

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

327



# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" if not applicable. For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

### 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building

Other names/site number: Equity Building, Equity Plaza Apartments

Name of related multiple property listing:  
N/A

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

### 2. Location

Street & number: 122-124 South Main

City or town: Blackwell State: OK County: Kay

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

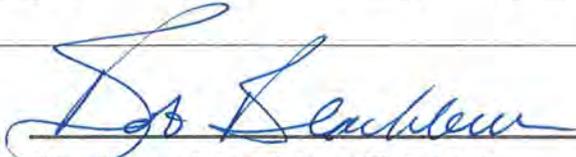
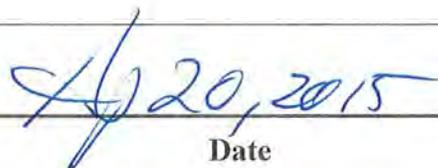
I hereby certify that this X nomination     request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

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

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A     B X C     D

 Signature of certifying official/Title:	 Date
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	
In my opinion, the property <u>   </u> meets <u>   </u> does not meet the National Register criteria.	
Signature of commenting official:	Date
Title :	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

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

For Edson H. Beall  
Signature of the Keeper

6-8-15  
Date of Action

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

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

**Category of Property**

(Check only **one** box.)

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

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

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

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

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions** (Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE: business  
RECREATION AND CULTURE:  
theater  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions** (Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: multiple dwelling  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## 7. Description

**Architectural Classification** (Enter categories from instructions.)

Art Deco  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Brick

### Narrative Description

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

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### Summary Paragraph

The Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building is a four-plus story, brick, Art Deco style, rectangular, commercial building with a full basement constructed on the south side of downtown Blackwell, Oklahoma. The name of the building is a combination of the common names of the building during the 1928-1963 period of significance. During the period of significance, the building contained professional offices on the upper three floors with the Rivoli Theater located on the first floor. The Art Deco style building was constructed in 1928-1929 with the Rivoli Theater opening to the public on March 6, 1929. Designed by H.H. Mahler, a well-known Tulsa, Oklahoma, architect, the four-story building is equal to a five-story building. Between the first and second floor, there is a mezzanine level which originally provided rest and lounging rooms for both men and women, as well as the projection booth. The building is predominately a buff colored brick with striking architectural terra cotta ornamentation. The Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building has been altered on the exterior by the boarding of select windows on the front and side elevations, as well as the replacement of the historic flat marquee and the original vertical sign which read Rivoli. Other exterior changes include the enclosure of the theater vestibule with a flush aluminum and glass storefront. The vestibule was possibly enclosed in the mid-1960s when the theater ceased operation, although reportedly a tornado may have damaged the vestibule previous to that. On the interior of the building, the first floor was modified to create offices in the former theater area, although original theater detailing on the walls and ceiling remain evident. On the upper three floors, the offices were converted to

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apartments in the mid-1980s. The original configuration of the upper floors remain evident in the central corridors which still feature the pattern of door and window openings, although the office windows have been obscured. Overall, the changes do not impede the ability of the building to convey its historic and architectural significance.

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## Narrative Description

The Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building is a rectangular, predominately brick building. The narrow façade (west elevation) of the building fronts onto Blackwell's South Main, the primary north-south thoroughfare through town. The building's long south elevation faces East Bridge Avenue. The rear (east) elevation overlooks the twenty foot north-south alley separating the block and the north wall is partially obscured by the adjacent two-story, brick, Chamber of Commerce building. The roof of the Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building is flat with a full parapet wall that is castellated on the west and south elevations. The east and north walls have a flat parapet wall with a wide brown terra cotta covering which is stamped repeatedly with "W.S. Dickey, Kansas City, MO U.S.A." On the northwest side of the roof is a tall buff colored brick pent house. The pent house has a flat roof that is trimmed with a narrow band of glazed terra cotta.

The building's foundation is concrete except for a granite-like cladding on the front elevation and the westernmost bay of the south wall which is actually a glazed terra cotta finished to look like granite. Above the foundation, the front elevation of the building features an over height first floor of white stone-like glazed terra cotta cladding which also wraps around the westernmost bay of the south elevation. The second through fourth floors of the façade and south elevation are both clad with a buff colored brick laid in a running bond which contrasts with the predominant red brick of the other downtown buildings. The east elevation is clad with a common red brick which is laid in a common bond. The portion of the north elevation that is visible above the adjacent two-story building is predominately a painted red brick with buff colored brick providing a more finished look to the westernmost bay of the elevation.

