

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

COPY

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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. Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

1. Name of Property

historic name Sioux Theatre

other names/site number Sioux Rapids Area Historical Museum

2. Location

street & number 218 Main Street

N/A

not for publication

city or town Sioux Rapids

N/A

vicinity

state Iowa code IA county Buena Vista code 021 zip code 50585

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

I hereby certify that this X 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 X 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 X local

Barbara A. Mitchell/DSHPO
Signature of certifying official/Title

January 3, 2012
Date

STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

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

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.)

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | private |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | public - Local |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | public - State |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | public - Federal |

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | building(s) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | district |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | site |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | structure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | object |

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

"Historic Movie Theaters of Iowa"

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/museum

RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater

RECREATION AND CULTURE/auditorium

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Art Moderne

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: CONCRETE

walls: BRICK

CERAMIC TILE

roof: SYNTHETICS

other: GLASS

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

SUMMARY PARAGRAPH

The Sioux Theatre, located at 218 Main Street at the east edge of downtown Sioux Rapids, is a two-story building classified as a Commercial Block Downtown and Neighborhood Movie Houses associated property type as defined in the Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) "Historic Movie Theaters of Iowa" (the MPDF).¹ Designed by the Des Moines architectural firm of Wetherell and Harrison, the building is one of more than one hundred movie theaters designed by the firm. Completed in 1946, the building is an excellent example of the Modern Movement's Art Moderne style, with stylistic character-defining features including curvilinear walls, blonde brick cladding, a lack of applied ornamentation, and an overall horizontal aesthetic. The primary elevation faces south onto Main Street at the northwest corner with Third Street. The T-shaped footprint consists of a broad forward section and long rear auditorium section. The reinforced hollow clay tile building has a blond brick cladding on the forward portion of the building and a flat roof. The theater is a relatively large example of the Commercial Block Downtown and Neighborhood Movie Houses property type. The asymmetrical design features a main entrance bay off-center toward the east end of the primary elevation within a full-height recess with curved side walls. The internal plan incorporates the original circulation pattern comprised of primary and secondary foyers, integral soda fountain/snack bar concession area, an ovoid lounge area, and horseshoe-shaped curvilinear passageway that accesses men's and women's restrooms, and a cry room before terminating at each end into the auditorium. The auditorium features the historic, character-defining sloped floor, acoustic wall and ceiling plaster, original air conditioning ductwork, red velour seats, and two auditorium exits via the stage. A stair from the primary foyer leads to the second-floor projection room and the manager's apartment that features multiple rooms and viewing windows into the auditorium. There is a partial basement.

The Sioux Theatre retains integrity of its historic location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The Sioux Theatre retains its key character-defining features, including the original Art Moderne style elements and finishes, as well as the original interior spatial arrangement. The original floor plan remains unchanged. The original horizontally divided two-over-two light, double-hung wood sash windows and glass block windows remain intact. All of its significant character-defining design elements and materials are intact and it clearly conveys its original role and historic associations as a Commercial Block Downtown and Neighborhood Movie Houses property type.²

Its high-style Art Moderne design and stylistic treatment successfully convey feelings of its period of construction. The only apparent alterations include the circa 1990 pitched roof on the original entrance canopy, removal of a 1949 neon sign to storage on the property, replacement of the original air handling equipment, and a circa 1990 extension of the stage. Each of these alterations are reversible and do not obscure the overall historic character or design of the building.

¹ Sally Fullerton Schwenk, "Historic Movie Theaters in Iowa" (National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form) (Sally Schwenk Associates, Inc., (Draft: March 2011), F-20.

² Ibid.

Narrative Description

LOCATION AND SETTING

The Sioux Theatre is located at the northwest corner of Main and Third streets, at the east edge of downtown Sioux Rapids. The building stands at the border between the central business district, characterized by late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century commercial development, and late nineteenth and early twentieth century residential neighborhoods beyond (See Figures 1 and 2). Main Street is the primary downtown commercial street and is a two-lane paved roadway with sloped concrete curbs and broad concrete sidewalks.

The building is 61 feet by 115 feet, occupying the east two-thirds of the large 105-by-175-foot parcel. The broad primary elevation faces south onto Main Street and the building has a setback measuring about fifteen feet. A broad, concrete entrance sidewalk approximately 20 feet wide runs from the public sidewalk to the main entrance and is flanked on each side by grassy lawn. The at-grade entrance is flush with the sidewalk. A steel pole sign of undetermined age near the sidewalk supports both a spherical and a rectangular back-lit sign. An alley and a few parking spaces are located at the north (rear) end of the property. Along the west edge of the parcel, a collection of small historic buildings owned by the Sioux Rapids Area Historical Society, including a one-room school, a cabin, and a historic garage are on display.³ A single-family dwelling abuts the property to the north and a mid-twentieth century, one-part commercial block building abuts the property to the west.

EXTERIOR

The Sioux Theatre is a two-story building with a T-shaped footprint and a flat roof. The broad, forward section measures 61 feet across its east-west alignment and forms the 'head' of the T; the long, narrow auditorium section aligns north-south to form the 'leg' of the T (See Figures 4 and 5). Reinforced hollow clay tile forms the masonry structure, which is visible at the north end of the building. Blonde brick facing laid in a running bond clads the broad forward section with header bricks concentrated at the tight, inner curved wall corners flanking the main entrance. The blonde brick facing wraps the corners and about one-third of the secondary (east and west) elevations, beyond which the original hollow clay tile walls complete the building's footprint. The foundation is concrete and only visible from within the partial basement.

The primary (south) elevation has twelve bays and the side (east and west) elevations have three and four bays respectively. Wall penetrations – windows, doors, embedded poster cases – define the bays and are asymmetrically arranged. The primary elevation has three distinct wall sections defined by the off-center recessed entrance bay flanked on each side by projecting bays with curved wall corners.

The first-story openings in the primary elevation contain original glass blocks, full-light wood-paneled doors, aluminum-framed embedded poster cases, and curved ticket/concession windows with chrome headers. The historic single, horizontally divided two-over-two, light double-hung wood windows and picture window are intact in the second-story and side elevation window openings. Throughout the building, the original steel lintels and cast stone sills remain.

³ These buildings are outside the nominated property boundary.

The historic shallow canopy shelters the triple-leaf door main entrance. Exposed light bulbs on the underside provide illumination. The non-historic hip roof atop the historic canopy dates to around 1990. Historic vertical aluminum poster frames are attached to the wall on each side of the entrance (See Figure 3). Also under the canopy on either side of the entrance and integrated into the curved wall, the ticket window (east) and concession window (west) each have a chrome header, curved glass featuring integrated voice openings with aluminum enclosure and oblong ticket/money handling opening, and a chrome sill/counter.⁴

Beyond the entrance bay to each side are the original, large embedded aluminum framed poster cases. A separate entrance into the soda fountain/snack bar is at the fourth bay from the west end. The two bays from the west end are high-set horizontal openings that contain original glass block and illuminate the soda fountain/snack bar within. The outermost bays contain original glass block and follow the profile of the curved walls.

A continuous, slightly projecting cast stone parapet coping enhances the streamlined aesthetic. An additional subtle treatment that underscores the building's horizontality is the lightly projecting continuous course of stretcher brick that encircles the entire forward portion of building between the first and second stories.

Behind the broad forward portion, the narrower auditorium section extends north. At the junction between the two distinct sections on the east elevation the original exterior entrance porch and wood stair to the second-floor apartment remains. On the west elevation at this junction is a wood-framed shed roof enclosure that shelters the basement access. The hollow tile walls have no penetrations except the two single pedestrian exit doors at each end of the rear (north) elevation (See Photographs 4 and 5).

INTERIOR

The Sioux Theatre contains approximately 7,980 square feet of space comprised of a partial basement (34 by 31 feet), the main theater floor, and a second-floor apartment. The basement contains a high efficiency furnace and central air system that replaced the original system in the late 1980s. The main floor contains the original, circulation pattern and character-defining spaces associated with the historic theater function (See Figure 4). The triple-leaf door entrance leads into the main foyer that accesses the ticket booth, concession area, snack bar/soda fountain, manager's office, and stairs to the second floor. A second set of triple-leaf doors at the north end of the main foyer leads to the second foyer, a horseshoe-shaped space that accesses the central ovoid lounge, the separate men's and women's restrooms (on opposite sides), a storage room, and the cry room before terminating at each end in the auditorium. The second foyer features curved walls and smooth wall plaster with no base or cornice trim. Each of the abutting rooms has narrow, simple stained wood surround trim, solid wood doors, and the original etched glass back-lit blade sign above identifying the room's function – "LADIES," "CRY ROOM," "MEN'S." The lounge's ovoid footprint echoes the second foyer's arc and retains the rounded wall ends and original decorative carpet.

The auditorium is about 70 feet long with the original sloped concrete floor slanted at a calculated angle to allow for ideal viewing from each and every seat (See Figure 6). Originally with seating for 404, extension of the stage in the 1950s

⁴ A neon blade sign was affixed to the building in 1949 and removed at an undetermined date. No historic photographs have been located that show the sign in place, so its orientation on the building is not known at this time. A neon sign is stored on the property in the narrow lawn along the west wall of the building; however, it is unverified if this is the same sign installed in

reduced the seating capacity to 375. The ceiling and walls retain the original taupe Zonolite™ acoustical plaster. The historic decorative wall painting is intact, featuring a combined organic and geometric motif executed in yellow, red, and teal. Due to extensive patron graffiti carved into the soft wall plaster, at an unknown date the manager added sections of painted wood panel and a more stable stucco material to the lower portion of the side walls to prevent additional degradation. The original air handling ducts are intact at the top of each side wall. The original stage is intact and has two extensions – one from circa 1954 and another from circa 1990. The screen dates to circa 1971 and was the fourth generation screen, as part of the ongoing maintenance and upgrading of the building. The stage curtain is not original to the building and originated from a local school upon its closing. The characteristic two exits are intact at the east and west end of backstage, set within the original angled walls and through canted arch openings with etched glass back-lit blade signs that read “EXIT.”

The second floor contains the projection booth, centered at the north end of the upper level, with the manager’s apartment surrounding it and occupying the remainder of the second floor (See Figure 5). Concrete encases the projection booth and access is through a steel entrance door. The projection booth retains the original multiple view port openings with sliding metal doors, multiple ceiling vents and fan, and a lavatory and toilet.

