

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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any 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.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Eugene S. Briggs Auditorium

Other names/site number: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 2450 East Maine

City or town: Enid State: OK County: Garfield

Not For Publication: ☐ nity: ☐

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___national ___statewide ___local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

___A ___B ___C ___D

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title :

State or Federal agency/bureau
or Tribal Government

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private: ☐
Public – Local ☐
Public – State ☒
Public – Federal ☐

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s) ☒
District ☐
Site ☐
Structure ☐
Object ☐

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION & CULTURE/Auditorium

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION & CULTURE/Auditorium

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: BRICK

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Eugene S. Briggs Auditorium, with a date of construction of 1957-58, at 2450 East Maine, Enid, Oklahoma, is situated on the campus of Northern Oklahoma College. Designed by the local architectural firm of Wheeler and Wheeler, the building is a large, apparently flat-roofed, horizontally massed two-part block that has three visible sections: lobby, auditorium proper, and stage house. The exterior is created of a steel superstructure overlaid by non-load-bearing brick curtain walls. The walls are laid up in tactile patterns and have unusual angles in the primary elevation. The two secondary (east and west) elevations, those of the auditorium section proper, incorporate a horizontally zigzagged wall construction that is acoustically functional. Modern materials, including steel superstructure, glass blocks, and contrasting brick colors and patterns illustrate features of Modern Movement architecture with strong reference to Neo-Expressionism, and the exterior makes clear that form is function. Briggs Auditorium maintains excellent integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and the exterior has not been altered since its construction.

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Narrative Description

Eugene S. Briggs Auditorium was erected in 1957-58 at 2450 East Maine in Enid, Oklahoma on the campus of Phillips University, a private college that is now a two-year state school called Northern Oklahoma College. Locally significant for its architecture. Completed in 1958, the auditorium is sited in the south-central area of campus and is surrounded by parking lots and academic buildings, including the Mabee Center Field House (to the south), the Hallie Gantz University Center (to the west), the Zollers Memorial Library (to the north), and two Physical Plant buildings (to the east). The location of most campus buildings reflects a makeover of the entire physical plant that occurred from 1939 to 1960; the Mabee Center and the Zollers Library were later additions after 1970. Thus, the campus setting changed gradually over several decades but has been stable for almost fifty years.

The auditorium building is a detached two-part block. Its primary/south elevation presents as a massive rectangular block resting on a base block with battered walls. The building's short axis aligns with East Maine street, the primary access to campus, and the long axis aligns with 25th Street/Michael Hedges Boulevard, which functionally defines the east edge of campus. The building measures generally 108 feet at its widest point (east-west, in the stage house section on the north) and 194 feet along its long axis (north-south; not counting a canopy that projects 11 feet from the south/front wall). The I-shaped footprint and a distance view of the auditorium's east/west walls indicate that the building has three functional sections: a main public entrance and lobby (on the south); an auditorium/seating area (in the center); and a stage house (on the north). The building has a partial basement. The roof is flat in the lobby section (on the south) and stage house section (on the north) but is arched in the auditorium section; all sections have a shallow parapet concealing the roofs. The walls rise to a height of an estimated 33 feet over the lobby and auditorium sections and to 50 feet (estimated) in the stage house.

The architectural category and style are Modern Movement with strong reference to Neo-Expressionism. The design was executed by Wheeler and Wheeler (Glen Norris Wheeler and Elbert M. Wheeler of Enid), noted regional architects. The auditorium's symmetrical presentation and choice of surfaces reflect modernism's construction techniques and materials, the most important of were steel for structure (rather than masonry), thin-shell reinforced concrete, and glass. A construction photo from 1957 (Fig. 1, Briggs Auditorium under Construction, Continuation Sheet 7/1) shows Briggs's half-completed exterior with a steel superstructure and non-load-bearing masonry curtain walls. In the photo, the steel members of the auditorium walls and roof are in place, and the brick is being laid up between the vertical steel columns. The primary elevation, on the south (the lobby entrances) is different. Its walls have standard steel framing members that will be covered by brick veneer. The second story will be framed atop a cantilevered zigzag, or accordion-pleated, canopy that rests on a horizontal steel beam with no framing yet placed above it. Briggs Auditorium's major design features are its intricate and textural brick patterns, contrasting colors, zigzag reinforced-concrete canopy, and walls that are vertically or horizontally angled.

The building is overwhelmingly concerned with volume, horizontality, and contrasting texture and color. Intricately crafted masonry varies with the function of each section. On all elevations the wall material (or cladding) comprises primarily brickwork, some buff and some dark red, and, in contrast, there is smooth granite in the second story of the lobby/south section. The decorative elaboration includes popular 1950s materials such as glass blocks (for lighting in the lobby section) and thin-shell

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concrete (for the zigzag, or pleated, cantilevered canopy). The building's overall appearance is monumental; its overall "feel" is heavy and bulky. That the first story of the primary/south elevation does not seem to "match" the second story may draw from Neo-Expressionism. Above all, the building's textural hallmark is *motion*; it is dynamic. The variety of textures and unusual angles give the observer's eye no place to rest; the eye must move; when it moves, the building appears to move with it, and the brain registers contradictory, disunited, but interesting, information.

