

ELKS BUILDINGS AND THEATER HISTORIC DISTRICT A PRESCOTT HISTORIC PRESERVATION DISTRICT

12.1 DISTRICT OVERVIEW AND HISTORY

12.1.1 Overview and History



*Elks Building and Theater; 1906
and Today*

Since its completion in 1905, the Elks Building has been a positive contribution to the community of Prescott. As a commercial structure, the building has complemented the adjacent commercial district; architecturally, it stands as a forerunner of 20th century commercial styles; and socially, the structure has provided a setting for one of the town's most active fraternal organizations. Yet it is principally for its theater that the Elks Building is recognized to be of historic value. Through the first quarter of this century the theater was used for a wide variety of events: minstrel shows, balls, high school plays, graduation ceremonies and serious theater. As movies became popular, they were also presented. The structure is in good condition and, although some remodeling has occurred both to the interior and the exterior, the original integrity of the design is intact and could be recovered.

In 1904 a request was made to the community by the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks Lodge No. 330 to add an "opera house" at the back end of a building they were planning to build on East Gurley Street. The response was positive and the cornerstone of the building was laid on April 3, 1904, with the grand opening held on February 20, 1905. From the beginning the Elks Building served as a focal point of local pride and community events. Famed performers Sir Harry Lauder, Olivia deHavilland, John Phillips Sousa and Tom Mix were among the notables who appeared at the Elks Theater. The acoustics were reported to be superb, with an original seating capacity of 900.

With the arrival of the movies, silent films began to be shown in 1915 and continued to 1929. The arrival of sound systems ushered in the "talkies" which continued to be shown until the 1980s. The opera seats were removed in the 1940s to accommodate the wide screen, as was much of the ornate interior bric-a-brac. The ceiling was lowered replacing a second set of stairs. The inside box office was removed, an outside one installed, and the existing marquee was added. The bronze elk statue was removed in 1971 and currently resides on top of the Elks Lodge in Prescott Valley.

After several ownership changes, the Elks Building became the property of the Arizona Community Foundation, who has designated Prescott College as the steward of the building at no charge.

A grant in 1992 helped to underwrite a historic structure assessment as an initial step toward stabilization and protection. In 1993 the building was

reroofed, eliminating one of the many problems resulting from age. Also that year a new light board and sound system were installed. Two years later the south wall was replastered and painted, the pressed metal ceiling repaired, and the stage enlarged.

Today the Elks Building and Theater remains as a focal point for many community activities such as the Cowboy Poet's Gathering, the Arizona Jamboree and other special events, conventions and meetings.

The Elks Building is located on Gurley Street, the main commercial thoroughfare in Prescott. The land descends steeply as one travels westbound, until it reaches Granite Creek, which runs south-to-north west of the Courthouse Plaza. The property is completely developed and areas that are not built upon are paved.

12.1.2 Location

The Elks Building and Theater Historic District is located at 117 East Gurley Street, between Cortez and Marina Streets. The building is near several other historic structures, including the Carnegie Library (125 East Gurley Street), the Hassayampa Inn (122 East Gurley Street), and the Union Street Preservation District (south side of Union between Marina and Alarcon Streets). The district is also close to several National Register Districts, including the East Prescott (to the east), the South Prescott Townsite (to the south), and the Courthouse Plaza (to the west). This central location helped the building prosper over the years, as it was walking distance to residential, entertainment, commercial and business uses in the downtown area.

The boundary of the district, along with current zoning, is shown on Figure 12-1.

12.1.3 Formation of the Historic District

The district was formed as the result of the Prescott Multiple Resource Area (MRA) survey and nomination of 1978. The ordinance establishing the local district was completed in 1980 and the local guidelines and standards for the district were approved by the Prescott City Council in September of 1996.

12.1.4 Prescott Preservation District Responsibilities

The Prescott Preservation Commission has review responsibilities for the Elks Buildings and Theater Historic District. The review process is required for any project requiring a building permit. Applicants are encouraged to meet with the City's Preservation Specialist prior to submission to answer any questions and obtain assistance in designing a historically compatible project.

12.2 DISTRICT QUALITIES AND DESIGN ELEMENTS

12.2.1 Architectural Overview



Original Theater Interior

The Elks Building and Theater is a three-story masonry structure of symmetrical massing. Measuring about 95 feet in width by 125 feet in depth, the floor plan is divided into two sections of approximately equal volume. The front portion is divided into rental spaces of various sizes; the rear portion is a theater. On the exterior, few eclectic features were employed. Instead, paired windows and colossal-order pilasters were juxtaposed to create a stark, structural effect. Banks of contrasting masonry above and below the windows accentuate the horizontal thrust.

The building is built upon the front property line, as are many of the commercial buildings in the downtown. The fly loft of the theater is a prominent feature of the west elevation and is visible from many areas of west Prescott. In addition to the front, simple masonry pilasters can also be seen on the east, south and west elevations.