The manager’s apartment includes about 1,760 square feet of living space and features multiple rooms comprised of a parlor/stair hall, living room, dining room, kitchen, two bedrooms, a sitting room, and two bathrooms. The room arrangement reflects a shallow U-shape around a central east-west corridor. The original partition walls and plaster are intact, as is the modest trim found around windows, doors, at the wall base. The original two-panel wood doors remain. Two small viewing windows, one in the sitting room and one in the kitchen’s breakfast nook, allowed the manager to view the show and/or the audience. The apartment currently contains the Sioux Rapids Area Historical Society’s museum exhibits.

INTEGRITY DISCUSSION

The Sioux Theatre retains all seven aspects of historic architectural integrity and meets the integrity criteria for the functional property type Commercial Block Downtown and Neighborhood Movie Houses established in Section F of the Multiple Property Documentation Form “Historic Movie Theaters of Iowa.”⁵ The integrity of location and setting are intact, reflected by the building’s occupation of its original site on the east edge of downtown Sioux Rapids at the transition from commercial to residential areas. Its historic identity is clearly conveyed through its retention of original character-defining features, including its size, scale, and massing, as well as its original design, materials, and workmanship. It is an excellent example of a mid-twentieth century movie theater executed in the Art Moderne style and retains all the original design features including windows, entrances, and masonry treatments, as well as the interior spatial arrangement, functional spaces, and finishes. The only apparent alterations include the circa 1990 pitched roof on the original entrance canopy, removal of the 1949 neon sign to storage on the property, replacement of the original air handling systems, and a circa 1990 extension of the stage. Each of these alterations are reversible and do not obscure the overall character or design of the building. By virtue of its high degree of retention of all other aspects of integrity, the Sioux Theatre continues to clearly convey its historic feeling and local associations with the architectural patterns of development of movie theaters during the mid-twentieth century.

1949. The extant sign is a rectangular metal sign with letters that read, “Sioux Theatre.” Though the holes remain identifying it as a neon sign, none of the glass tubing is extant.

⁵ Schwenk, F-25.

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.)

Property is:

- ☐ 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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

COMMERCE

Period of Significance

1946-1961

Significant Dates

1946

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Wetherell and Harrison

C. I. Hersom Construction

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance begins in 1946, the year the building was placed in service, and ends in 1961 with the National Register's fifty-year cut-off required to demonstrate sufficient time has passed to gain perspective on historic significance.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

N/A

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

SUMMARY PARAGRAPH

The Sioux Theatre, located at 218 Main Street in Sioux Rapids, Buena Vista County, Iowa, is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for the areas of ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION and COMMERCE and under Criterion C for the area of ARCHITECTURE as described in the Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) "Historic Movie Theaters of Iowa" (the MPDF). It has significant associations with the MPDF Context "Historic Development of Iowa Theaters: 1880-1975"⁶ and the associated subcontexts: "State-wide Impact of Era of Centralization and Domination of Movie Theater Chains, 1920 – 1948,"⁷ "Movie Theater Development in Iowa in the Great Depression and the War Years: 1930 – 1946,"⁸ "Iowa Movie Theaters in the Post-World War II Period and Era of Suburbanization: 1946 – 1975"⁹ and "Evolution of Movie Theater Design, 1900 – 1975 in Iowa."¹⁰ The theater meets the criteria for its property type, "Commercial Block Downtown and Neighborhood Movie Houses" established in Section F in the MPDF.¹¹

Constructed in 1946, within a year of the end of World War II, the Sioux Theatre is significant at the local level in the area of Entertainment/Recreation and Commerce under Criterion A for its associations with significant historic contexts related to the patterns of commercial exhibition of movies during the mid-twentieth century post-war era in Iowa. As the only movie theater within an eighteen-mile radius, the Sioux Theatre played an important primary and secondary role as an entertainment venue and commercial component of Sioux Rapids and the surrounding locality. It has important local associations with historic contexts associated with the national pattern of events related to the resumption of commercial development in the post-world War II period. Locally, it represents important associations with a specific and important era of the town's growth; it is important as an early and key commercial and entertainment endeavor associated with construction in Sioux Rapids after an approximately twenty year hiatus due to the Great Depression and war. It is also one of the last of its commercial and movie theater entertainment property type to be constructed in Iowa that began operation under the era of the monopolistic studio-dominated film production, distribution, and exhibition system, and continued in operation in the era subsequently dominated by independently owned movie theaters and movie chains.

Designed by the prolific Des Moines architectural firm of Wetherell and Harrison¹² noted for their Modern Movement style theater designs during the late 1930s and 1940s, the Sioux Theatre is significant as a representative work of a master. Because of its unimpaired historic architectural condition, it is significant in the area of Architecture as an excellent example of the Modern Movement's Art Moderne style,¹³ as well as for its clearly conveyed associations with the Commercial Block Downtown and Neighborhood Movie Houses functional and architectural property type documented in the MPDF.¹⁴ It reflects a distinct period after the end of World War II in the late 1940s and early 1950s when a shift occurred in movie theater design from the Modern Movement's Art Moderne style to the post-war American

⁶ Schwenk, E-1.

⁷ Ibid., E-51.

⁸ Ibid., E-59.

⁹ Ibid., E-64.

¹⁰ Ibid., E-73.

¹¹ Ibid., F-20-F27.

¹² Ibid., E-91.

¹³ Ibid., E-76, See "The Evolution of Movie Theater Architecture Property Types in Iowa: 1910 – 1930," and E-83, "Movie Theater Design 1930-1950."

International Style. It is an excellent representative example of a mid-century Modern Movement style adaptation of the Commercial Block Downtown and Neighborhood Movie Houses property type in Iowa. It represents the last of the era of the Commercial Block Downtown and Neighborhood Movie Houses property type prior to the shift, in the early 1960s, in location of new movie theaters from downtown and neighborhood commercial nodes to local and regional shopping malls. As such, it embodies distinctive characteristics of the property type, period of construction, methods of construction, patterns and features common to its style, as well as the individuality and variation of features that occurred within that architectural stylistic classification. The period of significance for the Sioux Theatre begins in 1946, at the time of its completion, and ends in 1961, the National Register's fifty-year cut-off required to demonstrate sufficient time has passed to gain perspective on historic significance. The period of significance also reflects the building's continuous use as a movie theater that continued into the early 1970s.

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

ELABORATION

HISTORIC BACKGROUND AND LOCAL CONTEXTS

The Sioux Theatre was constructed in 1946 in an Art Moderne style design by the Des Moines architectural firm of Wetherell and Harrison for theater owners Edna Collins Rector Gran and Don Gran. The Grans previously operated the Star Theater in Sioux Rapids and the Avery Theater in Garner, Iowa.

Like many towns of its size throughout the country, Sioux Rapids saw the closing of its late-nineteenth century opera house and the arrival of its first motion picture house in the first decades of the twentieth century. The Star Theater opened around 1914 as a silent film theater in a one-story building located at the southeast corner of Second and Main streets.¹⁵ In the early 1930s, the Star Theater, now in a two-story building at the same location, came under the ownership of Mr. and Mrs. Ousley Rector.¹⁶ Upon her husband's death around 1935, Edna Lucille (Collins) Rector (1906-1989) continued operating the theater. In 1937, *Boxoffice* magazine reported "Mrs. Edna L. Rector, manager of the Star Theatre at Sioux Rapids, Ia., says she thinks that the motion picture theater operation is an ideal business for a woman. She has redecorated her [movie] house, installed new seats, new carpets and new sound, besides enlarging the auditorium."¹⁷ Rector expanded her theater business in 1939 by purchasing the Avery Theater in Garner (about ninety-eight miles east of Sioux Rapids).¹⁸ That same year, she married Don Gran (1912-2004), a native of Milford, Iowa, where he managed his father's hardware store. Don Gran managed the Avery Theater in Garner¹⁹ while Edna managed the Star Theatre in Sioux Rapids.²⁰ The Grans were very active in the movie theater industry and, particularly, the

¹⁴ Ibid., E-78 and F-20.

¹⁵ The one-story movie theater building appears at this location on the 1916 Sanborn Map Company fire insurance map. By 1926, the two-story "Star Theater" building was in place at this local and contained a print shop in the basement. Upon the closing of the Star Theater, the owner remodeled the interior to accommodate Warden's Five-and-Dime Store. Alterations at this time included the leveling of the original sloped floor and the construction of apartments upstairs where the balcony and projection booth once were. The building is still standing. Its Iowa Site Inventory Number is 11-00276.

¹⁶ Ousley Rector (1905-1935) is buried in Lakeview Park Cemetery near Storm Lake, Iowa.

¹⁷ *Boxoffice*, May 29, 1937: 114. <http://issuu.com/boxoffice/docs/boxoffice> (accessed May 18, 2010).

¹⁸ Jan Olive Nash, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, "The Avery Theater" (Iowa City, Iowa: Tallgrass Historians, LLC, 2008), 18. After improving the building and operation, the Grans sold the theater in April 1941.

¹⁹ The Avery Theater was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2008.

²⁰ "Aw, Shucks!" *Boxoffice*, November 4, 1939: 46. http://issuu.com/boxoffice/docs/boxoffice_1104391 (accessed May 18, 2010)

Independent Operators Association. They advertised in *Boxoffice*, the film industry's trade magazine, and were well acquainted with the network of film circuit distribution representatives, salesmen, and bookers (See Figure 10). Late 1930s through 1950s issues of *Boxoffice* reported them as active "on the Row" in Des Moines, a reference to Des Moines' Film Row. In 1946, the Grans closed the Star Theater and opened the Sioux Theatre.

These theaters were a significant component in a time where many of the citizens of every background in rural Northwest Iowa could gather for an experience that took them out of their insular world. The movies provided the experience, while the theaters offered the introduction and housed the experience. The Sioux Theatre during its period of significance is representative of the movie theaters throughout the United States in towns with populations of less than 2,500 that constituted forty percent of the movie theater venues in the country. To survive commercially, at a minimum, theaters of this type provided two different feature films a week – and up to as many as 150 movies a year of which twenty-five to fifty were first run films.²¹

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: CRITERION A

COMMERCE AND ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

The post-World War II era (1946-1960) was a period of significant change in the United States. It was a time of growing economic affluence and consumerism after the Great Depression and World War II that created a cycle of economic growth. Shaping the popular culture was increased leisure time and expanded opportunities for commercial entertainment. The commercial and entertainment/recreation significance of the Sioux Theatre is thus intertwined, reflecting a distinct symbiotic relationship.