South elevation:

The south elevation provides the primary public entry and is the building's most elaborate, carrying the many of the distinguishing visual characteristics that are recognized by the public. The façade comprises three parts. From grade, the 88-foot-wide, dark red brick first-story walls rise from the concrete entry pad to a height of about 14 feet. The first-story walls are battered, or angled inward at the top, so that the bottom of the wall is roughly 2.5 feet wider than the top, creating a "pyramid" look. The battered construction embraces the southeast and southwest corners, and extends along the east and west walls. A centrally placed, 38-foot-wide, glazed entrance accesses the lobby and comprises 5 sections of various configurations of slab glass in aluminum casings and frames. Three sets of paired aluminum and slab-glass doors are flanked by and divided by sets of eight-part aluminum-framed window sections of slab glass. In all five sections, the lights are of unequal size, and the top two sections form horizontally flattened diamond shapes mimicking the zigzag canopy above them. Between the sections, four steel columns (exposed structure) also divide the space. A single blue plastic decorative stripe is applied to the glazing of the windows and doors all the way across the entry.

An eleven-foot-deep concrete zigzag, or pleated, canopy over the doors spans the 88-foot width of the building and extends out past the side walls for four feet. It wraps the corner and extends down the east and west sides for 30 feet. This shelters the front and side entrances from drainage from the wall above. The canopy is cantilevered on a steel beam that rests on round steel columns (between the entry doors). The canopy continues from the exterior into the interior, forming the lobby ceiling, and is anchored to an interior brick wall on the north end of the lobby. In visual effect, the pleated canopy seems to "move" and makes the second story appear to float above the first floor's battered wall.

Above the canopy, the second floor visually dominates this elevation. The wall is characterized by decorative and complicated buff-colored brickwork. The bonding pattern forms an elaborately laid checkerboard, interspersed with single glass blocks that appear to be small holes in the wall, making the wall resemble a solar screen. The pattern is created, beginning at the canopy, with a triple course of plain running bond (stretcher) that spans the width of the elevation; in the center course of this triplet, the bricks are set so that every other joint of short edges is slightly receded, giving a sawtooth (or perhaps recessed zigzag) effect. Above each triplet course is a three-course-high section of alternating rectangles of two types: one rectangle has 9 bricks in soldier, with five of them recessed (and four set flush with the wall); the other rectangle comprises 9 bricks set 3 over 3 in stack bond. Across the height and width, eight rows have glass blocks, alternating between 10 and 11, for a total of 84 blocks. This arrangement of 3 running-bond courses alternating with a changing-direction course is repeated up to a parapet of narrow granite blocks that also extend down the sides, framing the brick wall.

A concrete pad extends the full width of the elevation and joins with a concrete sidewalk at each side of the building. It also joins with a wide walkway that continues south to the curb. There is removable signage and outdoor furniture.

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West elevation.

The west elevation clearly delineates the building's three functional sections. In this, form indicates function, with the exterior design representing the type of activity that takes place inside each section. The length of the building from south to north is 194 feet, of which 30 feet is the lobby section, 118 feet is the auditorium section, and 46 feet is the stage house section.

At the south end, the red-brick cladding of the first-story battered wall, described above, continues for 30 feet. This section has one opening, filled with a pair of steel slab doors that access the lobby. Seven glass blocks are inset into the brick, widely separated and in three rows, lighting an original restroom inside. At the top of the red brick wall is the terminal up-fold of the canopy. Above that, the second-story wall cladding is comprised of four-foot-square blocks of smooth, light-beige granite, in the same material that comprises the parapet at the top of the wall. A five-foot-deep sidewalk extends along this side of the building from south to north. In front of the entry doors, a set of concrete steps, with steel handrails, accesses the parking area on the west side.

The center section of the west elevation is the auditorium, proper. The walls are buff brick, divided into six sections. The sections are determined by the locations of the superstructure's steel columns. At its south end the wall is stepped in from the lobby section four feet, and subsequently, each of the six sections is zigzagged horizontally, or stepped inward, at an angle from about a foot on its north side. This is because the brick wraps only the side and front of each vertical steel column and then angles back in toward the rear of the next column. That gives the wall a horizontally "moving" zigzag appearance that seems to make the building seem to become narrower with each "step" toward the north (it does not; the width remains constant at 80 feet for the entire 118 feet of length). There are five 20-foot-wide sections, and then the wall terminates in an 18-foot section on the northernmost end. Each section of buff brick generally stops three feet above the ground, next to the nearest steel column, but leaves a series of pilaster-like "posts" of buff brick that wrap the columns and extend to the ground. Between the posts, a section of dark red brick is recessed one foot, completing the wall. This construction feature and contrasting colors makes the wall look like a piece of blonde mid-century modern furniture on stubby legs. In the northernmost 18-foot section the wall steps out 5 feet to create a protected entryway sheltering a pair of steel slab doors under a glass transom. In the auditorium part of the west elevation the color of buff brick varies irregularly and occasionally has slightly darker (gold-colored) bricks. Every sixth course is header-and-stretcher. Inside the building, these walls are exposed and have an acoustic function.

The north section of the building comprises the stage house, which rises approximately 17 feet above the roofline of the auditorium and lobby sections. The stage house section is 46 feet wide from north to south. At ground level, a 14-foot-deep (east to west), two-story extension with a flat, overhanging roof extends along the entire 46 feet. The extension's first-floor cladding is the same red brick used in the lobby section, and the walls are battered, or angled inward, at the top. The extension's second floor, with vertical walls, is buff brick. In each story, contiguous, 3-foot-wide-by-1-foot-deep, single-light, steel-framed clerestory windows extend around all three sides. Above the extension, the stage house' cladding varies from that of the auditorium. Though created of the same two shades of buff brick in running bond, in the stage house wall every 12th course is header-and-stretcher, and every 4 feet in that course, a header brick projects about 3 inches, creating a checkered effect. It is similar to a rock-climbing wall.