Exterior features of the building include the full-width, metal, flat awning which extends continuously above the storefronts of the west elevation. The nonoriginal awning is suspended by cables that are attached to the wall above. The awning replaced a 1950s/1960s movie marquee which had replaced the original bronze entry marquee that ornamented the building from construction through the 1940s. The original vertical "Rivoli" sign has been supplanted by the existing vertical sign which currently reads "Equity Plaza" with a small horizontal sign adding "Apartments." The Equity Plaza sign was likely added in the early 1970s when the building was acquired by the Equity Life Insurance Company. The Blackwell City Directories indicate that the name of the building changed from "Hays-Kennedy" to "Rivoli" in the early 1950s and from "Rivoli" to the "Equity Building" in about 1972. Other exterior features include a metal fire escape and a large metal vent pipe on the rear elevation. On the south elevation, there is an original basement entry that is accessed by a below-grade stairwell. Historically, there was a beauty shop in the finished portion on the west side of the basement with the area currently used

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as a workshop space. The existing metal pipe railing at grade level on the east and south sides of the basement stairwell matches the railing visible in historic photographs of the building available from the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Decorative details on the Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building include paired wood windows on the upper three floors of the west, south and north elevations. Each of the windows on the west and south elevations feature glazed terra cotta two-part headers and sills with the headers on the second and third floors being nearly twice the width of the sills. The headers on the fourth floor of the building are even wider than the ones below. The windows on the rear and north elevations have a narrow, glazed, terra cotta, three-part sill and no headers. The majority of windows remain intact; however, on the west elevation, five windows have been boarded and on the north elevation, two windows have been boarded. The overall fenestration pattern remains clearly evident as the boarded windows retain their original dimensions. The upper wall of the façade and westernmost bay of the south elevation are ornamented with glazed terra cotta panels featuring Classical designs including flowers, urns, swags and shields. The upper wall also features a glazed terra cotta coping that is dentilated. Separating the first floor from the second floor on the west and south elevations is an ornamented glazed terra cotta entablature. The entablature is ornamented with Classical designs matching the panels along the uppermost wall of those same elevations.

The west elevation (façade) contains three separate entries (photographs 1, 2 and 5). Typical of theater construction, the south corner of the façade contains a small commercial space that is independent of the rest of the building. The small storefront has been modernized to an aluminum-and-glass storefront but the original configuration, consisting of a single door on the south corner with a single fixed display window to the north side, remains intact. Above the south storefront, there is a large, glazed terra cotta, semi-circular, Romanesque arch which contains a projected circle flanked by two curved triangular pieces. The building's main entry is centrally located on the facade and provided access to the original theater area. Probably in the mid-1960s when the first floor was converted to office space, the original inset entry was changed to be flush with the rest of the façade. The marble-walled vestibule remains with a glass wall separating the vestibule from the first floor corridor. Currently, the flush, aluminum-and-glass storefront consists of a central glazed slab door with a transom. The door is flanked by large, aluminum-framed, full-height windows. Instead of an arched element above the entry, the center portion of the façade's first floor contains three identical panels ornamented with a swag design. Below these panels, in space that the historic photographs indicate was covered by the original marquee, are three glazed terra cotta panels with elaborate floral designs. The panels are separated by two plain glazed terra cotta rectangular blocks. The north corner of the façade contains a separate entry for the upper floors that originally included access to stairs and the high-speed elevator. The stairs have been blocked in, although the bottom few steps remain visible on each floor (see photograph 13). Like the storefront to the south, the upstairs elevator entry has been modernized to aluminum-and-glass but retains its original dimensions. To compensate for the original double doors, the existing pedestrian, aluminum-framed, glazed slab door is oversized and has a divided, full-height, aluminum-framed sidelight on the north side. The original sidelight space now contains full-height, aluminum-framed sidelights that are similar in

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dimension to the originals. The wall above the transom was ornamented identical to the corresponding area above the south storefront, including a large arch ornamented with a projected circle flanked by two curved triangular elements. The transom area over both the north and south entries on the west elevation have been covered with a white metal. Extending completely across the façade of the first floor in about the middle of the historic transom space is a modern, flat, metal awning that is suspended by multiple wires. The original mounts for the historic marquee remain extant on the upper wall of the first floor but are now used for wires supporting the bottom horizontal element of the vertical sign that extends from the upper part of the first floor through the top of the fourth floor. The upper wall of the façade's first floor has an ornamental entablature that wraps fully around the south elevation of the building.