Commercial Significance

Resumption of Construction in Post-World War II Sioux Rapids

The Sioux Theatre is significant for its importance on a local level with the pattern of events associated with the resumption of commercial development in the post-World War II period after a 20 year hiatus of new construction due to the Great Depression and war as documented in the MPDF historic subcontext, "Iowa Movie Theaters in the Post-World War II Period and Era of Suburbanization: 1946 – 1975."²² As noted in the introduction of Section E of this MPDF, the exhibition of movies was and is, fundamentally, a commercial enterprise created and disseminated for private profit. The Sioux Theatre is significant for its associations on the local level with trends within the national development of commercial movie exhibition.

Following the deprivations of the Great Depression and World War II, Americans had a real and psychological need for new construction and clear signs of progress, which led to a building boom that resulted in major changes to the nation's built environment including communities such as Sioux Rapids. Between the end of the war and 1955, new construction in the town included the Sioux Theatre, an \$80,000 power plant, and \$20,000 library/community center, additions and improvements at the hospital, a law office building, a "modern" fourteen-unit apartment building, a Standard Oil filling station, the O.K. Motel and Dairy Sweet snack bar on Highway 71, the E & L Clothing Store, the Hamburger Shop, the Bulletin-Press building, a new auto display addition to the Schuelke Motors building, and the new Roman Catholic

²¹ Michael Putnam, *Silent Screens: The Decline and Transformation of the American Movie Theater* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2000), 8.

Church and rectory buildings. Civic improvements included new street markers. The local telephone company spent \$11,000 on improvements to the telephone system.²³

The completion of construction of the Sioux Theatre in 1946 within this local context is notable because the theater's design and construction period began in 1945, a time of shortage of construction materials before the end of World War II.²⁴ (The Sioux Theatre was one of only 853 indoor theaters erected in the United States between 1946 and 1953.)²⁵ However, other factors apparently influenced the Gran's decision to construct the Sioux Theatre. Research indicates that by 1944, the war's end was imminent and government agencies, as well as the private sector, began to initiate economic projections based on the rise in wartime wages and the impact of disposable income. The Grans were well aware of the dramatic growth in movie attendance to ninety million a week during the first half of the 1940s.²⁶ Moreover, because competition was controlled by the studios who dictated what theaters got first-run films and for how long they could exhibit them, experienced owners like the Grans with the necessary savvy and connections with studio agents, had a competitive edge. Thus, reinvestment in a new movie theater in Sioux Rapids appeared to be a plausible, profit-motivated undertaking. Nationwide box office receipts for the first full post-war year supports the Gran's rationale; they totaled more than \$1.69 billion, double the numbers from 1941, a time when Americans spent one-fourth of their recreational income going to the movies.²⁷

Significance in Commercial History of Sioux Rapids

The construction of the theater immediately after the end of the war was not only significant as an early post-war commercial undertaking, the theater also translated into a long-term commercial and entertainment asset to the community of Sioux Rapids. The town's downtown district, as in other rural areas of the state, reflected the commercial focus of the surrounding agricultural area. As the only movie theater in the community during its period of significance, the Sioux Theatre functioned as a significant commercial entertainment and recreation venue in Sioux Rapids and the surrounding area. As a commercial business, the theater reflects important local associations with historic contexts relating to the rise in movie theater attendance and revenues beginning in the Great Depression and continuing through the immediate post-World War II period.²⁸

In 1945, when the Grans began their plans, Sioux Rapids served as an important railroad and truck freighting market transportation hub in the region. In addition to passenger service available on the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad, US Highway 71, a major interstate route between Louisiana and the Canadian border, traveled through the town and was the main north-south route between Storm Lake and Spencer, the county seats of Buena Vista and Clay counties, respectively.²⁹ Additionally, paved roads linked Sioux Rapids with most of the towns in a twenty-mile vicinity. Iowa Highway 10, a 105-mile highway between Iowa Highway 4 (a north-south route at Havelock, Iowa) and the South Dakota

²² Schwenk, E-64.

²³ *Sioux Rapids: 1855-1955* (Sioux Rapids IA: Sioux Rapids Centennial Committee, 1955), 81-83.

²⁴ President Truman ended all wartime restrictions on construction materials by 1948. The Korean War, which also impacted private construction, ended in July 1953.

²⁵ "Motion Picture Theaters, Except Drive In: State Industry Market Evaluation," *Highbeam Business*
<http://business.highbeam.com/industry-reports/personal/motionpictures-theaters-except-drive-in> (accessed August 26, 2011).

²⁶ Ross Melnick and Andreas Fuchs, *Cinema Treasures: A New Look at Classic Movie Theaters* (St. Paul, MN: MBI Publishing Company, 2004), 99; and "Wartime Hollywood," *World War II*
<http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/modules/ww2/wartimehollywood.html> (accessed August 30, 2001).

²⁷ Melnick and Fuchs, 101.

²⁸ Schwenk, E-59 and E-64.

²⁹ *Hammond's New Era Atlas of the World* (New York: C.S. Hammond, c. 1944), 111-112.

border linked Sioux Rapids with the nearby communities of Laurens (Pocahontas County) to the east and Peterson (Clay County) to the west. These rural transportation routes were critical to the Sioux Rapids economy, since almost half of the Buena Vista County residents lived in unincorporated areas in 1946.³⁰

During the first half of the twentieth century, Buena Vista County and Sioux Rapids, in particular, reflected national trends of movie theater development. By 1925, almost 19,500 theaters operated nationwide to serve the forty-eight million Americans that attended at least one movie each week.³¹ At this time, Buena Vista County had at least eight movie theaters, three in the county seat of Storm Lake and the remainder in smaller communities throughout the county. Five theaters operated within a 15-mile radius of Sioux Rapids (population ~1,000),³² including Sioux Rapids' Star Theater, as well as a movie theater in Linn Grove, a town half the size and just six miles west of Sioux Rapids.

However, beginning in the late 1940s, a significant drop in national movie attendance began, which ironically strengthened the Sioux Theater position in the local community's economy. . In 1943, 25.7 percent of the population spent money at the movies; by 1950, only 12.3 percent went to the movies. In 1949 alone, the number of movie patrons plummeted by twenty million per week and, by 1950, the number dropped another ten million.³³ The Sioux Theatre was by that time one of only four operating downtown movie theaters in Buena Vista County, claiming a market share of four failed theaters.³⁴

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Sioux Rapids' only movie theater attracted an audience from the surrounding area. According to Buena Vista County historian, twenty-miles were not an uncommon distance to drive for a night at the movies, "especially among the young people."³⁵ The theater attracted commercial patrons to Sioux Rapids from all the smaller towns in the vicinity, which included rural communities in southern Clay County and Northwestern Pocahontas County. Within a twenty-mile radius was a target audience from communities with no movie theater including: Marathon, Albert City, Rembrandt, and Linn Grove (Buena Vista County), Peterson, Webb, Gillet Grove, Greenville, and Rossie (Clay County).³⁶

At the time of the Sioux Theatre's construction, in addition to concession sales receipts, for every dollar spent on admissions, approximately 23.6 percent went to the resident movie theater owner. Moreover, sales rose in the downtown commercial center when the theater offered a new first-run film and the Sioux Theatre offered as many as nine different productions per month, each running for three to four days. The theater's commercial success provided revenues to wholesale and retail businesses that provided the goods and services necessary to the exhibition of movies (such as advertising, concession items, and electrical repairs). Major commercial benefits also included the jobs related to the management of the theater as well as those generated by the services and sales required by the theater's operation. The

³⁰ Ibid. In the mid-1940s, of the over 19,000 residents of Buena Vista County, more than 9,050 people lived in rural areas outside town or city limits.

³¹ Nash, 10.

³² Mary Bennett, "Iowa Movie Theaters," (Unpublished Iowa City Directory Research, State Historical Society of Iowa, 2009). The five theaters in the vicinity were the Grand Theater in Marathon, the Empress Theater in Linn Grove, the Peterson Theater in Peterson, the Gem Theater in Webb, and the Star Theater in Sioux Rapids.

³³ Melnick and Fuchs, 105.

³⁴ Buena Vista County had a population of 19,838 in 1949, 21,113 in 1950 and 21,189 in 1960.

³⁵ Alan Sorenson (Sioux Rapids historian), interview with Kerry Davis by author, 9 October 2009, Sioux Rapids, Iowa.

³⁶ During the period of significance of the Sioux Theater, the closest movie theaters to Sioux Rapids were: the Coral Drive-in Theater on Highway 59 N, the American Theater, and the New Arrow Theater in Cherokee (30 miles); at least one movie theater, the

movie theater, as did all small local businesses, contributed to all local and state taxes, including sales and property taxes and state income and employment taxes.³⁷ Recognizing the economic benefit of the movie theater, the Sioux Rapids Chamber of Commerce promoted the Sioux Theatre with “Lucky Buck Night” every Wednesday during the 1950s.

The continued commercial success of the Sioux Theatre and its emergence and dominance as a major regional entertainment venue continued for almost three decades. As one of the last of its movie theater property type to be constructed in Iowa that began operation under the era of the monopolistic studio-dominated film production, distribution, and exhibition system, and successfully continued in operation in the era subsequently dominated by independently owned movie theaters and movie chains, the Sioux Theatre is unique.

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: CRITERION C

ARCHITECTURE

The Sioux Theatre is significant at the local level for its important associations the evolution of movie theater design in general and, in particular, with the popular use of the Modern Movement’s Art Moderne style in commercial buildings in the Great Depression and immediate post-World War II period. It is a late example of the Commercial Block Downtown and Neighborhood Movie Houses property type, supplanted by the mid-1960s by the drive-in theater and shopping mall multi-theater property types. As such, it has associations with the historic subcontexts “Evolution of Movie Theater Design in Iowa, 1900 – 1975,”³⁸ Movie Theater Development in Iowa in the Great Depression and the War Years: 1930 – 1946³⁹ and “Iowa Movie Theaters in the Post-World War II Period and Era of Suburbanization: 1946 – 1975.”⁴⁰

Designed in the Modern Movement’s Art Moderne style by the prestigious firm of Wetherell and Harrison, prominent Des Moines architects who designed over a hundred movie theaters,⁴¹ the Sioux Theatre is significant under Criterion C Design/Construction for its embodiment of distinctive characteristics of a type and period of construction. It also represents the work of masters in the design of movie theaters in Iowa, and, by virtue of its style and integrity, possesses high artistic and architectural value.