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Outside the west wall, near the stage house's exit door, there is a concrete well, covered by steel plates, which may conceal an access opening into the basement. Further north there is a second concrete well, inside a steel fence. This well has a boarded window. A very large satellite dish is placed on the north end of the stage house.

East elevation:

The east elevation mirrors the west elevation, with the exception that the 14-by-46-foot extension from the stage house is only in one story and there are no exterior wells for access. Otherwise, the overall presentation, size, shape, cladding, and roofs are identical to that of the west elevation.

At the south end, the 30-foot lobby wall is red brick and battered, has one entrance with a double door, and glass blocks are inset in the wall. The wall above is also clad with four-foot-square granite slabs. The up-fold of the concrete canopy extends around on this side. The variation is that the concrete pad outside the entry at the does not access a parking lot.

Again, the 118-foot center section of the east elevation is the auditorium, proper, with six sections of buff brick that zigzag horizontally, or step inward, and appear to narrow the building. Again, each section appears to rest on short, buff-brick legs and recessed walls of dark red brick. In the northernmost section of the elevation, the wall steps out 5 feet to create a protected entryway sheltering a pair of steel slab doors under a glass transom. Again, in this section the brick is buff with scattered gold-colored bricks, and there are courses of header-stretcher.

The 46-foot north section comprises the stage house, which looms over the roofline of the auditorium and lobby sections. Here, the 14-by-46-foot extension is only one story and but otherwise mirrors the first story of its counterpart on the west side, with flat, overhanging roof and dark red brick, battered wall. The extension has continuous, steel-framed, single-light clerestory windows on all three sides. The stage house's wall cladding varies from that of the auditorium and has two shades of buff brick, a header-stretcher course every twelfth course, and projecting header bricks. In the north wall of the extension is the building's cornerstone, stating: "PHILLIPS UNIVERSITY/ AUDITORIUM/GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY/1907—1957."

North elevation:

The north, or rear, elevation, is the back of the stage house. Its 108-foot width includes 80 feet for the stage and 28 feet for the extensions on east and west. The wall is dark red brick from ground to 10 feet above grade, and above that, continuing to the parapet, the brick is buff. The wall varies and has two shades of buff brick, a header-stretcher course every twelfth course, and projecting header bricks. There is a pair of steel slab doors in an entry (into the stage proper) toward the northeast corner. At the top of each extension's wall (one story in the east and two stories in the west) are a flat, overhanging roof, over steel-framed continuous clerestory windows. A wooden palisade fence extends 34 feet out from the wall and spans 70 feet across the north elevation. The fence encloses a basement stairwell and a concrete pad with various large pieces of HVAC or electrical equipment.

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Interior:

The interior of Briggs Auditorium retains virtually all of its interior features and has only been slightly altered. Upon entering at the south/main doors, the viewer enters a wide, shallow lobby. Ahead is a brick wall, originally and presently glazed black brick, with two widely separated pairs of wood-slab doors (in blonde oak) that access the auditorium. Above, the concrete accordion-fold canopy that begins over the exterior entryway form the lobby ceiling. On the left (west) side of the lobby are a stairwell and stairs leading to the balcony; these conceal the door into an original first-floor restroom. The stairs have a plain, aluminum banister. An exit door and a new ADA-compliant restroom (dating 1992) are in the same area. That arrangement is precisely mirrored on the right (east) side of the lobby. The south (entry) wall around the doors, the east and west walls, and the stairwells are created of varicolored brick. The lobby floor comprises original white terrazzo with brown speckles. Directly in front of the black brick wall are ten regularly spaced, original aluminum cone-shaped drop lights; the rest of the ceiling has regularly placed can lights.

The cavernous seating area, or auditorium proper, accessed from the lobby, has a ceiling height of thirty feet. At the rear of the seating area, just inside the lobby doors, a brick pony wall provides separation for a carpeted gathering area. The room seats 1,250; original seating for 1,350 was reduced in 1992 by the addition of new restrooms in the southwest/southeast corners. There are 3 sections of theater-style metal contiguous seating, with upholstered fold-up seats. The sections are separated by a wide, carpeted center aisle, and there are carpeted side aisles along the east and west walls. The walls are varicolored brick up to about 8 feet, and from that height to the ceiling, they are buff brick. The ceiling is covered by sprayed-on acoustical material. The zigzag-angled, or "stepped," walls that are visible on the exterior are also visible on the interior from floor to ceiling; this is said to be an acoustical aspect, but it also facilitates illumination. Each narrow, vertical wall "step" carries a continuous strip of fluorescent lighting. In addition, square can lights are regularly placed throughout the ceiling. Approaching the stage, the walls curve gently inward and are covered by an acoustical fabric. The auditorium floor is raked and drops approximately three feet from south (lobby, on grade) to north (stage), and when the floor reaches the stage, it drops several feet to allow an orchestra pit that spans the width of the stage. The pit is separated from the walkways by a metal railing, and its rear wall, which supports the stage margin, is created of glazed black brick. Near the stage, on left and right, patron exit openings lead out of the seating area and to a set of steps up to a steel exit door at ground level.

Above the orchestra pit is the large stage, raised roughly five feet above the auditorium floor and accessible by a set of steps on each side. The stage is 80 feet wide and approximately 46 feet deep with elaborate rigging above, in the top of the stage house. The proscenium is rectangular; there are multiple curtains behind it. A white backdrop sits at the rear of the stage, creating a backstage area that functions as a walkway; a small metal stair leads up into the rigging. Also behind the backdrop is an exit door in the building's north elevation (leading to a parking lot).