Matching the three-part division of the lower floor, the upper three floors of the west elevation are separated by two projected brick pilasters into three bays. Each of the bays contain paired, one-over-one, hung, wood windows which are slightly recessed and separated by additional brick pilasters. Each of the pilasters has a glazed terra cotta cap with the two pilasters dividing the façade into three bays having larger crowning elements. The top of all of the pilasters are ornamented by glazed terra cotta panels which have elements that extend down to the level of the fourth floor window headers. The majority of windows on the upper floors of the east elevation remain visible. Five of the eighteen windows have been boarded. This includes both the first and second floor set of windows in the southernmost bay and the south window of the fourth floor in the center bay.

The south elevation clearly conveys the historic theater function of the building with its oversize first floor void of any windows (photographs 2 and 3). The south wall is divided similar to the upper floors of the west wall. The long wall is separated by projected brick pilasters into eight bays. The upper three floors of all bays are treated the same as the corresponding area on the façade with two windows in each bay. The first and second floors are separated by the wide glazed terra cotta ornamental entablature which extends the full-width of the elevation. Seven of the eight bays on the first floor are plain brick with the westernmost bay clad with glazed terra cotta to match the first floor of the façade. The south elevation has only two entries, a first floor entry located on the easternmost bay and a basement-level entry in the second bay from the west. The first floor door is a metal slab pedestrian door. The only window opening on the first floor is located within the westernmost bay. The existing two-part, fixed, metal window is smaller than the original display window. As such, the upper window area, below the decorative arch that matches those on the north and south sides of the façade, has been filled in with a white panels. The below-grade entry is described above in the discussion of exterior features.

The rear (east) elevation is predominately constructed of a common red brick (photographs 3 and 4). On the first floor of the building, there are two pedestrian entries located on the south side. Both of these doors are metal paneled with the southernmost door being a light gray and the other door a cream color. On the north edge of the first floor, there is a nonoriginal, oversize, metal, overhead door which was likely added in the 1960s. Above the oversize door, on the mezzanine level, is another smaller opening which now contains a single slab metal door and wood infill. To the south of this on the same level, there is a large metal vent with a louvered

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vent located on to the south side, adjacent to the large metal pipe that now extends from the mezzanine level to the roof. Extending off the mezzanine level is a metal brace. Beginning at ground level and extending to the fourth floor, there is an exterior metal fire stair in the center of the rear elevation. There is a metal hook ladder which extends from the fourth floor to the roof of the building. The upper three floors of the rear elevation also each contain three, two-over-two, hung, metal windows. There is a metal drain pipe on the north side of the west elevation and various small pipes extending from the roof to the second floor on the inside edge of the northernmost window.

The north elevation (photographs 4 and 5) is very plain with only the upper three floors being visible. The unornamented wall is divided into eight bays by the paired windows. The majority of windows are two-over-two, wood, hung, many with metal screens. The other windows are one-over-one, wood, hung. A couple of windows are also boarded. The red brick of the seven east bays are painted a light yellow to blend better as the building towers over the adjacent two-story building. The westernmost bay is buff colored brick to match the façade and south elevation, although the only glazed terra cotta ornamentation is confined to the very top west corner of the wall. Visible on the south elevation is the brick pent house discussed in more detail above.

In 1964, the function of the theater space on the lower level of the building was altered for use as office space. Probably at that time, a flush entry was added in the original inset theater opening. The marble walls of the theater vestibule, however, remain intact. To the east of the vestibule, a new concrete floor was poured to allow for creation of offices along both sides of a center corridor, which is the same space configuration as on the upper floors (photograph 6). The new first floor did not occupy the entirety of the original theater space which historically extended east in the basement (photographs 14 and 15). Still visible from the basement on the east side (photographs 16 and 17), above the drop ceiling on the first floor (photographs 7 and 8), and the mezzanine-level projection room are original wall and ceiling treatments of the Rivoli Theater. The original elevator lobby on the north side of the first floor also retains its marble walls; however, the stairs in that area have been removed, although the bottom few steps on each floor remain visible (photograph 13). The upper floors of the building follow the pattern of private space off of a central public corridor (photographs 11 and 12). The corridor retains the terrazzo floors and wood doors. In the mid-1980s, when the upper floors were converted to apartments, some of the upper walls of the corridors were clad with new materials and the large office windows and transoms covered over. However, the basic pattern of the corridor wall treatments remains evident.