Sioux Theatre: Construction and Operation History

The Grans demolished the 1871 Central Hotel at the northwest corner of Third and Main streets to make way for the new Sioux Theatre. The large parcel provided ample room for the 61-by-115 foot building and a good downtown location with easy access from all points in Sioux Rapids. The Grans engaged the Des Moines firm of Wetherell and Harrison to design the Sioux Theatre. Plans for the Sioux Theatre were well underway by the end of the summer of 1945.

Elite, in Laurens (18 miles); the Bandbox Theater in Spencer (19 miles); the Vista, Corral Drive-in and Princess Theater in Storm Lake (27 miles).

³⁷ Schwenk, E-2. See “Introduction The Significance of Commercial Motion Picture Exhibition.”

³⁸ Ibid., E-73.

³⁹ Ibid., E-59

⁴⁰ Ibid., E-64

⁴¹ Ibid., E-91-94.

C. I. Hersom Construction of Laurens, Iowa, received the general building contract.⁴² United States Air Conditioning Corporation of Minneapolis, Minnesota, completed the design and installation of the air conditioning system, which included ductwork along nearly the full length of the auditorium at the top of each side wall. St. Paul Foundry and Manufacturing Company provided steel construction materials including the curved lintels required over the glass block windows at the rounded wall corners on the primary (south) elevation. American Seating Company of Grand Rapids, Michigan, designed the floor slope and seating arrangement, and provided the seats (See Figure 6). Additional subcontractors included: Leighton Supply Company of Fort Dodge, Iowa, who completed the plumbing and heating equipment systems; Kalo Brick & Tile of Kalo, Iowa, who provided tile and brick masonry; National Theatre Supply Company of Des Moines, Iowa, who supplied various materials, equipment, and finishes; and Dahlstrom & Weinbarger of Minneapolis, Minnesota, who completed the interior design and finishes.

The Sioux Theatre opened on September 12, 1946 with seating for 404 patrons and featured a 13.6-by-18 foot stereo silver screen with invisible seams. The theater featured all the latest amenities and the requisite sequence of functional spaces. Patrons purchased their tickets from a booth adjacent to the main entrance that featured both outside and inside access, the use of which depended on weather and crowd conditions. Upon entering the main foyer, patrons had the options of 1) purchasing popcorn at the concession area adjacent to the west of the main entrance, 2) entering the separate soda fountain/snack bar, or 3) continuing toward the auditorium through the second foyer.

The second foyer offered a central lounge space and separate men's and women's restrooms on the east and west ends. The cry room, adjacent to the women's restroom, allowed parents with fussy children to excuse themselves from the auditorium and to enjoy continued viewing of the movie through a large window and sound speakers. The second foyer's curved walls gently guided patrons toward two entrances to the auditorium, which offered two aisles accessing comfortable seats in a setting of modern finishes and state-of-the-art heating and cooling systems.

The auditorium design reflected an intentional geometry in relation to the slant of the floor, placement of the screen, and the angle of the projectors to maximize visibility for all patrons (See Figure 6). The projection room featured a small toilet and ceiling fan for projectionist comfort and to allow for continued occupancy during a film. The auditorium walls and ceiling featured Zonolite™ acoustical plaster, a product lauded by the film industry since the 1930s "as ideal for soundproofing movie studios and enhancing theater acoustics" and, by the 1940s and 1950s, it was a popular wall and ceiling treatment for theater auditoriums.⁴³ The basement contained a steam boiler system that included a heat plenum room divided by a pair of large radiator coils through which a large blower forced air for warming before it traveled up into the auditorium. This system switched over for air chilling in the summer.

Due to the highly flammable film and projection technology, the projection room featured a concrete shell and a steel entrance door. Each of the multiple projection windows had a sliding metal door held open by a piece of scrap film; in case of a fire and upon burning of the film scrap, the door would slide shut and prevent flame and/or toxic gases from penetrating the auditorium (Photograph 14). Additionally, two ceiling vents allowed fresh air intake and toxic gases to escape. Should a fire occur, two patron exits flanked the auditorium screen stage, each with illuminated blade "EXIT" sign.

⁴² Calvin Isaac Hersom (1909-1981), a native of Iowa and a farmer, began his prolific construction business in the mid-1930s.⁴² He based the company in Laurens, Iowa. By the late 1940s, he owned and operated several hardware stores in northwest Iowa in addition to his construction business.

In addition to all the theater-specific spaces, a large, second-floor residential apartment provided living quarters for the Grans. The apartment included seven rooms and two bathrooms, as well as private viewing windows from the sitting room and the breakfast nook to allow observation of the movie and/or the audience.

The September 12, 1946 opening night celebration included a showing of the film *Two Guys from Milwaukee* with branch managers, salesmen, bookers, and circuit representatives attending.⁴⁴ Radio personality, Mason Dixon of KICD in Spencer was the master of ceremonies for the evening's pre-show program. The *Sioux Rapids Bulletin Press* featured numerous congratulatory ads from local merchants and subcontractors and described the theater as "one of the finest in Northwest Iowa," and "a great improvement to the community of Sioux Rapids."⁴⁵

During the next thirteen years, the Grans continued to enhance and upgrade the theater. In 1949, they installed a "new neon flasher sign" atop the marquee.⁴⁶ In 1954, they closed the theater temporarily for the installation of an upgraded 26-by-14.5 foot screen.⁴⁷ The Grans promptly put the old screen up for sale in *Boxoffice* magazine. Around this time, they also extended the narrow four-foot stage by about eight feet.

Significance for Distinctive Characteristics of a Type and Period of Construction

The Art Moderne style Sioux Theater in Sioux Rapids meets National Register Criteria for Design/Construction as outlined in Section VI *National Register Bulletin: Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties*. It incorporates the pattern of features common to a particular class of resources — Art Moderne style commercial buildings. It reflects the individuality or variation of features that occurs within the class as applied to movie theaters in Iowa. It is an example of the evolution of that class by virtue of its post-World War II design influences. It also reflects national patterns relating to the transition from Art Deco style to Art Moderne to International style — all transitional designs in the American Modern Movement style.

By virtue of its integrity and design, the Sioux Theatre is a significant and rare local example of a state-of-the-art Commercial Block Downtown and Neighborhood Movie Houses property type⁴⁸ of the late 1940s. At the time of its construction, it featured up-to-date sound systems and new technology, some of which were developed during the war,⁴⁹ and a design aesthetic that reflected a departure from the earlier grand ornamental theater to the streamlined Modern Movement designs. It exemplifies the evolution of the purpose-built movie theater genre erected in communities as part of two-part commercial block forms that began in the post-World War I movie boom era. Its Art Moderne style reflects changes in designs in response to the austerity of the depression and the war that created a need for less expensive but

⁴³ Andrea Peacock, *Libby, Montana: Asbestos and the Deadly Silence of an American Corporation* (Boulder, Colorado: Johnson Publishing, 2003), 32, <http://books.google.com>. (accessed May 18, 2010).

⁴⁴ "New Theatre Building to have Grand Opening," *Sioux Rapids Bulletin Press*, September 5, 1946: 1. Sioux Rapids Public Library Archives.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ *Boxoffice*, November 19, 1949: 76. <http://issuu.com/boxoffice/docs/boxoffice>. (accessed May 14, 2010) This sign may be the one stored on site on the lawn along the west wall of the building. The historic record is unclear as to the original location of this sign.

⁴⁷ Ibid., September 25, 1954: 65. <http://issuu.com/boxoffice/docs/boxoffice> (accessed May 14, 2010)

⁴⁸ Schwenk, F-20.

⁴⁹ Such as new truss systems that allowed theaters of greater width than before the war. The building predates the wide-screen and stereophonic sound that would become the latest technology by 1952.

comfortable theaters. As implemented in the design of the property type, this meant simple, soothing design treatments on the interior and sophisticated cutting-edge design on the outside.

During the period the Grans built the Sioux Theatre, the Commercial Block Downtown and Neighborhood Movie Houses property type featured a sequence of functional spaces as part of a pre-determined circulation system, all of which are present at the Sioux Theatre. This hierarchy typically included a box office/ticket booth (often accessible both outside and inside), multiple foyers (vestibule(s) and/or lobby(s)), space for a concession stand, restrooms and a cry room, and sometimes a lounge area outside the restrooms. Depending on the footprint of the building, a passage usually led off the lobby to access two doorways into the auditorium, the doors coinciding with the arrangement of auditorium aisles. Inside the auditorium a raked floor led downward toward a small stage with screen. (At this time stages were shrinking and the proscenium was disappearing.) Two emergency exits flanking the screen provided access to the alley through the rear elevation.

The arrangement of the Sioux Theatre is unusual. The platted size and dimensions of city lots usually dictated the rectangular footprint common to most of this property type's theaters. The location and wide lot size of the Sioux Theatre property allowed a more creative T-shape building footprint permitting an asymmetrical, horizontal emphasis of the exterior and a very unique interior plan including a large concession area off the entrance lobby and a curvilinear secondary lobby passageway that directed access to restrooms, cry room, and entrance into the auditorium.

Patron comfort was critical and air conditioning and heating systems designed for a particular velocity in the movement of air and ventilation, as well as comfortable seats and ample legroom, were standard by 1946. The Sioux Theatre, like other movie theaters of its property type, featured a deliberately calculated floor slope to achieve maximum visibility of the screen from each seat. The theater's curved walls and long draperies, dampened extraneous sounds. The assembly of large numbers of people in a confined space combined with the highly flammable nitrate film and carbon-arc projection technology created an acute need for advanced fire safety elements such as the fire-proof projection booth situated behind the masonry walls of the auditorium, an asbestos stage curtain, multiple exits, a limited number of seats between aisles, and special circulation patterns. The Sioux Theatre retains variations of each of these character-defining elements, with the exception of the asbestos stage curtain.