The side "wings" of the stage are actually the rooms of the "extensions" on east and west. The one-story extension on the east is used for properties storage; the two-story extension on the west has dressing rooms and storage. There is an interior stairway in the first-floor west dressing room.

The balcony, or mezzanine, which is accessed from the lobby, is divided from east to west by a wall. This creates a small lobby that is lighted by the glass blocks in the exterior wall above the entry. The stairwells are also lighted by the blocks. Balcony seating is approximately 160, the original reduced by the presence of a sound/light control room with windows through which to project lights. The balcony

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wall is varicolored brick with a small expanse of brick and stucco above it, and in this area a drop ceiling has acoustical tiles.

Beneath the first floor of the stage house is a partial basement. It houses mechanical units for this building and for others on campus.

Alterations:

There have been no known alterations to the exterior of Eugene S. Briggs Auditorium. Interior alterations have included the 1992 construction of additional ADA-compliant restrooms, which reduced the seating capacity of the auditorium. Additional acoustical material was also added to the auditorium walls in 1992.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. 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.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1958

Significant Dates

1958

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

ARCHITECT---Wheeler & Wheeler

BUILDER---Mefford Construction Co.

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

Eugene S. Briggs Auditorium, sited at 2450 East Maine in Enid, Garfield County, Oklahoma, is locally significant within the educational and architectural history of Enid. It is being nominated for historical significance under Criterion A, Education, for its importance in the city's and Phillip's University's liberal arts curricular programming. Completed in 1958, it is also nominated under Criterion C, Architecture, for its significance in 1958 Enid's Modern Movement architectural history. Using modern technology and the concept of "form follows function," the auditorium's exterior dramatically illustrates its uses. The building maintains excellent integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association and is well able to transmit information about its importance to the educational history of Enid as well as the Modern Movement as expressed in Enid's twentieth-century architectural history.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)

Educational Significance:

Like many towns in west-central Oklahoma, Enid was born in 1893 of a land run. The seat of Garfield County, Enid quickly became a regional agricultural service center because of railroads and wheat farming. Continued population stability and growth were assured when petroleum production and refining became important in the region in the 1920s. The construction of Enid Army Air Field (now Vance AFB) for the U.S. Army Air Corps in 1941-43 established another stable economic engine. With those factors, Enid's 1930 population of 26,000 grew to be more than 50,000 by 2000 and stood at more than 49,000 in 2010.¹ One of Enid's hallmarks as a regional center was its educational offerings, including a strong public school system, a small college, and a state school for the handicapped.

Enid became a regional higher education force with the 1907 opening of Oklahoma Christian University, in 1912 renamed as Phillips University. It was a private, sectarian (Disciples of Christ) four-year college. Under the leadership of Dr. Ely V. Zollars, the college settled into a small campus just east of town. Under the leadership of Dr. Frank H. Marshall and Dr. Eugene S. Briggs, by 1942 the facility had expanded over two decades into a campus of academic buildings, generally in revival styles and lying within an eight-block area north and south of East Maine street. Most academic buildings were situated in the northern four blocks of campus.²

Over the years Phillips came to be known as a quality liberal arts school, and it had very well regarded arts and humanities programs. The educational offerings were particularly strong in vocal,

¹ Glen McIntyre, "Enid," *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 2010), 451-53.

² See I. N. McCash, "History of Phillips University," *The Chronicles of Oklahoma* 25, 181ff; Frank H. Marshall, *Phillips University: The First Fifty Years, Vol. 1, The Early Days of Phillips University*, (Enid, Okla.: N.p., Phillips University, 1957). Some of the university's history is outlined in Rosen, "Clay Hall" National Register nomination, 2012 and in Montgomery/Gaston, "Marshall Hall" National Register nomination, 2015, both in the State Historic Preservation Office files, Oklahoma City.

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orchestral, and band music, and the drama and fine arts departments were also notable. There were small performance spaces in several buildings, none adequate for the audiences that were attracted. Among them, Old Main (the administration building) had the largest room available for all-student assemblies and cultural events. With the unfortunate destruction of Old Main in a fire in 1947, however, the university had to rely on smaller, inadequate spaces on campus in Marshall Hall, the Library, and the Student Union Building. They were also able to begin sharing performance space with the citizens of Enid, who had created a Convention Hall downtown and whose high school had an auditorium. Phillips could also rely on its own downtown Community College Education Building. None of those spaces could meet the size and the frequency of Phillips students' educational needs. Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, band and orchestra fall and spring concerts (an academic requirement for students in those majors) were held in the Convention Hall. Baccalaureate services and commencements were held in University Christian or First Christian Church and at Enid High School Auditorium, respectively. When the university orchestra performed with the Enid Symphony Orchestra, for example, the downtown Education Building became the venue.³ A new auditorium for Phillips would offer an educational benefit for the college's students and would also be welcomed by the city's residents.