Overall, the Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building retains a good degree of historic integrity, including location, setting, design, workmanship, materials, feeling and association. Because the historic pattern and dimensions, as well as some of the original materials, remain discernible, the modifications to the building do not interfere with the ability of the building to convey its architectural and historic significance. The building is a landmark in downtown Blackwell for its unique architectural contribution to the community and its historic association with entertainment and related events.

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### Statement of Significance

#### Applicable National Register Criteria

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

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

#### Criteria Considerations

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

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

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**Areas of Significance**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture  
Entertainment/Recreation  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**  
1928-1963  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**  
1929  
1963  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**  
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)  
N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**  
N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**  
Mahler, H.H., architect  
\_\_\_\_\_

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

The Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building is individually eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion A for its association with recreation and entertainment in Blackwell from the opening of the Rivoli Theater in 1929 to its closing in about 1963. Additionally, under Criterion C, the building is an excellent, unique example of a combination theater and office building in downtown Blackwell, Oklahoma. The Art Deco style building clearly stands out in downtown Blackwell due to its size, location and distinguishing brick color and glazed terra cotta detailing. The period of significance for the building starts with the year the building was constructed, 1928, and extends through the closing of the theater in 1963. The landmark building was designed by Tulsa architect H.H. Mahler for Vern Hays and Jo and Carl Kennedy. Named Hays-Kennedy for the owners, the building was specifically designed and built to house the Rivoli Theater on the first floor. While the original building name remained in use through about 1950, the name then shifted to the Rivoli Theater Building. Thus, the combination name of Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building reflects the historic names of the building during the period of significance.

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

The community of Blackwell was founded in about 1893 by a group of businessmen from Winfield, Kansas. The new town was named after Colonel A.J. Blackwell, an adopted Cherokee Indian on whose property the original townsite was located on. In 1893, the town lacked rail connections “and had few natural advantages except an excellent agricultural territory.” Within ten years, the town enjoyed transportation facilities linking it to the larger area and an abundant water supply. The largest industry at the time was the 300-barrel-capacity flour mill. This was augmented by a steam laundry, a machine shop and a brick plant.<sup>1</sup>

While agriculture remained a dominant factor in the town’s development through much of the twentieth century, other natural advantages subsequently developed that also contributed significantly to Blackwell’s growth. Blackwell’s agricultural-based prosperity was first augmented in 1901 by the discovery of natural gas. In the mid-1910s, the discovery of oil provided another major economic stimulus. The Blackwell Field was situated seven miles northeast of Blackwell and at peak production had 129 wells producing over 25,000 barrels a day. Other oil fields in proximity to Blackwell included the Tonkawa (also known as the Three Sands) Field, the Deer Creek Field, the Billings Field, the Ponca Field, the Mervine Field, and the Kaw City Field. With the town centrally located to all of these fields, various oil related

<sup>1</sup> *The Daily Oklahoman*, (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma), 27 September 1936. See also “Blackwell,” (unpublished manuscript, available Vertical Files, Research Library, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma), n.d.

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industries were soon blossoming in Blackwell. In 1916, the Blackwell Zinc Company, a subsidiary of the American Metal Company Limited, was established in the community. By 1923, the town's industrial and business resources included five banks, four lumber yards, four oil well supply houses, three refineries, a brick yard, an ice and storage plant, a bottling works, a steam laundry, a creamery and ice cream plant, a wholesale grocery, a wholesale fruit house, a wholesale tobacco and candy house, two planing mills, an osteopathic sanitarium, a hospital, a nursery, a green house, a tank factory, a foundry, a glass factory, and a zinc smelter. With the city economically thriving in the 1920s, services and amenities also reached new heights.<sup>2</sup>

In terms of population, Blackwell, along with Kay County as a whole, experienced tremendous growth during the first decades of the twentieth century. At the time of Oklahoma's statehood in 1907, Blackwell's population stood at 2,644. Within three years, the number of residents jumped to 3,266, nearly a 24 percent increase. More than doubling over the next decade, Blackwell's population numbered 7,174 in 1910, a 119.6 percent increase. According to the local newspaper, the estimated population of Blackwell in 1923 was 11,000. At that time, Blackwell was touted as being centrally location in terms of the area oil pools with railroads entering the town from six directions and state highways in four directions. However, according to the official census, only 2,347 new residents moved to Blackwell between 1920 and 1930 bringing the 1930 population to 9,521. The discrepancy in the reported 1923 population and the official 1930 population is attributable to the twin factors of the transient nature of oil field employment and declines in oil production in the area during the latter part of the 1920s.<sup>3</sup>

