

## Spot on SHPO

### News from the State Historic Preservation Office

Movie theaters come in all shapes and sizes: from meeting halls and converted opera houses of the early 20th century to mid-century drive-ins and the multiplexes of today. Depending on the venue (and the movie, for that matter), the experience is different from the moment you read the marquee until the last credit rolls off the screen. Today, we snack on pizza and nachos while sitting on rocking chairs fastened to steeply pitched risers in a short auditorium. We probably walked through the mall to get there and we'll walk through a sea of cars to get out. But, many of us also remember sitting in a long Main Street auditorium looking down over the backs of rows and rows of people and seats. The gently sloped floor was always slightly sticky, and we felt special if we could grab one of the loveseat-sized chairs on the occasional end of the row. We walked down the street to get there—either from our house or our car parked a block away—and walked past the same brightly lit storefronts to get home.

The State Historic Preservation Office wants to learn more about Iowa's movie houses and the state's connections to Hollywood. That's why we are embarking on what will likely become a multi-year and multi-phase study of Iowa's movie theaters and other properties associated with the film industry. In addition to the theaters, we want to know more about Iowans associated with cinema, from actors and actresses to producers and directors (not to mention musicians, writers, costume designers, and distributors). That's why we're also talking with people who have been bringing movies to you for decades, including Robert Fridley, who has been a fixture in Iowa's film industry since the 1930s. We also want to know more about the filming locations of the many movies filmed in the state over the last 100 years. You probably remember *Field of Dreams* (1988) and *Twister* (1995), but do you recall *Penitentiary* (1935) and *Cold Turkey* (1968)?

Although we're concentrating on properties built or associated with the film industry before 1970, we're researching everything from the nickelodeon to the multiplex—the whole story over the last century. Not all of these buildings, people, and places will be significant. Some will have such a small association with the film industry they'll be considered irrelevant, and others will barely be recognizable due to alterations over time. But in the end, they all tell a part of the story. By gaining an understanding of the entire history of cinema in Iowa, we hope to be able to determine which properties are most worthy of preservation for future generations.

So, if you have a wonderful movie theater in your town, or know of another property that could help represent Hollywood in the Heartland, we want to hear from you. We'll be working with IHPA to put information about the survey on IHPA's redesigned website this winter, but in the meantime contact Paula Mohr at the State Historic Preservation Office for more information about the survey or if you would like a digital copy of our site inventory form for theaters. Paula can be reached at Paula.Mohr@iowa.gov or 515.281.6826. Help us learn more about the last 100 years of Iowa cinema!

Contributed by Barbara A. Mitchell



Iowa Theater, Onawa. Photo courtesy the State Historical Society of Iowa's State Historic Preservation Office.

### Recent Actions on the National Register of Historic Places

**Edmundson Park Historic District**, Oskaloosa, Mahaska County. Listed 09/27/2007.

**Lincoln Township Mausoleum**, Zearing, Story County. Listed 09/27/2007.

**Henderson Lewelling House**, Salem, Henry County. Listing upgraded 08/31/2007.

**Fort Madison Downtown Commercial Historic District**, Lee County. Listed 08/31/2007.

**Williges Building**, Sioux City, Woodbury County. Listed 08/31/2007.

**Knoxville WPA Athletic Field Historic District**, Knoxville, Marion County. Listed 08/02/2007.