Access to the site is either directly from Gurley Street or from an alley that connects Gurley and Union Streets. No parking is available on-site. The alley, although paved, is in poor condition. Alley improvements need to be made to the pavement, trash receptacles and utilities.

The front (north) elevation of the buildings is set on a blue granite base that is still visible in most locations. This granite is also used as accents at the heads and sills of the front windows. The original brick masonry which constitutes most of the rest of the structure is still visible on all sides except the east side of the south wing (the theater). The brick has been covered with a colored gunite-type material which cannot be removed without damaging the brick. This material is painted in two light earth-tone shades, with the color of structural supports (such as the large pilasters) a lighter color than the areas between.

Two partially inset balconies originally occurred on the second and third floor above the theater entry. These have been enclosed to provide more rental space, each with five panels of fixed glass. The third floor enclosure follows the outside curve of the original balcony, and the area above it has been blocked in with vertical wood siding. The cast balcony rails and supports have been lost.

The theater entry has changed significantly from the original design. The marquee extends well over the sidewalk and is sided with wood in a board-and-batten pattern. Neon tubes are on the marquee soffit in a sunburst pattern. The marquee sign itself is a box set into the frame, backlit with fluorescent lights, as is the "Prescott College - Elks Theater" sign on top of the extension.

The sides of the entry have been covered with flagstone from the ground level to the bottom of the marquee - a clearly incompatible addition. A ramp has been added to the left of the main entry for access to the rental offices. The ramp has a simple wrought iron handrail that is incompatible and should be replaced. The entire theater entrance should be restored to its original appearance.

Other signage at the front of the buildings is box-type with translucent panels and fluorescent lighting. This, too, is incompatible with historic signage for the rental spaces, which usually consisted of painted signs above the first floor transoms. Some of the businesses, particularly those on the upper floors, can be identified by the company sign painted on the north windows. This is a compatible use of signage that should be encouraged here and on other historic commercial buildings.

Doors vary from a storefront type at the ground floor businesses to wood at the theater entrance. Both are appropriate for their respective uses, although the theater doors are in disrepair.

Nearly all of the windows have been replaced over the years, and some have been blocked-in and stuccoed over. The blocking-in has been limited to the theater wing (presumably as part of previous remodeling efforts) so it has a limited effect on views of the building from the primary public right-of-way (Gurley Street). Replacement windows consist of one large, fixed pane over two panes, one of which slides open. These replaced the original "one-over-one" windows. Windows are of a metal "storefront" quality, appropriate to this context and compatible with the historic design.

12.2.2 Landscape/Streetscape

As previously mentioned, the site of the Elks Building is completely developed and no landscaping is present. A downtown enhancement program is currently under development which may provide better sidewalks (which are in poor condition) and other amenities such as historic street lamps, street furniture and landscaping at corners and crosswalks.

12.2.3 Integrity

The Elks Building is in generally good condition, and what incompatible changes have been made can be reversed. The building is an intact example of early twentieth century commercial development that still serves the primary functions for which it was built.

12.3 DISTRICT RECOMMENDATIONS

12.3.1 Opportunities Within the District



Original Theater Stage

Since the first decade of the twentieth century, the Elks Building and Theater have been central to the daily life and history of Prescott. Its location is close to many other important business and entertainment uses and the building remains an important part of the town's professional and cultural life. Zoning is compatible, although the Business "B" classification allows several uses that would be incompatible within or adjacent to the Elks Building (for a fuller discussion of these incompatible uses, see the section on the Courthouse Plaza National Register District).

Given this history and setting, the best use for the Elks Buildings would be as a quality business and entertainment node in the middle of the downtown area. The increased demand for business and commercial space in Prescott, especially in the downtown, may increase pressures to accommodate more uses within the building or to make additional incompatible changes that would alter the historic character of the building.

12.3.2 Specific District Recommendations

Summary of Recommendations

The following represents a brief summary of the recommendations for the Elks Building and Theater Historic District.

Table 12-1
Summary of Recommendations - Elks Building and Theater Historic District

<i>Item</i>	<i>Observation/Recommendation</i>
Architectural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the quality of the alley, including pavement, trash receptacles and utilities (coordinate with City) • Do not allow any additional coverings or coatings on the original masonry that would obscure the brick pattern • Encourage continued subtle use of contrasting light colors on the building • Restore exterior balconies to their original look and use; restore original handrail and remove vertical wood siding at third floor • Restore theater entry to original design; remove marquee and vertical flagstone • Replace wrought iron railing with historically compatible material and design • Replace existing business signage with simpler, historically accurate design (see text); do not allow box-type and/or fluorescent signs