At an estimated cost of over \$200,000, the construction of the Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building was announced at the end of May 1928 as a "New Monument to Blackwell Prosperity." Construction of the building was to start in about thirty days. The "graceful" building was to contain a theater and 45 office suites. As announced by H.E. Gilbert, who was in partnership with the Griffith Brothers Amusement Company of Oklahoma City, the new theatre was to "be virtually a cinema temple" with reclining seats in an auditorium that featured "the last word in cold blast cooling." Led by "three of Blackwell's most substantial businessmen," the project was deemed to "do much toward offsetting any psychological business-depression that may exist." Designed by noted Tulsa architect H.H. Mahler, the building was to be "Luxuriously fitted and lavishly ornamented" so that the building would "be the show place (sic) of Blackwell, in civic, architectural and theatrical senses of the phase."<sup>4</sup>

Nearly nine months after the building was announced, the Rivoli Theater was readying to open. At the end of February 1929, the "acoustical experts" had finished their work with "gangs" of men starting work on installing the leather upholstered seats and the wool pile carpets. Electricians were also working on connecting the movitone and vitaphone machines. On the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 27 September 1936. See also *Blackwell (Oklahoma) Daily Tribune*, 22 May 1923.

<sup>3</sup> Institute of Community Development, University of Oklahoma, "Blackwell, Oklahoma, A General Plan of Study," (Available Bizzell Library, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma), 1960. See also *Blackwell Daily Tribune*, 22 May 1923 and John W. Morris, ed., *Drill Bits, Picks, and Shovels: A History of Mineral Resources in Oklahoma*, (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1982), 27-28.

<sup>4</sup> *Blackwell (Oklahoma) Morning Tribune*, 30 May 1928.

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Monday before the theater opened, the 20 foot, electric, vertical sign which automatically flashed “R-I-V-O-L-I” was hung. Showing “Stolen Kisses” starring May McAvoy, the theater officially opened on March 6, 1929 with short speeches by Blackwell Mayor M.M. Lively and the Griffith Brothers legal advisor D.I. Johnson of Oklahoma City. With nearly 900 seats, the building was expected to attract attendees from all over northern Oklahoma and southern Kansas.<sup>5</sup>

With movie prices ranging from 10 cents to 50 cents, the theater’s opening night was hailed as “Blackwell’s greatest theatrical achievement.” According to the local newspapers, “several thousand” attended the opening night with the line extending “beyond the ticket window, up and down the street on both sides of the entrance.” Among Mayor Lively’s comments were tributes to Vern Hays and Jo and Carl Kennedy, “the men who made this building, a sound investment and an ornament to Blackwell,” as well as compliments for architect H.H. Mahler. Lively also acknowledged the Griffith Brothers for giving Blackwell the “best of the Griffith chain of 68 theaters.” All in all, Lively proclaimed “Blackwell now ranks in entertainment facilities well to the fore among Oklahoma cities.” Attending the opening night were Vern Hays, Carl Kennedy, H.H. Mahler and three Griffith brothers, general manager R.E. Griffith, president L.C. Griffith and maintenance man H.J. Griffith.<sup>6</sup>

The Rivoli Theater brought a new aspect of movie going to Blackwell, that of the “talkie.” Utilizing vitaphone technology, the Rivoli was reportedly among the 800 to 900 theaters of the total 20,000 theaters in the United States in 1929 capable of showing “talking pictures.” The synchronization of pictures with sound was a major advancement in movie going for residents of Blackwell. As advertised, movie goers were finally able to “hear what you see.”<sup>7</sup>

The Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building is historically significant for its association with recreation and entertainment in Blackwell from its opening through the closing of the Rivoli Theater in about 1963. From the turn-of-the-twentieth-century through the 1950s, movie theaters played a critical role in the entertainment activities of the typical American. Evolving from “shorts” which portrayed a single scene to feature-length films which told an artistically edited story by the 1920s, movies gained an audience spanning the social and economic spectrum of American society. Despite the economic crisis of the 1930s which devastated many industries, the movie industry with its affordable prices and attractive escapist product continued to thrive. Movie-going reached its peak in the 1940s with patriotism and romance entertaining the homefront and newsreels bringing world events to every town, U.S.A. Although movie theaters remained an important entertainment option in the 1950s and beyond, the emergence of television in the late 1940s and early 1950s reduced the American reliance on movie theaters for affordable entertainment. The Rivoli Theater, operating throughout the late 1920s through the 1960s, is a good local representation of this popular entertainment venue which captivated the nation. As stated in Andrew Bergman’s 1971 work *We’re in the Money: Depression America*

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<sup>5</sup> *Blackwell Morning Tribune*, 28 February 1929 and 6 March 1929. See also *Blackwell Sunday Tribune*, 3 March 1929.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 7 March 1929.