In 1954 Dr. Briggs set into motion the process of planning and funding a new auditorium for Phillips University. In early winter 1955 the board of trustees authorized a committee to interview architects; they hired Wheeler and Wheeler, a local architectural firm. A citizens committee of Enid residents, chaired by Court E. Loomis, was formed in order to raise money for the project.⁴ In October, Briggs and the trustees announced a \$1.5 million building program. It included \$350,000 for an auditorium estimated to cost 25 percent more than that figure, a new administration building, a library, and wings and additions to existing buildings. By mid-May 1956 the "auditorium fund" had passed \$100,000.⁵ When the trustees met for the annual Founders' Day in October 1956, they selected the southeast corner of the main campus, which was the location of the campus maintenance building (a former National Guard armory). Construction began by Mefford Construction Company of Enid as soon as \$150,000 was in hand.⁶ On October 9, 1957, Dr. Briggs laid the cornerstone during the annual Founders' Day. The board of trustees proclaimed the next twelve months to be the university's Golden Anniversary celebration year, hopefully to culminate in the opening of the newly named Eugene S. Briggs Auditorium.⁷

Private citizens and student groups all collaborated to raise money to provide the auditorium with the latest in light, sound, rigging, and seating. For example, the "gate" money collected during the Music Department's 1957 annual event, on this occasion set to be the Broadway smash-hit musical *Showboat*, was donated to the building fund. The auditorium was completed in time for the October 9, 1958, Founders' Day celebration. A last-minute, month-long round-up of \$60,000 by local citizens made the building debt-free on opening day.⁸ In total, the citizens raised \$150,000 toward a building that ultimately cost \$500,000, parking and landscaping included.⁹

³ See Phillips University *Haymaker*, the student newspaper, for almost constant features on music and dramatics programs presented as students as requirements of their major fields of study, for the years 1947-1958.

⁴ *Haymaker*, 18 February 1955.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 21 October 1955, 18 May 1956.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 19 October 1956.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 11 October 1957; Frank H. Marshall and Robert G. Martin, *Phillips University's First Fifty Years, Vol. 3., The Period of Greatest Advance* (Enid, Okla.: N.p., Phillips University, 1967), 152-53.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 14 March 1958, 19 September 1958.

⁹ *Enid Daily Eagle*, 10 October 1958; *Enid Morning News*, 10 October 1958.

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Eugene S. Briggs Auditorium opened to the public on October 9, 1958. One thousand students, faculty, alumni, and Enid citizens attended. Briggs was outfitted with the most modern seating (1,500 heavily padded and upholstered movie theater-style seats), stage-house rigging for a variety of performances, an orchestra pit large enough to accommodate a symphony orchestra, special acoustical walls, and a balcony-level control room with a state-of-the-art sound system, a lighting system controlled from one single console, and a "fireproof" 35mm professional motion-picture projector. The building itself was completely fireproof and was provided with in-house heating and air-conditioning, massive units that also served other campus buildings.¹⁰ Interestingly, on the balcony, or mezzanine, was an inaugural art exhibit of works by Prof. John Randolph, head of the Fine Arts Department, whose chosen paintings, in this instance, were styled by a student reviewer as "Impressionistic" and "Abstract Expressionism,"¹¹ certainly in keeping with the building's architectural mood.

Phillips University's new Eugene S. Briggs Auditorium was a boon to educational activities. As noted in various media, it provided ". . . for the first time since the burning of Old Main in 1947, a gathering place where the student body can be seated in one large Phillips family, and it offers the public the opportunity to see Phillips productions presented on the campus in this magnificent building."¹² From 1958, the year of its completion, through the present, Briggs Auditorium has continued to provide valuable educational service to the student body and the citizens of Enid. The university departments' mandatory all-school assembly productions and required semi-annual student recitals and performances, in the form of concerts, musicals, and plays, were held there, as were baccalaureate services and commencement. The Enid community also occasionally rented the venue for educational and cultural activities and benefited from it.

As noted by the student newspaper, the *Haymaker*, in 1965, "for the community of Enid, the auditorium provides the setting for performing groups, church gatherings, and state conventions." The student reporter noted that since Briggs's opening in 1958 "the university has welcomed such famous people as former Vice-President Richard Nixon, Stan Kenton and his orchestra, Vincent Price, pianists Ferrante and Ticher, Meredith Willson [*The Music Man*], the Four Preps [singers], William Shirer [author], Tom Ewell [actor], and famed flamenco guitarist Carlos Montoya." He summarized, "Some consider Eugene S. Briggs Auditorium as one of the most important factors in unifying campus life. Besides its physical advantages, the auditorium provides a place where the social and spiritual life can be enjoyed by all of the students and thus helping them grow into mature adults during their college years."¹³ In saying this, he neatly defined the building's historical significance and its eligibility for listing in the National Register under Criterion A, Education.

Architectural Significance

By the late 1930s the ambiance and appearance of Phillips University's original buildings was, in the words of the *Enid Daily Eagle*, "pretty decrepit." From 1939 to 1958, during the tenure of President Eugene S. Briggs (1938-61), the college's original four academic blocks were repopulated with new buildings in a \$7 million modernization project.¹⁴ No architectural type predominated; several were revival styles. Two buildings erected in this period by Phillips University are listed in the National Register of

¹⁰ Quoted in *Haymaker*, 26 September 1958, from *Phillips University Bulletin*. See also *Haymaker*, 10 October 1958; *Enid Morning News*, 26 and 28 September 1958; and *Enid Daily Eagle*, 10 October 1958.

¹¹ *Haymaker*, 7 November 1958, review.

¹² *Ibid.*, 17 September 1965.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 17 September 1965.

¹⁴ *Enid Daily Eagle*, 8 October 1958; Frank H. Marshall, *Phillips University's First Fifty Years, Vol. 2, The Turbulent*

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Historic Places: Clay Hall, originally a dormitory (1941, Mission Revival style, now privately owned; southwest campus, NRIS-12000346); and Marshall Hall, originally for classrooms and chapel (1946-50, Gothic Revival style; still in academic use; main campus block northwest, NRIS-15000868).