Art Moderne Style

By the mid-to-late 1930s, the popular aesthetics for movie theaters – revivalism and exoticism – gave way to a focus on state-of-the-art technology and the aesthetic of progress: Modernism. After the deprivations of the Great Depression and World War II, Americans felt a strong need for all types of fresh symbols of progress and earlier styles (including the Modern Movement's Art Deco style) appeared extravagant and fussy.⁵⁰ The property type exemplified by the 1946 Sioux Theatre, expressed the Art Moderne style with its horizontality, curved walls, chrome detailing, and buff brick facing. The fresh, streamlined motion implied in the Art Moderne style reflected the nation's design preferences of the time, treatments that were easily applied to the design of numerous commercial and institutional building types.⁵¹

The Art Moderne style evolved from the earlier and somewhat contemporaneous Art Deco and International styles of the Modern Movement in the 1920s and 1930s. Echoing the streamlined design of the industrial age and the automobiles,

⁵⁰ Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), 242. The concern for more simple design began prior to the war in the late 1930s and continued after the war.

⁵¹ Nash, 12.

ships, and airplanes of the era, Art Moderne (aka Moderne, Modernistic, or Streamlined Moderne) strove to evoke active, aerodynamic movement through the use of smooth wall surfaces, contoured walls, and horizontal lines. The Art Moderne style utilized machine inspired motifs and featured smooth cubic and cylindrical forms with a horizontal emphasis, curving shapes, and a minimum of ornamentation. To achieve the desired aesthetic, designs integrated ribbon windows set high in the wall, light-colored brick, rounded wall corners, large expanses of glass, glass block, chrome, and stainless steel.⁵² Art Moderne style buildings sometimes incorporated the geometric elements of the Art Deco style. However they typically evoke the International Style's reduction of decorative detailing and applied ornament to the barest minimum.⁵³

The most popular of the Modern Movement styles after 1930, the Art Moderne style buildings appear throughout the country and many towns and small cities boast at least one example. The state and federal relief programs of the Great Depression, in particular the Works Progress Administration (WPA) building projects, played an important role in the broad geographic dissemination of the Modern Movement's styles and its simplified architectural design throughout the country. Government-funded projects such as dams, bridges, parks, schools, stadiums, post offices, city halls, courthouses, and fire and police stations employed out-of-work architects who incorporated the stripped-down and cost-efficient Art Moderne style into their designs and spread the idiom throughout the country.

Significance as the Work of a Master

Designed by the prolific Des Moines architectural firm of Wetherell and Harrison⁵⁴ noted for their Modern Movement theater designs during the 1930s and 1940s, the Sioux Theatre is significant as a representative work of a master reflecting both technical and aesthetic achievements in the design of movie theaters in Iowa. The theater is locally significant for its associations with the body of work of the firm beginning in the 1930s and continuing into the post-World War II period.

As noted in the MPDF, the firm of Wetherell and Harrison began to specialize in movie theater design beginning in the early 1930s through connections with independent theater operators and, later with large theater developers such as Central States Theatre Corporation and Tri-States Theatre Corporation. During this period, the firm served on the architectural advisory staff of the Modern Theatre Planning Institute. They designed more than one hundred theaters throughout Iowa during the Great Depression and post-war period.⁵⁵ These theaters were part of an era of renovation and new construction of movie theaters in Iowa in response to the advent of talking pictures and other technological innovations.

As required by National Register guidelines, the significance of the firm of Wetherell and Harrison as a master architect is due to the firm's prolific work in the design of movie theaters in Iowa beginning in the early 1930s and continuing throughout the post-World War II period. These movie theaters express a particular phase of development of the firm when, according to reports filed with the American Institute of Architects, Roland Goucher (Tip) Harrison and Edwin

⁵² Richard Longstreth, *The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to America's Commercial Architecture*. Updated Edition (New York: AltaMira Press, 2000), 47-49.

⁵³ Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 466.

⁵⁴ Schwenk, E-91.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Henry Wetherell, the firm's partners, specialized in the design of movie theaters.⁵⁶ During this time, technical expertise utilized by Wetherell and Harrison included the long-term consulting associations with structural engineer, S. F. Nydam of Peterson and Appell of Chicago and Des Moines; the plumbing, electrical, heating and ventilating engineering firms of Stevenson and Pulley, B E. Landes, and the Harry F. Wilson, all of Des Moines; landscape architects, Robinson and Parnhan, Des Moines; and civil engineer, Bert H. Shivers, Des Moines. The firm also collaborated with Tinsley, Higgins and Lightner architects of Des Moines.⁵⁷

The associations of these design professionals was important to the firm's reputation as master architects of movie theaters in the state. The technical design expertise of the Wetherell and Harrison architectural firm utilized in the firm's near monopoly on movie theater design in the 1930s is significant. It was during this period that a wide variety of leased or purchased sound systems with a variety of choices in amplification came on the market with the advent of the talking picture. At the same time, technological advance in air distribution and ventilation systems, including air conditioning, became widely used in theaters. Other innovations included acoustical materials to control amplification of sound and new projectors that required screens calibrated for both color and black and white films and larger screen dimensions. These innovations required the services of architects with specialized technological experience, proficiency, and knowledge.

All of the new theaters designed by the firm during this period were variations of the Modern Movement style genre including the popular Art Deco and, a few years later, Art Modern styles. By the 1950s, the firm's design emphasis shifted to reflect the commercial adaptation of the American post-World War II International style.⁵⁸ The firm is noted for its execution of Modern Movement style movie theaters. Two of the more dramatic examples of the Wetherell and Harrison firm's work were the design of the Capitol Theater in Burlington and the Charles Theater in Charles City. Despite their smaller size relative to the earlier Revival style movie palaces in the state, both are outstanding examples of the dramatic, soaring, dynamic Modern Movement style Art Deco movie palace façade. Their utilization of terra cotta is notable and the work on the Charles Theater is featured in *American Art Deco: Architecture and Regionalism*.⁵⁹ Their adaptation of the Modern Movement stylistic genre in movie theater design utilized new materials such as the combination of Lannon stone,⁶⁰ Vitrolite and glass block in the 1946 Malek Theater in Independence, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Between 1936 and 1939, the Wetherell and Harrison firm designed eight such Art Deco theaters for the Central States Theater Corporation movie chain.⁶¹

EPILOGUE

In late 1959 or early 1960, Don and Edna Gran sold their ownership interest in the Sioux Theatre to Don's brother, Al Gran (1905-1972). In 1960, a brief mention in *Boxoffice* reported that Al Gran "... has the spring fever good and is

⁵⁶ Harrison's architectural license in Iowa ran from July 1, 1927⁵⁶ through into the 1950s. Wetherell, joined his father's firm in 1922, became licensed to practice architecture in 1927, and became a partner in the firm with Harrison in 1933 and continued as a partner into the 1950s.

⁵⁷ Schwenk, E-92 and E-93.

⁵⁸ See Figure 14.

⁵⁹ Carla Breeze, *American Art Deco: Architecture and Regionalism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2003), 26-27.

⁶⁰ Lannon Stone is dolomite, a type of cream to gray limestone that runs through The Niagara Escarpment, which runs underneath most of the Great Lakes.

⁶¹ Ibid., E-84 and E-94. Notable examples of Modern Movement style theater designs by the firm include: the 1935 Castle Theater, Manchester, IA; 1934 Charles Theater, Charles City, IA; 1937 Collegian Theater, Ames, IA; 1938 Varsity Theater, Ames, IA; 1939 Rialto Theater, Pocahontas, IA; 1951 Capital Theatre, Newton, IA; 1953 LeClaire Theatre, Moline, IL.

redecorating.”⁶² In 1961, he became a new member of the Allied Independent Theatre Owners of Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota. He installed new, larger screens in 1965 and again in 1971.⁶³

In 1973, Michael Berger assumed ownership and the following spring, purchased two Strong Lume-X projectors designed for indoor screens up to 45 feet wide. Berger commented on the upgrade in *Boxoffice*: “In my opinion, there is no comparison. The xenon is surely brighter and provides a truer color balance. We will be glad to have the name of our theatre used... (in) any way that might help some owners realize the advantages of the Strong Lume-X systems.”⁶⁴ At the time, the Sioux Theatre featured three-hundred seventy-five red, “self-rising seats,” and a twenty-four-hour automated telephone answering service describing show times and features.

Berger closed the theater in 1976 in response to the lengthy reconstruction of US Highway 71, which isolated the town for an extended period of time.⁶⁵ After a period of vacancy, in 1985 Berger deeded the building to the Sioux Rapids Area Historical Society to prevent it from on-going neglect. During the next five years, the historical society conducted emergency repairs to the roof and extended the stage an additional eight feet to expand its functionality for use in live productions and high school graduations. The Sioux Rapids Area Historical Society continues to care for the building, which contains their museum. They plan to maintain the building and conduct necessary repairs into perpetuity.

⁶² *Boxoffice*. April 18, 1960: NC-2, <http://issuu.com/boxoffice/docs/boxoffice> (accessed May 14, 2010).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, May 3, 1971: NC-1, <http://issuu.com/boxoffice/docs/boxoffice> (accessed May 14, 2010).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, September 2, 1974: NC-1, <http://issuu.com/boxoffice/docs/boxoffice> (accessed May 14, 2010).

⁶⁵ *Cinema Treasures*, “Sioux Theatre,” blog entry by Michael Berger, June 28, 2010, <http://cinematreasures.org/theater/26789/> (accessed October 13, 2010).

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- "Wetherell and Harrison." Cinema Treasures. Database online. <http://cinematreasures.org/firm/283/> (accessed May 10, 2010).
- W.R. Grace and Company. "Zonolite Attic Insulation Safety Facts." Article on-line. <http://www.grace.com/about/ehs/libby/zonolite.aspx> (accessed May 25, 2010).