<sup>7</sup> *Blackwell Sunday Tribune*, 3 March 1929.

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*and Its Films*, “Americans needed their movies. Moving pictures had come to play too important a role in their lives to be considered just another luxury item.”<sup>8</sup>

Throughout its history, the Rivoli Theater was owned and operated by the Griffith Amusement Company, which owned numerous theaters in towns across Oklahoma and Texas. Having invested heavily in its movie operations in Blackwell, the Griffith Amusement Company sought to show pictures in their facilities on Sundays. This contributed to the lawsuit between the city of Blackwell and the Griffith Amusement Company that was heard by the Oklahoma Supreme Court in 1932. The Kay County District Court originally issued an injunction against the city of Blackwell, its mayor, chief of police and the city commissioners to stop enforcement of the city ordinance that prohibited the showing of picture shows on Sundays. Violation of the ordinance allowed for the arrest and prosecution of the movie houses’ employees.<sup>9</sup> The Oklahoma Supreme Court reversed and remanded the Kay County District Court’s decision in *City of Blackwell et al. v. Griffith Amusement Company*.

The Rivoli Theater also offered the community more than just movie going. For example, the theater organized an annual Christmas party for children. In the mid-1940s, the party was a joint venture between the local *Journal-Tribune* and Griffith theaters. All pre-school and grade school children in Blackwell and the surrounding trade area could attend the party at the Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater free of charge.<sup>10</sup>

## ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building has been a landmark building in downtown Blackwell for more than eighty years. The four-story building, with its additional mezzanine level which increased the height to the equivalent of a five-story building, has been the tallest building in Blackwell’s central business district since its construction. In addition to being the tallest building in downtown Blackwell, the Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building is distinguished by its use of buff colored brick. Overwhelmingly, the buildings in Blackwell’s central business district are red brick, although the adjacent Chamber of Commerce building also utilized a buff colored brick on its two-story facade. The combination office and theater building’s exuberant Art Deco styling also sets it apart from the predominant Commercial style of downtown Blackwell. In particular, the glazed terra cotta ornamental detail on the Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building is a distinguishing characteristic. The majority of other buildings in downtown Blackwell relied on brick detailing to ornament the façades.

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<sup>8</sup> Maggie Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theatre*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1994), 5-7. See also Deborah Carmichael, “Main Street, Stillwater OK, Growing Up with Hollywood CA: An Oklahoma Town’s Movie Theaters,” *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, LXXX:1 (Spring 2002), 81 and *Blackwell Sunday Tribune*, 3 March 1929.

<sup>9</sup> *City of Blackwell et al. v. Griffith Amusement Co.*, The Oklahoma State Courts Network (OSCN), <http://www.oscn.net>, retrieved 20 June 2011.

<sup>10</sup> *Daily Oklahoman*, 22 December 1946.

Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building  
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Located on the southeast corner of the 100 block of South Main, the Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building, along with the four-story Masonic Temple building across the street to the west, dominates the south section of downtown Blackwell. While commercial development historically continued through the 200 block of South Main, all of those buildings are two-stories in height and are unable to rival the majesty of the Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building.

As with the Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building, the Masonic Temple was designed by architect H.H. Mahler. Born in Chicago, Illinois in 1876, Henry Hamilton Mahler attended the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Reportedly, Mahler worked from 1898 to 1918 for the nationally-recognized Chicago architectural firm of Holabird and Roche. This firm, founded in 1883, employed "...as many as 40 draftsman" by the early 1890s. Less than twenty years later, the firm had nearly 100 draftsmen and was one of the largest architectural firms in the nation. During his years in Chicago, Mahler reportedly developed "the diagrams for the first building of steel construction in Chicago." Mahler moved to Tulsa in 1918 to work as an engineer for the Oklahoma Iron Works. Soon after arriving in Tulsa, he set up an architectural firm. The only known architectural partnership Mahler entered when living in Tulsa was with Marshall C. Cross in 1920. It was the firm of Mahler and Cross who designed the Oklahoma Iron Works Office Building and the Jarecki Manufacturing Company. Both Tulsa buildings were designed in 1920. Apparently dissolving the firm within a year, Mahler then worked solo. In 1922, Mahler designed the Masonic Temple in Tulsa at the southwest corner of 7th and Boston. In the mid to late 1920s, Mahler also did considerable work in Blackwell. By May 1928, Mahler had designed the Masonic Building, the Kuhl Building, the Blackwell Oil and Gas Building and the McDaniel Building.<sup>11</sup>