Briggs Auditorium is also significant within the local context of Modern Movement architecture of Enid, Oklahoma. In Enid, as elsewhere a period of architectural experimentation began in the 1930s and continued through the 1960s. With constant growth and prosperity came architectural diversity in commercial, residential, and educational construction alike, although traditional revival styles prevailed. Into the 1940s modernism, generally in the form of Art Deco, became popular but was not ubiquitous. Exemplary is the Art Deco Garfield County Courthouse, in the downtown square (1934, Hawk and Parr, Architects, NRIS 84003018). As yet there has been no formal overall survey of Enid's Modern Movement architecture, and therefore, discussion remains generally anecdotal.¹⁵

A constellation of Enid's architects working in the post-World War II era sometimes made their livings with a variety of creative Modern Movement designs. They included Dura A. Smith, Thomas M. Rogers, Elbert and Norris Glen Wheeler, Frank Davies, and Dow Gumerson. Among their designs are commercial, residential, and educational buildings that are interpretations of modernist styles. Nonresidential examples include: Security National Bank Building, 201 West Broadway (International, 1962, Dura A. Smith); Public Library of Enid-Garfield County, 120 West Maine (New Formalism, 1964, Dura A. Smith); Babe's Package Store/Enid Finance Company, 220 South 3rd (Googie/Neo-Expressionism, Thomas M. Rogers, 1961); and Hedges Community Speech and Hearing Center, 2615 East Randolph (Neo-Expressionism, Thomas M. Rogers, 1969). In 1957-58 Phillips University and the firm of Wheeler and Wheeler provided Enid with one of the most visually interesting buildings among a community of Modern Movement representations. Eugene S. Briggs Auditorium, located at 2450 East Maine was, among its peers, unusual.¹⁶

A massive edifice completed in 1958 on the southeast corner of the main campus, Eugene S. Briggs Auditorium utilized the modern construction technique of a steel superstructure and curtain walls. It rises to 33 feet in height throughout but steps up to 50 feet in the stage house. It is fireproof, completely air conditioned, and has a partial basement that contained (at one time) a heating system that piped its product to many other buildings on campus. The stage is very large, measuring 80 feet from "wing" to "wing" and 46 feet in depth. Comfortable theater-style seating could accommodate up to 1,500 (a capacity that was reduced in 1992 by the installation of handicapped restrooms). The building's total cost, including paving for landscaping and parking lot, was \$500,000.¹⁷

Decades (Enid, Okla.: N.p. Phillips University, 1960), chapter 4, "The Best Building Years."

¹⁵ See Lynne Rostochil, "Enid Modern Architecture," *E-Town Magazine*, August/September 2014, 14-17; see also Internet blogs titled "How Much MCM Can One Town Have: A Tour of Enid's Architectural Marvels, Part 1 and Part 2," at okcmod.com, accessed 21 December 2016.

¹⁶ Enid's downtown area was listed under Criterion C, Architecture, in the National Register of Historic Places in 2007; of the 88 buildings recorded, 14 were, for one reason or another, described as Modern Movement (8 Art Deco, 6 International; only one, the Security National Bank, is authentically International). Most were noncontributing because of recent age or alteration. "Enid Downtown Historic District," National Register nomination, 2007, State Historic Preservation office; Oklahoma Landmarks Inventory Other sections of Enid, however, show more promise in estimating the Modern Movement influence. For example, see Sherry N. D. Emery, "Reconnaissance Survey of the Indian Hills Subdivision, Enid, Garfield County, Oklahoma," June 2016, which documents the popularity of Modern Movement/Contemporary and Ranch style residential units but has a comprehensive set of biographies of these architects, with names and dates of buildings designed by them (pages 92-94). See also Rostochil, "Enid Modern Architecture."

¹⁷ *Enid Daily Eagle*, 10 October 1958.

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The building incorporates many of the character-defining elements of Modern Movement styles, with considerable sensibility to a set of ideas that encompass the general style called "Neo-Expressionism." As noted by architectural historian Marcus Whiffen, in Neo-Expressionism, ". . . forms are not to be adopted, they should be unique products of the marriage of the program . . . [and reflect] the individual sensibility of the architect. . . . In Expressionism . . . the architect tries to convey his message at a nonintellectual level and directly, through the very forms that he employs."¹⁸ In this assessment, the main idea is that form follows function.

Briggs Auditorium incorporates modern construction techniques and materials, including steel superstructure, brick curtain walls that are intricately and decoratively laid, thin-shell molded concrete, and glass block tiles. In addition, and sensible to the general ideas of Neo-Expressionism, the architects created vibrant, dynamic surfaces by using mixtures of shape, color, and texture: a zigzag (pleated), cantilevered concrete canopy separating the first and second story in the primary/south elevation; battered first-story walls in the lobby/primary elevation section that makes this part of the building resemble the lower part of a pyramid; walls in the east and west/secondary elevations that zigzag in and out to embrace the vertical steel columns and also have interior acoustical functions for the auditorium; and battered walls in the stage house extension wings. Contrasting surface colors include dark red brick, beige granite, and buff brick. Contrasting textures include the face brick of the lobby, auditorium, and stage house sections; smooth, beige granite cladding in the second-story east and west walls of the lobby section; projecting bricks in the stage house walls; and an elaborate basket-weave pattern of recessed and projecting bricks interspersed with glass blocks, in the wall of the lobby/primary elevation.