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ 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 #
☐

Primary location of additional data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University

☒ Other

Name of
Repository:

**Sioux Rapids Area
Historical Association**

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): Iowa SHPO Inventory Number 11-00275

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>15</u>	<u>324515.3</u>	<u>4751216.5</u>	3	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary of the Sioux Theatre is shown as the bold line on the accompanying map entitled "Figure 11: Boundary Map." Original Town, Block 2, Lot 4.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The nomination includes the parcel of land that is historically associated with the resource. The approximately thirty (30) feet along the west edge of the south end of the parcel has been excluded because it contains non-historically relocated buildings that have no historic association with the parcel or the Sioux Theatre.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Sally Fullerton Schwenk, Historian & Kerry Davis, Architectural Historian, (Preservation Solutions LLC)

organization Sally Schwenk Associates, Inc

date June 2011

street & number 3800 Baltimore, Suite 3 South

telephone 816-221-2572

city or town Kansas City

state MO

zip code 64111

e-mail sschwenk@ssapreservation.com

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

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

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Sioux Theatre

City or Vicinity: Sioux Rapids

County: Buena Vista **State:** Iowa

Photographer: Kerry Davis

Date Photographed: October 9, 2009

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

All digital images labeled as follows: IA_BuenaVistaCounty_SiouxTheatre_000#.tif

01 of 16.	Primary (south) elevation.	View N
02 of 16.	Primary (south) and part of west side elevation.	View NE
03 of 16.	West side and rear (north) elevations.	View SE
04 of 16.	East side and part of primary (south) elevations.	View NW
05 of 16.	Primary elevation, main entrance.	View N
06 of 16.	Main foyer.	View SE
07 of 16.	Main foyer.	View NW
08 of 16.	Second foyer.	View SW
09 of 16.	Second foyer, view of lounge.	View NW
10 of 16.	Auditorium.	View NE
11 of 16.	Auditorium.	View SE
12 of 16.	Stage.	View NE
13 of 16.	Crying room, view from auditorium.	View S
14 of 16.	Projection room.	View NW
15 of 16.	Second-floor apartment, parlor.	View E
16 of 16.	Second-floor apartment, parlor.	View NW

Property Owner:

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Sioux Rapids Area Historical Association

street & number 128 Main Street, Box 21 telephone 712-283-2344

city or town Sioux Rapids state Iowa zip code 50585

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Sioux Theatre

Name of Property

Buena Vista County, Iowa

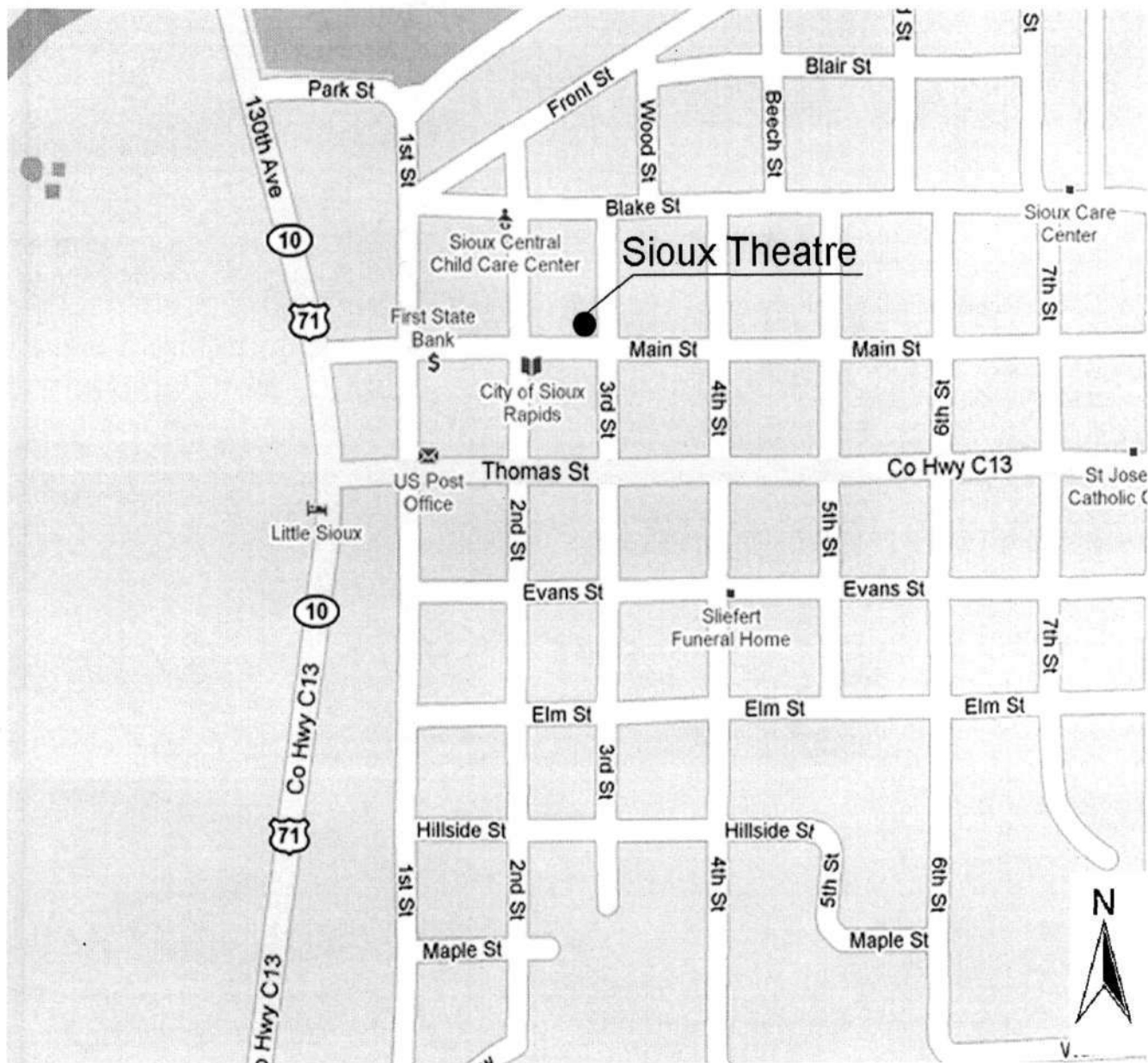
County and State

"Historic Movie Theaters of Iowa"

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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FIGURE 1: GENERAL LOCATION MAP
Sioux Rapids, Iowa



Sioux Theatre (11-00275) Iowa Site Inventory Form, 2009

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FIGURE 2: SETTING MAP
Sioux Rapids, Iowa



Sioux Theatre (11-00275) Iowa Site Inventory Form, 2009

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FIGURE 3: SIOUX THEATRE, c1946
Sioux Rapids, Iowa



Photo courtesy of Sioux Rapids Area Historical Association

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Sioux Theatre

Name of Property

Buena Vista County, Iowa

County and State

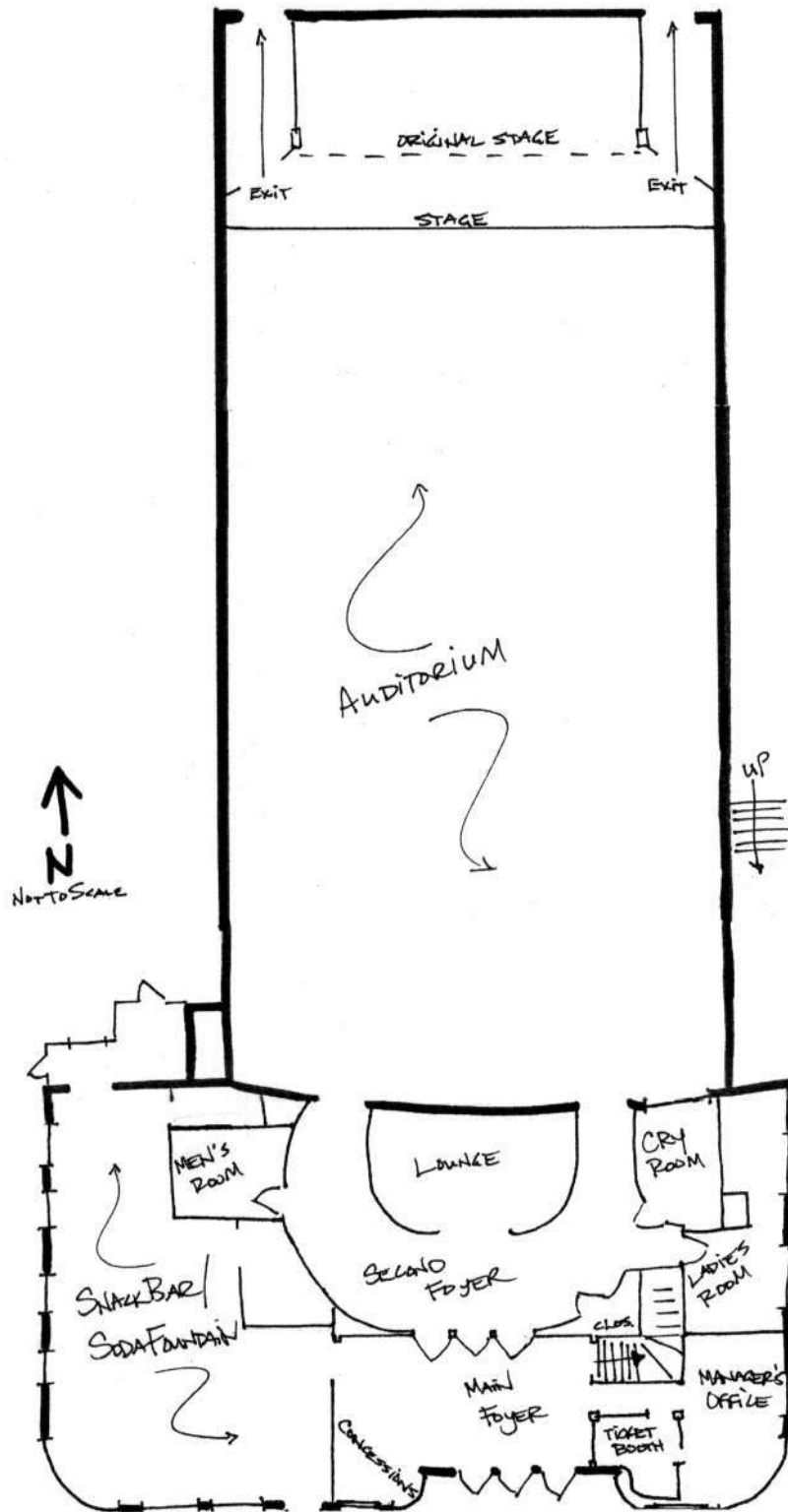
"Historic Movie Theaters of Iowa"