- Replace theater doors with wood in a historically appropriate design
- When the current windows need to be replaced, use "one-over-one" double hung design; do not allow sliding elements or aluminum
- Consider replacing the elk at the top of the main entrance

Streetscape/Landscape

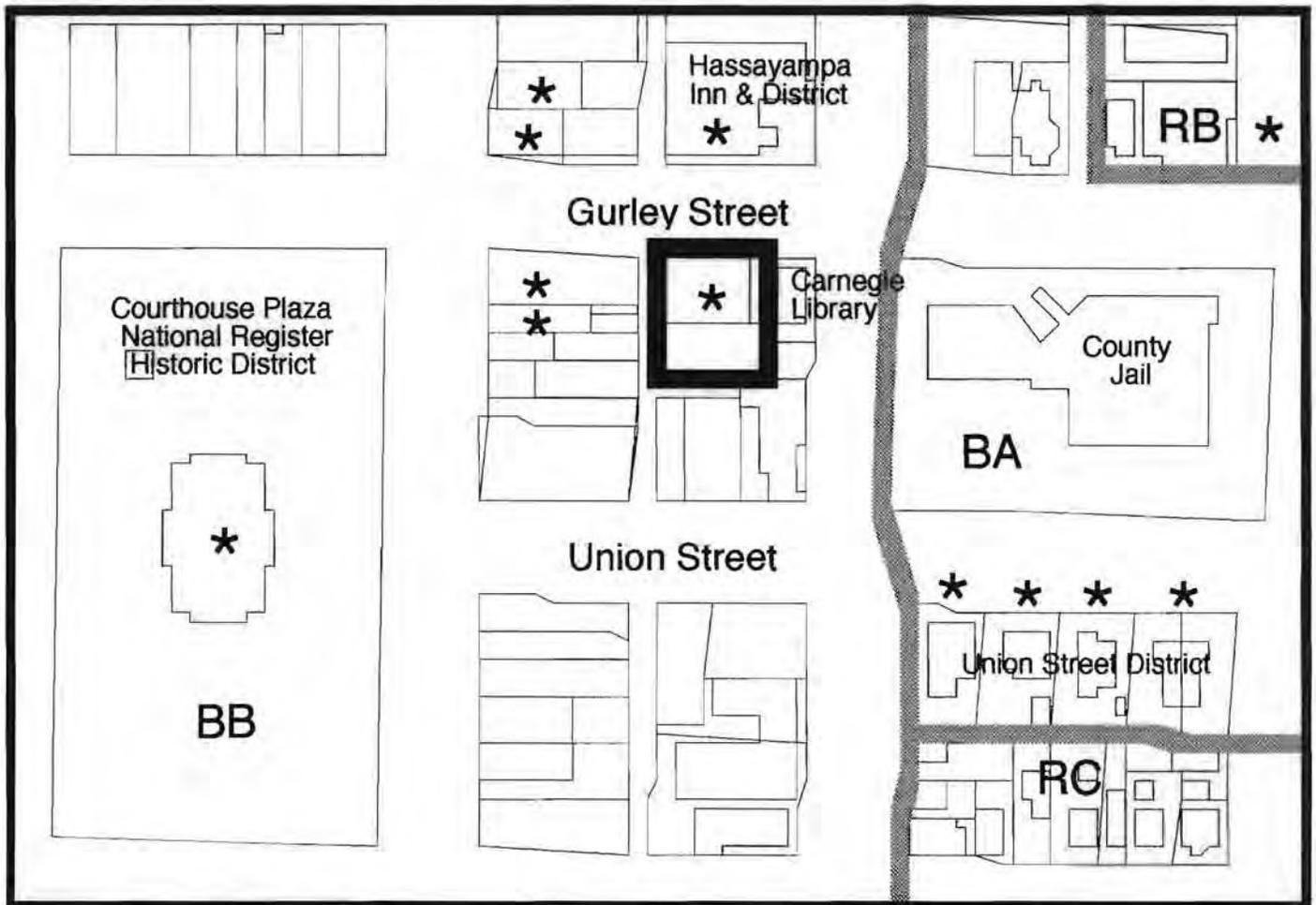
- Work with the City on the Downtown Enhancement Plan to ensure that any changes in front of the Elks Building are appropriate and do not damage historic resources

District Opportunities

- Promote continued use of the Elks Building and Theater Historic District as a quality professional and entertainment complex in the heart of Prescott
- Encourage compatible commercial and business office uses in and adjacent to the building
- Monitor development pressures that could encourage incompatible changes to the historic character of the building



HISTORIC PRESERVATION MASTER PLAN



	Local District Boundary
	Property Listed on the National Register
RB	Residential B
RC	Residential C
BA	Business A
BB	Business B

Figure
12-1

Elks Building & Theater
Prescott Historic Preservation District
District Boundary & Zoning
Not to Scale