Within downtown Blackwell, there were historically a total of three four-story buildings, consisting of the Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building, the Masonic Temple at 121-123 South Main and the Larkin Hotel (NRIS #13000940) at 201 North Main. All three four-story buildings were constructed in the 1920s with the Larkin Hotel built in 1923-1924, the Masonic Temple in 1925 and the Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building in 1928-1929. However, both the Masonic Temple and Larkin Hotel are distinguished from the Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building due to their red brick construction which contrasts sharply with the buff colored brick of the theater building. Reflecting the exuberance of the late 1920s and movie theaters in particular, the Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater building eclipses both the Larkin Hotel and the Masonic Temple with its striking glazed terra cotta decorative detail.

The Rivoli Theater was not the only movie theater historically in Blackwell. By 1918, there were at least three movie theaters in Blackwell, including the Liberty Theater located at 118 West Blackwell and what according to the 1918 Sanborn was a former theater at 106 South Main. By the mid-1930s, the Liberty Theater was known as the Palace Theater which continued to operate at 118 West Blackwell through the 1950s. The former theater at 106 South Main was the Midwest Theater by the mid-1930s and also continued to operate through the 1950s at that

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<sup>11</sup> *Blackwell Morning Tribune*, 30 May 1928. See also Cynthia Savage, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for the Tulsa Monument Company, Tulsa, Tulsa County, Oklahoma, NRIS #08000849 (2007), 8-9.

Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building  
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location. The name of the third movie theater in Blackwell in 1918 is unknown; however, by 1931, the location was simply a store. By the mid-1930s, there was additional movie theater, the Bays Theater, located at 208 North Main. The Bays Theater was included on the 1948 Sanborn Fire Insurance map but does not appear in the available 1940s city directories. Of the four theaters in Blackwell in the 1930s, only the Bays Theater was not owned by the Griffith Amusement Company.<sup>12</sup>

The existence of other movie theaters in Blackwell helps to demonstrate the recreational importance of movies to the community during the early and mid-twentieth century. Setting the Rivoli apart from the other movie theaters was its opulent Art Deco style and that the theater was located in a four-story building. Based on historic photographs of the other theaters available from the Oklahoma Historical Society, all of the other theaters were situated in two-story, Commercial style buildings. While the Rivoli Theater ceased functioning as a theater in 1963, the distinctive oversized first floor with no windows remains a distinguishing feature which allows the building to be understood in its historic capacity.

Overall, the Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building is architecturally and historically significant to the community of Blackwell. While there were other movie houses and office buildings in Blackwell, only the Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building combined them in such a landmark building. Retaining a good degree of historic integrity, the Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building clearly merits recognition for its contribution to Blackwell's built environment.

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<sup>12</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, Blackwell, Oklahoma, 1918 and 1931. See also Polk City Directory, Blackwell, 1936, 1941, 1946 and 1950 (available Blackwell Public Library, Blackwell, Oklahoma) and *Daily Oklahoman*, 4 December 1948.

Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building  
Name of Property

Kay County, OK  
County and State

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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

“Blackwell.” Unpublished Manuscript. Available Vertical Files, Research Library, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma History Center, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, n.d.

*Blackwell (Oklahoma) Daily/Morning/Sunday Tribune*. 22 May 1923; 30 May 1928; 28 February 1929; 3 March 1929; 6 March 1929; 7 March 1929; and, 10 March 1929.

Carmichael, Deborah. “Main Street, Stillwater OK, Growing Up with Hollywood CA: An Oklahoma Town’s Movie Theaters.” *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*, LXXX:1 (Spring 2002), 62-83.

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Institute of Community Development, University of Oklahoma. “Blackwell, Oklahoma, A General Plan of Study.” Available Bizzell Library, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma, 1960.

Morris, John W., ed. *Drill Bits, Picks, and Shovels: A History of Mineral Resources in Oklahoma*. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1982.

Polk City Directory. Blackwell, Oklahoma. 1930s-1970s. Available Blackwell Public Library, Blackwell, Oklahoma.

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Savage, Cynthia. National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for the Tulsa Monument Company, Tulsa, Tulsa County, Oklahoma. NRIS #08000849. 2007.