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FIGURE 4: FIRST FLOOR PLAN

Sioux Theatre (11-00275) Iowa Site Inventory Form, 2009



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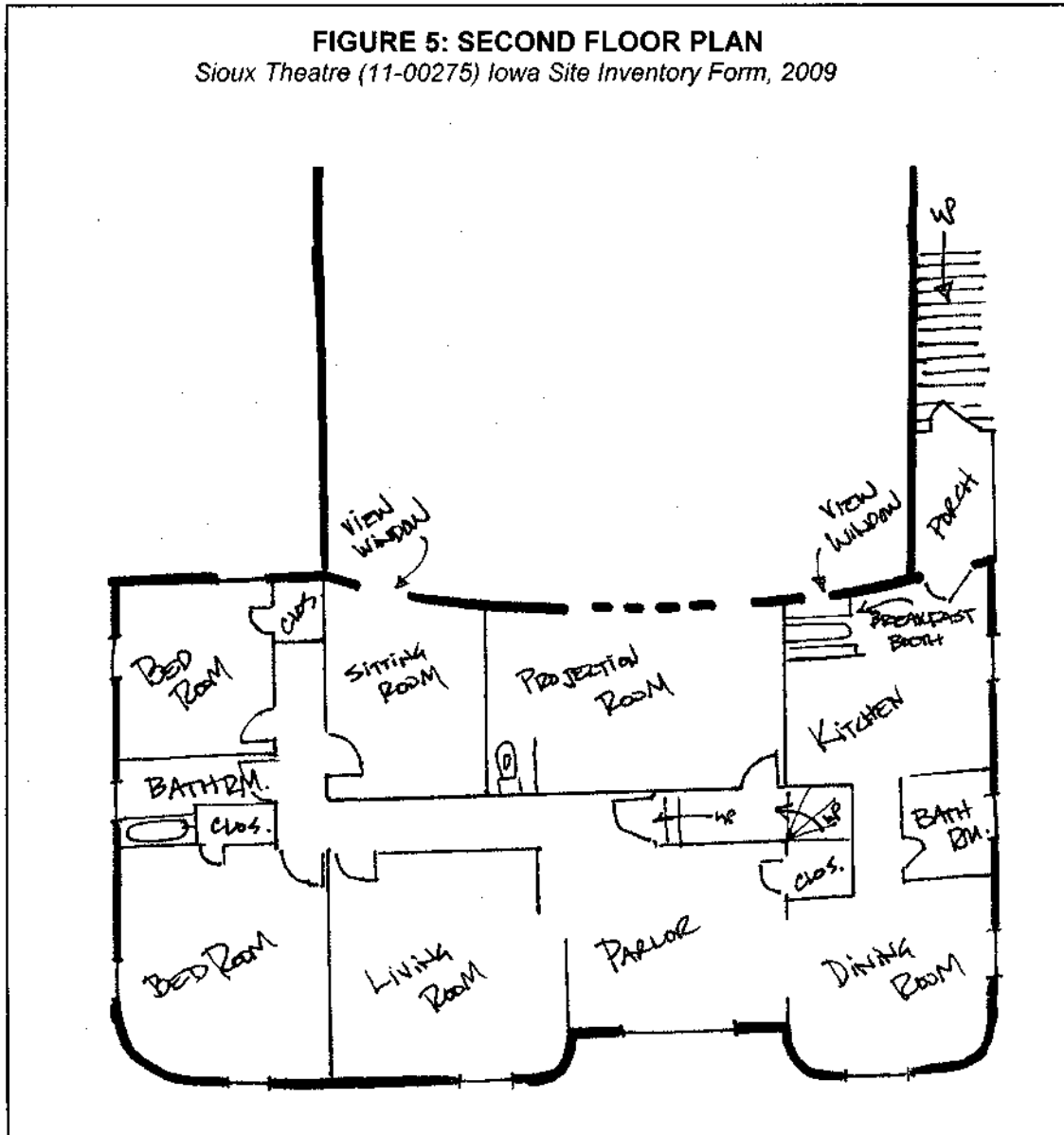
County and State

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FIGURE 7: SIOUX THEATRE UPON OPENING, SEPTEMBER 1946



Photo courtesy of Sioux Rapids Area Historical Association

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Sioux Theatre

Name of Property

Buena Vista County, Iowa

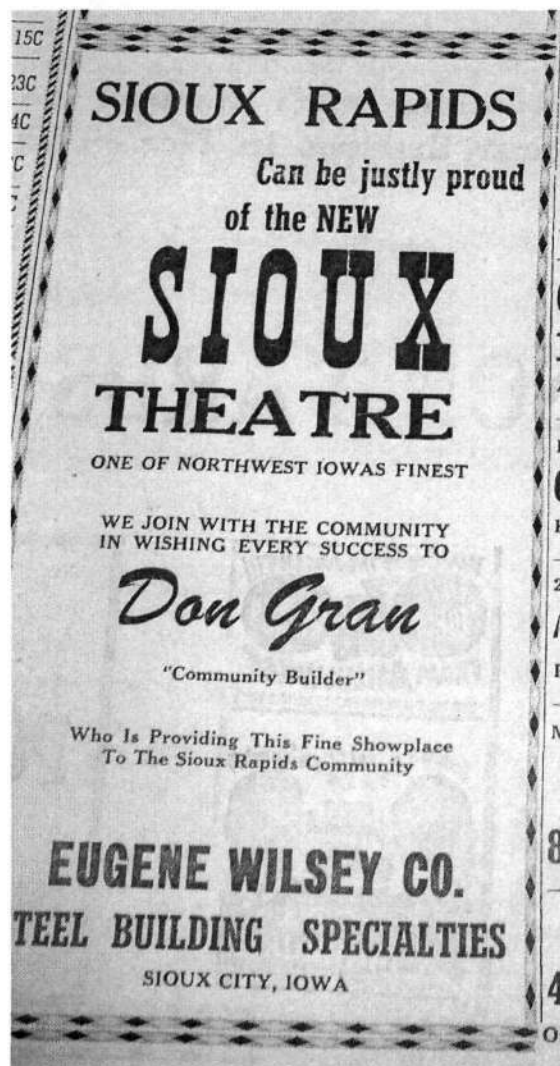
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FIGURE 8: GRAND OPENING ADVERTISEMENT, SEPTEMBER 1946



Courtesy of Sioux Rapids Area Historical Association

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FIGURE 9: GRAND OPENING ADVERTISEMENT, SEPTEMBER 1946

CONGRATULATIONS
DON GRAN
ON THE GRAND
Opening Of The New
SIOUX THEATRE

THE NEW SIOUX THEATRE
FINEST IN THE NORTHWEST

THURSDAY
1
2

TWO GUYS FROM MILWAUKEE
DENNIS CARSON
JACK MORGAN

THURSDAY
1
2

TWO GUYS FROM MILWAUKEE
DENNIS CARSON
JACK MORGAN

This Is A Great Boost To The
SIOUX RAPIDS COMMUNITY

We Are Proud To Have Built This Theatre
C. I. HERSOM
CONTRACTOR

IOV

Courtesy of Sioux Rapids Area Historical Association

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Sioux Theatre

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County and State

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Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

FIGURE 10: ADVERTISEMENT IN BOXOFFICE, JANUARY 26, 1952

Sioux Theatre

Edna & Don Gran
Sioux Rapids, Iowa

December 19, 1951

Industries, Inc.

Gentlemen:

We have been displaying film ads exclusively for Reid H. Ray Film Industries for more than fifteen years. During this time we have found the Company and its representatives to be "tops", and very cooperative.

The films produced by Reid Ray are of excellent quality and we believe their Ansco Color Films are most outstanding.

We are looking forward to extending this association for many years.

Very truly yours,
Don Gran
Edna & Don Gran
Sioux Theatre
Sioux Rapids, Iowa

BUSINESS BREVITIES

Local Screen Advertising of Quality

Reid H. Ray
FILM INDUSTRIES, INC.

2269 Ford Parkway
St. Paul, Minn.

208 South LaSalle St.
Chicago, Illinois

Image courtesy of issuu.com

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Sioux Theatre

Name of Property

Buena Vista County, Iowa

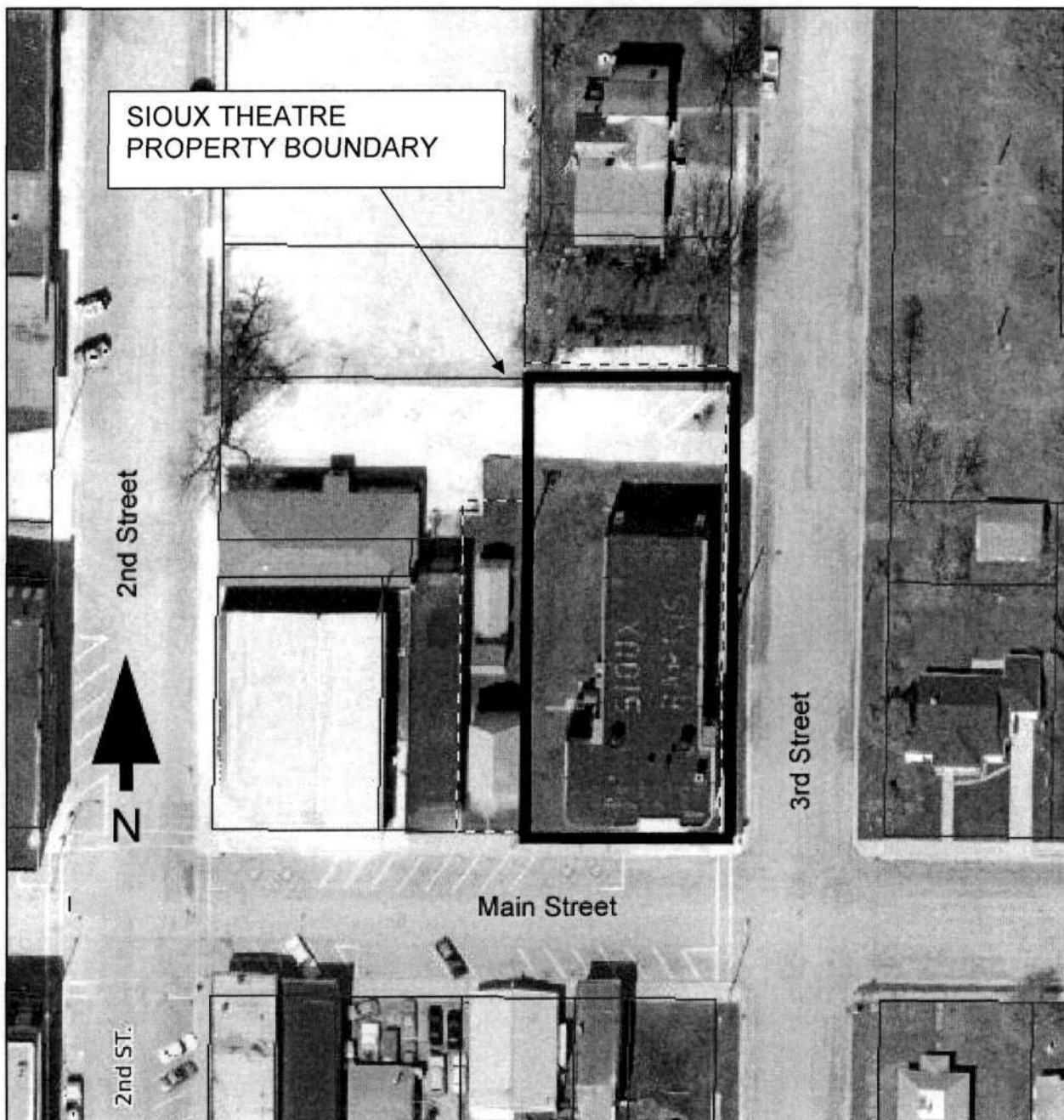
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FIGURE 11: BOUNDARY MAP