Briggs Auditorium is a performance center, and the audience begins interacting with the performance when they initially encounter the exterior. The south/primary elevation presents as a large rectangular block sitting on top of a first story that has battered walls. Uniting form and function, the horizontally zigzagging side walls of the auditorium proper actually have an acoustical function inside, where the thirty-foot-tall "pleats" deflect and direct sound.¹⁹ The design works out a relationship between form, plan, function, and feeling. As Whiffen asserts, ". . . architects who normally work in other styles often turn Expressionist when commissioned to design a building for the practice of religion."²⁰ Briggs Auditorium seems to slip neatly into that assertion, as it was constructed by a religious college and occasionally used for spiritual gatherings (though it now belongs to the state's higher education system). The presentation might, at the risk of reading too much into it, be called "performance architecture."

Unusual for its architectural detailing among a wide variety of Modern Movement properties in Enid, Briggs Auditorium is an excellent representation of ways in which a modernist architect could use features of contemporary design to create a functional yet expressive building. If the intent was to evoke an emotional or experiential response, rather than an intellectual response, to the building (as noted by Whiffen), it works on that level, but it, like modern art, makes the brain work to understand its somewhat abstract nature.

¹⁸ Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1988), 269-70.

¹⁹ *Enid Morning News*, 26 September 1958.

²⁰ Whiffen, *American Architecture*, 273-74.

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In 1992 Briggs Auditorium received a \$1.5 million “upgrade” to the interior. This constituted new acoustical wall fabric and carpeting in the auditorium proper, a new lighting and sound system, handicapped accessibility (restrooms), and new landscaping. None of the alterations significantly changed the building’s appearance or functions.²¹

Eugene S. Briggs Auditorium, completed in 1958 at 2450 East Maine in Enid, Oklahoma, maintains excellent integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association and is therefore eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places for its significance under Criterion A, Education, and under Criterion C, Architecture. Because Briggs Auditorium is now property of the State of Oklahoma, and because its primary uses were (and remain) in the area of arts and humanities, rather than religion, a criteria consideration is not being sought in this nomination.

Additional Developmental Context:

In the 1990s Phillips University financially faltered, and in 1998 it closed. In 1999 the State of Oklahoma purchased the campus and its facilities. It became Northern Oklahoma College—Enid, a state-operated two-year community college branch of Northern Oklahoma College of Tonkawa. It is still in operation, and Briggs Auditorium continues to serve its original function.

The architects, brothers Elbert M. and Norris Glen Wheeler, with their father, Marion Norris Wheeler, formed the company Wheeler and Wheeler, based in Enid. Marion Norris Wheeler was a draftsman for architect Row Shaw and assumed control of the business when Shaw died in 1946. Norris Glen Wheeler received a mechanical engineering degree at Oklahoma A&M (now Oklahoma State) University in the 1940s and in 1946 joined the family business; he was a licensed architect. Elbert Wheeler (A.I.A.) received a master’s degree in architecture from Oklahoma A&M University in 1957 and also joined the family business as a licensed architect. In that capacity he led the team that designed Briggs Auditorium.²²

²¹ *Enid News and Eagle*, 3 December 1992

²² Emery, “Reconnaissance Survey of the Indian Hills,” 93; obituary, Elbert Wheeler, 26 December 2011.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Emery, Sherry N. D. "Reconnaissance Survey of the Indian Hills Subdivision, Enid, Garfield County, Oklahoma." June 2016.

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Marshall, Frank H. *Phillips University: The First Fifty Years, Vol. 1, The Early Days of Phillips University*. Enid, Okla.: N.p., Phillips University, 1957.

----- *Phillips University's First Fifty Years, Vol. 2, The Turbulent Decades*. Enid, Okla.: N.p. Phillips University, 1960.

Marshall, Frank H., and Robert G. Martin. *Phillips University's First Fifty Years, Vol. 3, The Period of Greatest Advance*. Enid, Okla.: N.p., Phillips University, 1967.

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McIntyre, Glen. "Enid." *Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*. Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 2009).

Rostochil, Lynn. "Enid Modern Architecture." *E-Town Magazine* [Enid, Oklahoma]. August/September 2014.

Rostochil, Lynne. "How Much Mod Can One Town Have: A Tour of Enid's Architectural Marvels," Parts 1 and 2. Modblog at okcmod.com. Accessed 21 December 2016.

Whiffen, Marcus. *American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles*. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1988.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Eugene S. Briggs Auditorium
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Primary location of additional data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office

☐ Other State agency

☐ Federal agency

☐ Local government

☐ University

☐ Other

Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N/A

10. Geographical Data

Acres of Property Less than 1 (one) acre

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 36.396030 Longitude: -97.843140

2. Latitude: Longitude:

3. Latitude: Longitude:

4. Latitude: Longitude:

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

1. Zone: Easting: Northing:

2. Zone: Easting: Northing:

3. Zone: Easting: Northing:

4. Zone: Easting: Northing:

Eugene S. Briggs Auditorium
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Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

From the Northeast corner of the Southeast $\frac{1}{4}$ of Section 9, Township 22 North, Range 6 West (the intersection of North University and East Randolph), proceed 908 feet South, then turn East and proceed 908 feet East to the southeast corner of the Garfield County cadastral parcel #0000-22N-06W-09-4-310-00 (a 908-foot-square parcel bounded by East Randolph, University, East Maine, and 25th St./Michael Hedges Blvd.); this is the Point of Beginning. From the Point of Beginning, proceed for 350 feet North, turn West and proceed for 170 feet West, turn South and proceed for 350 feet South, and turn East and proceed for 170 feet East, having described an enclosed rectangle measuring 170 feet east-west by 350 feet north-south and including Briggs Auditorium and its associated south and west sidewalks, north parking/fenced utility area, and east grounds.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

