

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

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Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page 4

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Historic Resources of Downtown Gallup  
Mckinley County, New Mexico

1. Name: El Morro Theater
2. Location: 205-209 West Coal Avenue  
Gallup, New Mexico
3. Classification:  
Category building  
Ownership private  
Status occupied  
Accessible yes: unrestricted  
Present Use commercial
4. Owner of Property:  
Richard Kauzlaric  
307 S. Third Street  
Gallup, New Mexico 87301
5. Location of Legal Description:  
McKinley County Courthouse  
205-209 West Hill Street  
Gallup, New Mexico
6. Representation in Existing Surveys:  
New Mexico Historic Building Inventory  
August 1985  
New Mexico Historic Preservation Division  
228 E. Palace Avenue, Rm 101  
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87503
7. Description:  
Condition fair  
altered  
original site

The 1928 El Morro Theater is the only example of Spanish Colonial Revival architecture in Gallup. It was designed by Carl Boller of the Boller Brothers architecture firm of Los Angeles and Kansas City. The Boller Brothers firm was responsible for designing many theaters in the Southwest, Midwest and California. Once described as a "castle of pleasure and art",

11-36-87

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page 5

---

the El Morro occupies a prominent location on Coal Avenue and has been the backdrop to many Indian Tribal Ceremonial parades.

This two-story row building has a barrel vault roof, clay tile parapet cap, symmetrical facade and roof drains and corbels. The original street facade is stucco with an inscribed tile-like pattern and false stuccoed keystone-like arch. The main focus of the facade is the central portion consisting of ornate, low-relief, molded, half-round columns (vaulting shafts), architrave and impost moldings, and two architrave windows. On either end of this portion are two porthole-like openings with horizontal wood louvers and decorative plaster molded surrounds. Above is a decorative, low relief, molded plaster parapet with curvilinear gable and molded shields. Four small cone-shaped finials are missing from this area. Along the upper facade is a row of nine arched windows with wooden spindle frieze and six-over-one double hung sash windows. The central window in this configuration is larger, more ornate, and four-lite sidelites. Originally this facade was painted in several colors and will be painted in several colors again during rehabilitation.

The lower portion of the north facade consists of two storefronts, one on each side of the entrance to the theater. The door and window configuration of these storefronts remains as original except that the transoms have been covered and the wooden window frames have been replaced with aluminum. The entrance foyer of the theater is recessed, leading to the original ticket office between two wood and glass entry doors. Decorated with zigzag pattern glazed tile, the ticket booth protrudes into the foyer and is glazed on three sides. The original poster display cases with zigzag pattern glazed tile below are still in use at the front of the theater. The ceiling of the foyer is beamed in a coffer-like pattern with heavily textured plaster panels between. Each beam has been plastered, and decorated with a striated scratch pattern surface texture. The foyer floor consists of small multicolored ceramic tile. The original marquee has been replaced, but will likely be returned to a marquee similar to the original during rehabilitation.

The lobby of the El Morro is rectangular in shape with a snack bar directly across from the entry. Doors on either side of the snack bar lead to the first floor of the theater. Seats slant down toward a slightly renovated stage with no curtain. Originally the stage was surrounded by a large Reuter organ used both for movies and vaudeville. Stairs to the currently unused balcony rise from the east and west ends of the lobby. Also on the balcony level are offices and toilets. Originally there was also a "cry

11-30-87

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page 6

---

room" associated with the ladies room, complete with a glass panel so mothers could continue to watch the movie while they comforted their children.

The walls of the El Morro were lavishly decorated with painted murals by David A. Swing of Phoenix. These murals depicted locally important historical scenes; the titles were Onate Passing El Morro, Surrender of Zunis to De Vargas Coronado before Hawaiku, and Pioneers Passing Navajo Church rock. Unfortunately these works of art have been painted over, but good records exist of how they originally appeared.

The El Morro is among the buildings which will be rehabilitated in the Downtown Gallup Rehabilitation Program. As much as possible it will be taken back to its historical appearance, with the exception of the murals which would be too costly to recreate. Currently it is in fair condition with paint peeling from the exterior. Even before rehabilitation the El Morro Theater is one of the grandest structures in Gallup.

8. Significance:

Area of significance architecture  
entertainment

Period of significance 1928

Criterion A important in the entertainment life of Gallup

Criterion C important example of Spanish Colonial Revival  
architecture in Gallup

Builder/Architect Carl Boller

The 1928 El Morro Theater is architecturally significant for its use of Spanish Colonial Revival styling, and historically significant for its association with the entertainment life of Gallup.

Historically, this theater is, and has been, a mainstay of the entertainment life in Gallup. Originally the stage presented vaudeville and dramatic offerings as well as motion pictures, with a Reuter organ providing the sound. The builders desired that the El Morro would be a place "where you could hear music that would entrance and delight you, and where novelty entertainment would reign supreme". This theater was packed on weekends and brought other parts of the world right into downtown Gallup, both to entertain and to educate.

11-30-87

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page 7

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Architecturally, the El Morro is built in the Spanish Colonial Revival style, a period style which appears nowhere else in the city. This type or period architecture was scarce both because it was so exotic (and therefore not broadly applicable to commercial building), and because its detailing was expensive to execute. The developers of the El Morro Theater were able to overcome both these obstacles; the exotic styling was appropriate to a vaudeville and motion picture house, and the Gallup Realty Company which built the structure had great faith that it would prove to be a profitable venture in spite of the cost. In the opening night program, the owners stated that "our destinies are cast with the destiny of this community, and we are proud to have added to the beauty and brightness, of this, our home".

Of further architectural interest, this building was designed by Carl Boller, a partner in the Boller Brothers architectural firm of Los Angeles and Kansas City. This firm was active in the 1920s and designed more than 90 theater buildings throughout the Midwest, Southwest and California.

The theater is currently being rehabilitated to more closely conform to its historic appearance. This work will reinforce the structure's role as a local civic landmark.

9. Major Bibliographical References:  
See continuation sheets

10. Geographical Data: The nominated property consists of Lots 3 and 4, partial Lots 2 and 5, Block 44, of the Original Townsite.

Quadrangle Name: Gallup East

Quadrangle Scale: 7.5 minute

Acreage: less than one acre

UTM References:

Zone 12      Easting 704740      Northing 3933630