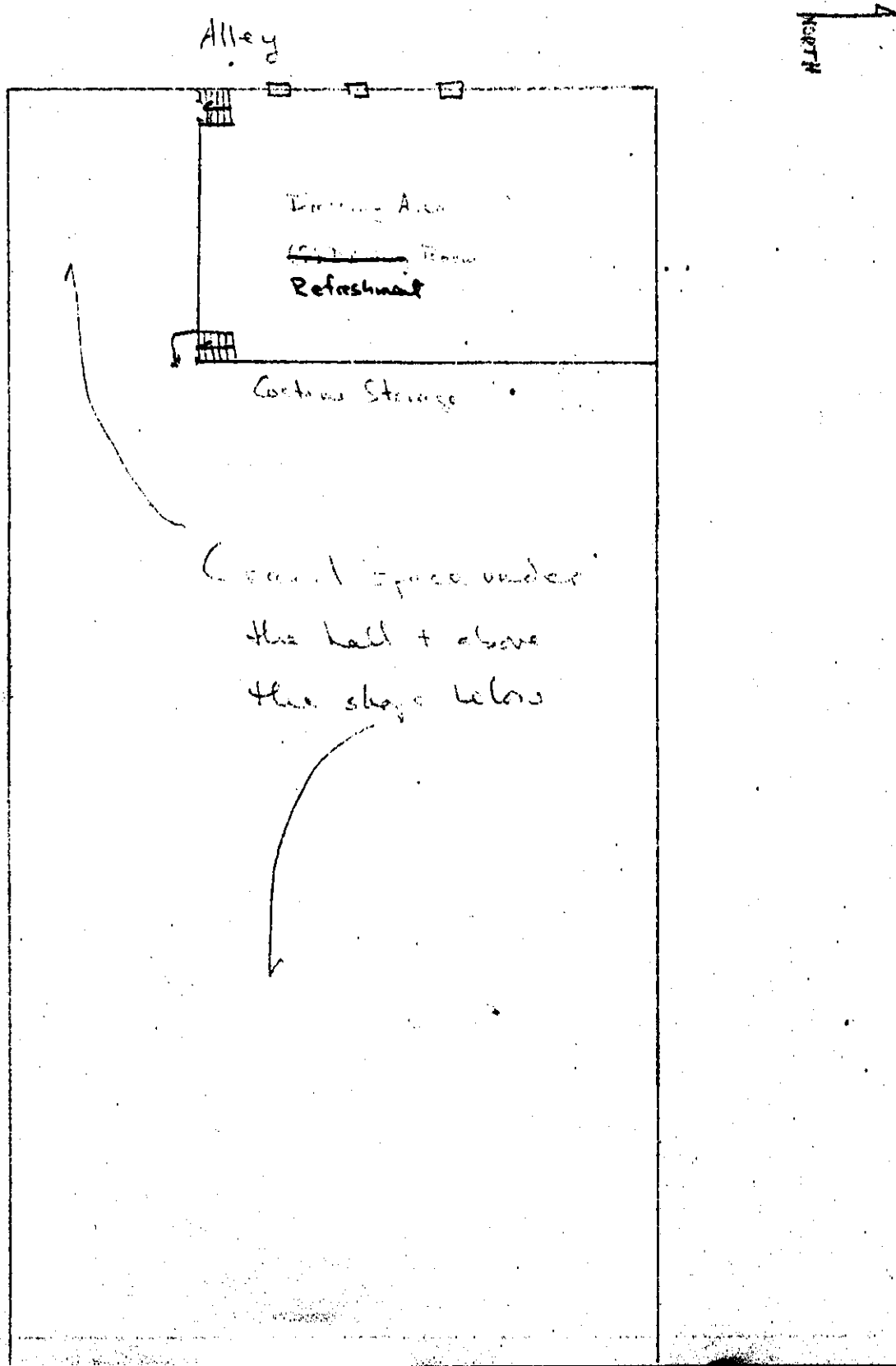


Fig. 4 Perspective view of the front façade. Photograph by author, 1975.