This boundary is drawn from the legal description found in the records of the Garfield County Assessor's Office, Enid, Oklahoma, and includes the property historically associated with Briggs Auditorium.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Dianna Everett, consultant to City of Enid
organization: _____
street & number: 2510 Countrywood Ln.
city or town: Edmond state: OK zip code: 73012-6433
e-mail: weaver25@cox.net
telephone: 4-5/348-4679
date: 1 March 2017

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

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Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Eugene S. Briggs Auditorium

City or Vicinity: Enid

County: Garfield State: Oklahoma

Photographer: Dianna Everett

Date Photographed: 29 December 2016

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 7. 0001 South (primary) elevation, camera facing North
- 2 of 7. 0002 South (primary) elevation, detail canopy/brick/glass block, camera facing North
- 3 of 7. 0003 East and North elevations, camera facing Southwest
- 4 of 7. 0004 East elevation, camera facing West
- 5 of 7. 0005 West elevation, camera facing East
- 6 of 7. 0006 Interior, lobby, camera facing East
- 7 of 7. 0007. Interior, auditorium, camera facing South

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Eugene S. Briggs Auditorium
Name of Property County and State

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Eugene S. Briggs Auditorium
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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

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Name of Property

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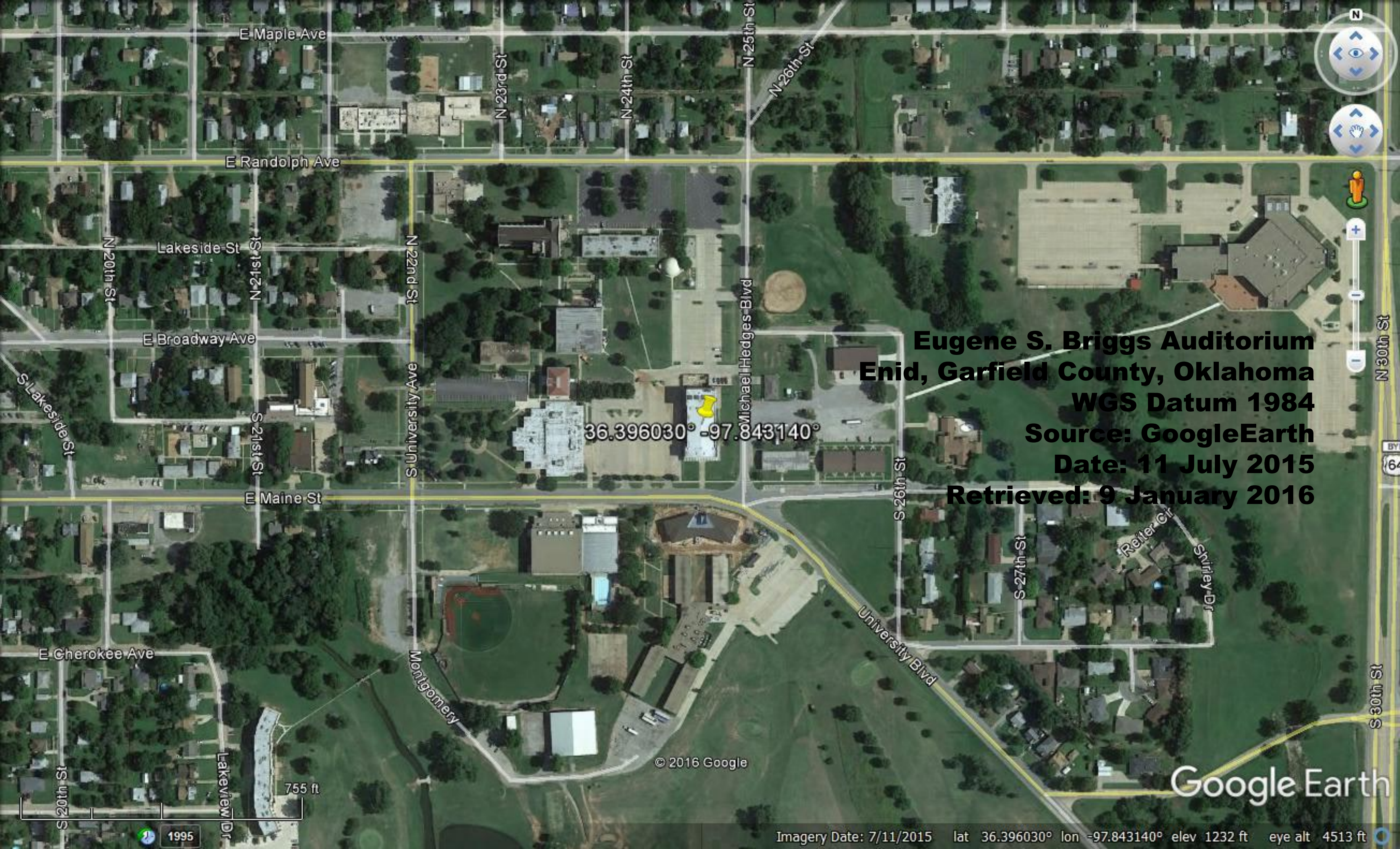
County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Additional Documentation

Fig. 1. Briggs Auditorium under construction, 1957. Source: *Phillippian* (yearbook), 1957-58, p 248.





Eugene S. Briggs Auditorium
Enid, Garfield County, Oklahoma
WGS Datum 1984
Source: GoogleEarth
Date: 11 July 2015
Retrieved: 9 January 2016

36.396030° -97.843140°

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Google Earth