



# OHIO HISTORIC INVENTORY

RPR Number:

1. No. <b>BUT-02147-01</b> REV		4. Present Name(s) <b>Ernst Nature Theater</b>		7-01 BUT-0214
2. County <b>Butler</b>		5. Historic or Other Name(s) <b>Ernst Nature Theater</b>		
6. Specific Address or Location <b>Western College Drive</b>		19a. Design Sources		2. County <b>Butler</b>
6a. Lot, Section or VMD Number		20. Contractor or Builder <b>Cephas Burns (1922)</b>		
7. City or Village <b>Oxford</b>		21. Building Type or Plan		4. Present or Historic Name(s) <b>Ernst Nature Theater</b>
9. U.T.M. Reference Quadrangle Name: <b>Oxford</b> <b>16 695610 4374683</b> Zone Easting Northing		22. Original Use, if apparent <b>College/University</b> <b>Outdoor Entertainment/Recreation</b>		
10. Classification: <b>Site</b>		23. Present Use <b>College/University</b> <b>Outdoor Entertainment/Recreation</b>		35. Plan Shape
11. On National Register? <b>YES</b>		24. Ownership <b>Public</b>		
13. Part of Established Hist. Dist? <b>YES</b>		25. Owner's Name & Address, if known <b>Miami University</b> <b>Oxford, Ohio 45056</b>		36. Changes associated with 17/17b Dates: 17. <b>Original/Most significant construct</b> 17b. <b>Substantial alteration/addition</b>
15. Other Designation (NR or Local) <b>Western Female Seminary</b>		26. Property Acreage		
16. Thematic Associations: <b>PRIVATE/College</b> <b>Entertainment/Performing Arts</b>		27. Other Surveys		37. Window Type(s)
17. Date(s) or Period <b>1921-1922</b>		28. No. of Stories		
17b. Alteration Date(s) <b>1996</b>		29. Basement?		38. Building Dimensions
18. Style Class and Design <b>None</b>		30. Foundation Material		
18a. Style of Addition or Elements(s)		31. Wall Construction		39. Endangered? <b>NO</b> By What?
19. Architect or Engineer <b>Olmsted Brothers (1922)</b>		32. Roof Type		
		Roof Material		40. Chimney Placement
		33. No. of Bays Side Bays		
		34. Exterior Wall Material(s)		41. Distance from & Frontage on Road
				51. Condition of Property: <b>Excellent</b>
				52. Historic Outbuildings & Dependencies Structure Type  Date  Associated Activity
				53. Affiliated Inventory Numbers: Historic (OHI)  Archaeological (OAI)
42. Further Description of Important Interior and Exterior Features (Continued on Reverse if Necessary)				
<p><b>Ernst Nature Theater is an open air amphitheater and earthen stage originally built in 1921-22 and rebuilt in 1996. The theater occupies its original hillside location, although the existing materials date from the 1996 project. Theater seats are poured concrete, tiered on a natural slope below Peabody hall. At the bottom of the hill is a bi-level grass-covered stage with gently curving convex retaining walls of cut stone. Steps lead to the top tier of the stage from each side. A pair of smaller curved steps are notched into the lower stage retaining wall. Two sets of concrete steps with railings lead down the hill to access the seats. Historic photographs indicate that the theater originally had cobblestone retaining walls and grass-covered benches with individual stone steps leading down from the top of the hillside.</b></p>				
43. History and Significance (Continue on Reverse if necessary)				
<p><b>Completed in 1922, Ernst Nature Theater was a gift to Western College for Women from Richard P. Ernst, a U.S. Senator from Kentucky and member of the Western College Board of Trustees for many years. The first play was presented here on Tree Day in 1922. Tree Day was a Western tradition begun in 1890 by President Leila S. McKee, an event similar to Wellesley's tree carnival. Performance of a Senior play was added to the day's events beginning in 1902. The play remained a Tree Day tradition and was expanded to students from any class in 1938. In addition to hosting this annual celebration, Ernst Nature Theater was also used for concerts, festivals and other outdoor events by the college. According to a 1935 article in the Western Round-Up student newspaper, the plans for the nature theater continued...</b></p>				
44. Description of Environment and Outbuildings (See #52)				
<p><b>The theater is built into a natural slope below Peabody Hall at the southeastern corner of Miami University's Western campus. Lush woods and shrubbery form the backdrop for the stage at the base of the hill.</b></p>				
45. Sources of Information				
<p><b>Mitchell, Lawrence, Western Female Seminary, National Register nomination, 1979; Miami University Libraries Digital Collections; Western Round-Up student newspaper, May 16, 1935; Motil, M., Ohio Historic Inventory form, 1999.</b></p>				
46. Prepared By: <b>Judy Williams</b>		47. Organization: <b>Historic Preservation Consultant</b>		6. Specific Address or Location <b>Western College Drive</b>
49. PIR Reviewer:		48. Date Recorded: <b>07/30/2008</b>		
		50. PIR Review Date:		

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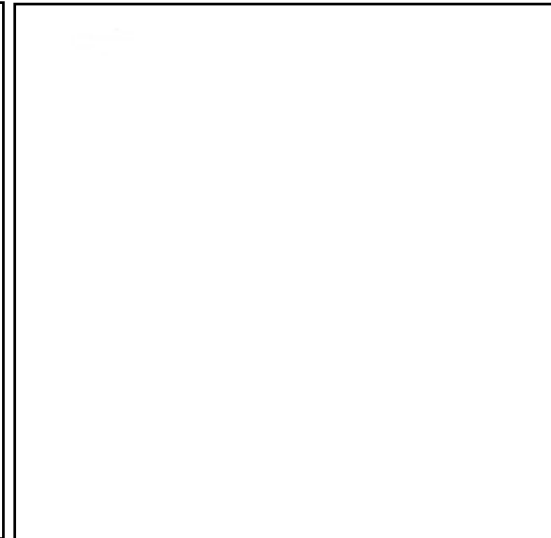
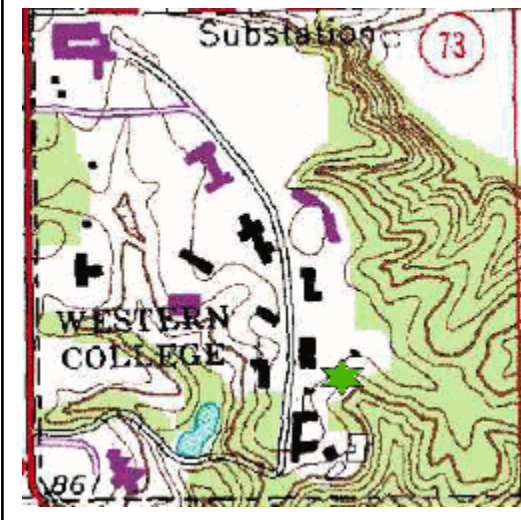
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2. County **Butler**

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8. Site Plan with North Arrow

54. Farmstead Plan :



Door Selection:

Door Position:

Orientation:

Symmetry:

Report Associated With Project:

NADB #:



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42. Further Description of Important Interior and Exterior Features (Con't)

43. History and Significance (Con't)

were by the Olmsted Brothers landscape architecture firm of Brookline, MA, successor to the firm of Frederick Law Olmsted. Senator Ernst and Western president William W. Boyd also helped to oversee the design, according to the article. Cephas Burns, Oxford's stone mason, is given credit for the nature theater's original construction.

44. Description of Environment and Outbuildings (Con't)

45. Sources (Con't)