APPROXIMATE SCALE 1" = 70'

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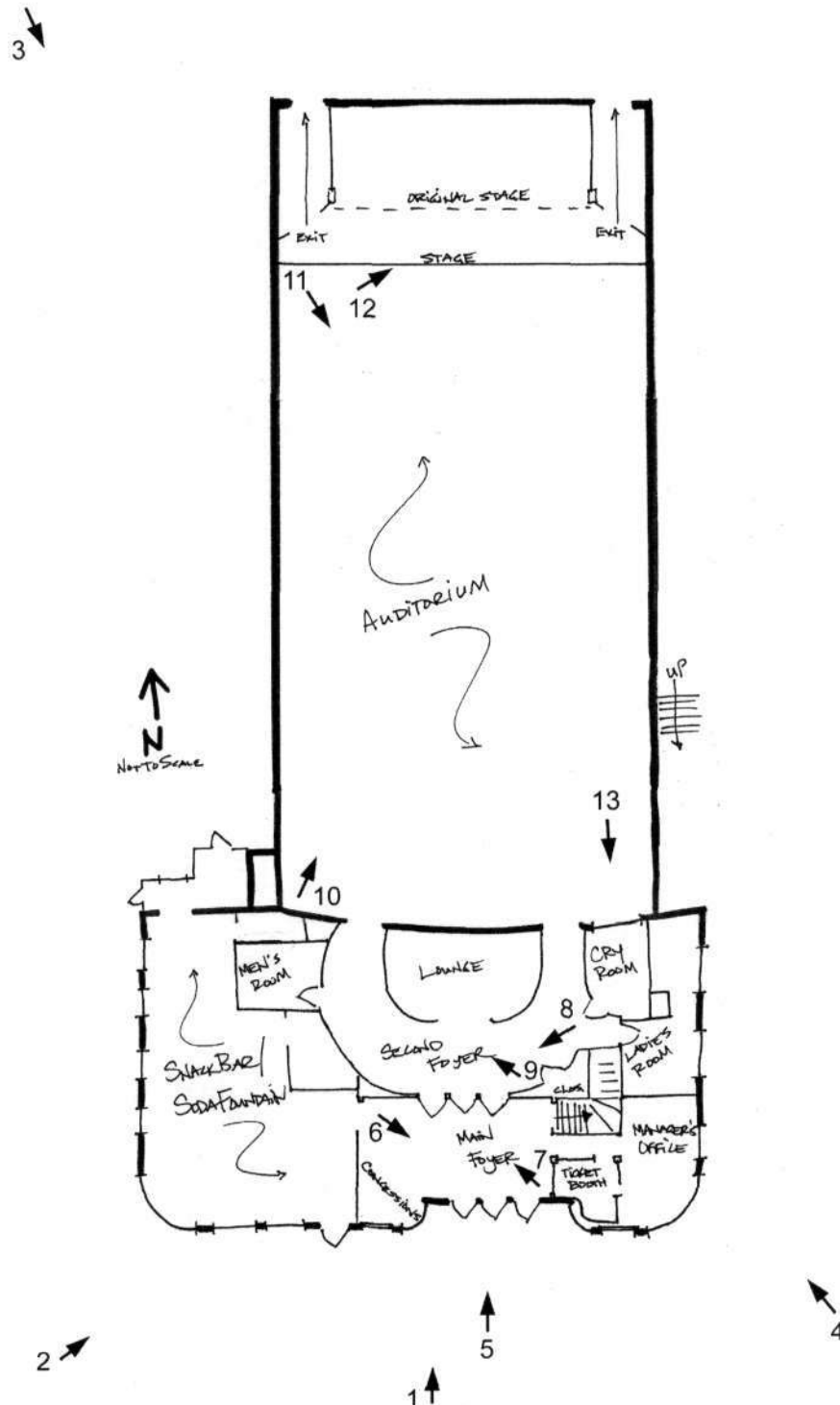
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FIGURE 12: PHOTOGRAPH LOCATION MAP – FIRST FLOOR



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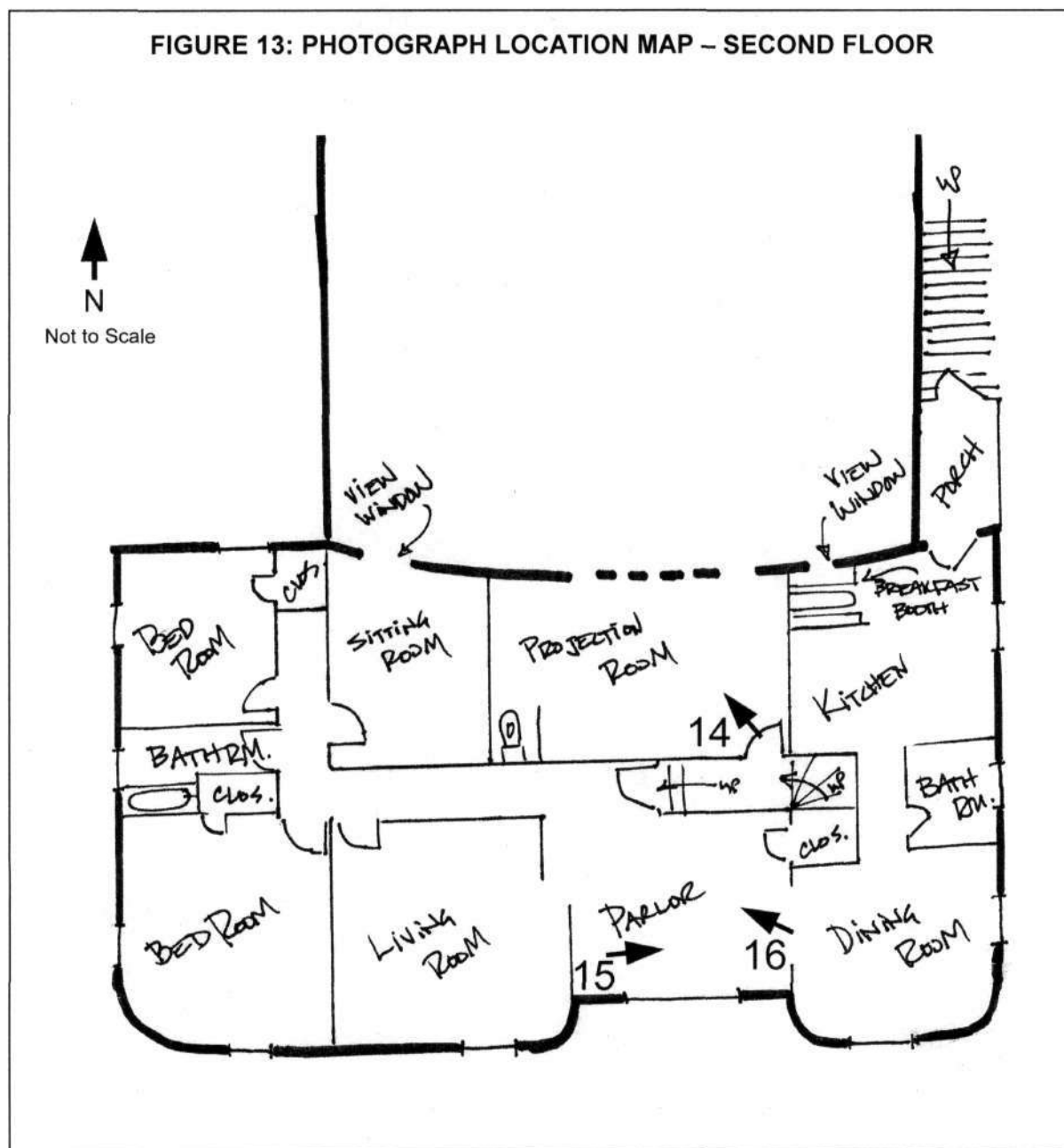
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FIGURE 14: Wetherell and Harrison Iowa Theater Designs 1934-1947



1934 Charles Theater – Exterior & Interior
(Charles City Chamber of Commerce)



1939 Ingersoll theater, Des Moines
(flickr.com)



1939 Rialto Theater, Pocahontas
(lowabackroads.com)



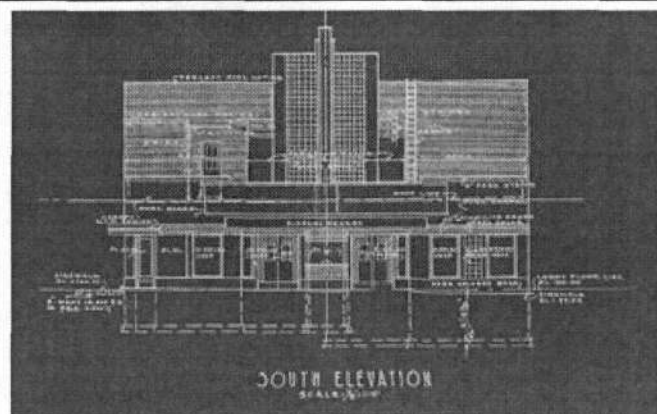
1947 Malek Theater,
Independence
(cinematreasurers.org)



1938 Varsity Theater, Ames
(ameshistoricalsociety.org)



1937 Collegian, Ames (cinematreasurers.com)



1938 Highland Theater, Des Moines (Wetherell Ericsson
Architects/Lost Cinemas Greater Des Moines)