Valentine, Maggie. *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theatre*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1994.

Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building  
Name of Property

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**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: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** Less than One (1) Acre

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_  
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- |                               |                              |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Latitude: <b>36.803409</b> | Longitude: <b>-97.282667</b> |
| 2. Latitude:                  | Longitude:                   |
| 3. Latitude:                  | Longitude:                   |
| 4. Latitude:                  | Longitude:                   |

Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building  
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**Or**

**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

- |          |           |           |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

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

Lots 11 through 12, Block 106, Original Townsite, Blackwell, Kay County, Oklahoma

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries include the property historically associated with the Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building.

Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building  
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### Form Prepared By

name/title: Cynthia Savage, Architectural Historian,  
organization: for Equity Plaza Blackwell, Limited Partnership  
street & number: 346 County Road 1230  
city or town: Pocasset state: OK zip code: 73079  
e-mail: archconsulting.savage@yahoo.com  
telephone: \_\_\_\_\_  
date: December 2014

---

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

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

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### Photographs

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

Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building  
Name of Property

Kay County, OK  
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## Photo Log

Name of Property: **Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building**  
City or Vicinity: **Blackwell** County: **Kay** State: **OK**  
Photographer: **Cynthia Savage**  
Date Photographed: **7 November 2014**

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

- Photo 0001:** East {front} elevation, camera looking northwest
- Photo 0002:** East and south elevation, camera looking northwest
- Photo 0003:** South and west elevation, camera looking northeast
- Photo 0004:** West and north elevation, camera looking southwest
- Photo 0005:** North and east elevation, camera looking southeast
- Photo 0006:** Interior, First Floor Corridor, camera looking east
- Photo 0007:** Interior, First Floor Theater Ceiling Detail Above Drop Ceiling,  
camera looking east
- Photo 0008:** Interior, First Floor Theater Ceiling Detail Above Drop Ceiling,  
camera looking north
- Photo 0009:** Interior, First Floor Spiral Staircase to Mezzanine Level, camera looking south
- Photo 0010:** Interior, Fourth Floor Elevator Lobby, camera looking northwest
- Photo 0011:** Interior, Fourth Floor Corridor, camera looking east
- Photo 0012:** Interior, Fourth Floor Corridor, camera looking east
- Photo 0013:** Interior, Third Floor Elevator Lobby, camera looking northwest
- Photo 0014:** Interior, Basement, camera looking east
- Photo 0015:** Interior, Basement, camera looking southeast
- Photo 0016:** Interior, Basement Theater Wall Detail, camera looking north
- Photo 0017:** Interior, Basement Theater Wall Detail, camera looking east

**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 100 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.

# Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building

122-124 South Main  
Blackwell, Kay County, Oklahoma

## Legend

★ 36.803409 -97.282667

E Blackwell Ave

S Main St

W Bridge Ave

177

Google earth

©2014 Google

200 ft



# Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building

122-124 South Main Street  
Blackwell, Kay County, Oklahoma

## Legend

 36.803409 -97.282667



# Photo Key Map for Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building

122-124 South Main  
Blackwell, Kay County, Oklahoma

Exterior Photos

Interior Photos

Photo 5

Photo 10 & 13

Photo 9

Photo 17

Photo 4

Photo 6-8 & 11

Photo 1

Photo 14 & 15

Photo 16

Photo 12

Photo 2

Photo 3

Google earth

© 2014 Google

100 ft





APARTMENTS

PLAZA

518

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

SMOR



CITY  
PLAZA

APARTMENTS

BOB'S  
PICTURE BOX TOO







EQUITY  
PLAZA

APARTMENTS

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



Bob's FLOWER

Bob's Flower

















U.S. MAIL



NOTICE









UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Hayes--Kennedy--Rivoli Theater Building

MULTIPLE  
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: OKLAHOMA, Kay

DATE RECEIVED: 4/24/15                      DATE OF PENDING LIST: 5/19/15  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 6/03/15                      DATE OF 45TH DAY: 6/09/15  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 15000327

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT     RETURN     REJECT    6.8.15 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in  
The National Register  
of  
Historic Places

RECOM./CRITERIA \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_ DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



**Oklahoma Historical Society**  
**State Historic Preservation Office**

Founded May 27, 1893

Oklahoma History Center • 800 Nazih Zuhdi Drive • Oklahoma City, OK 73105-7917  
(405) 521-6249 • Fax (405) 522-0816 • [www.okhistory.org/shpo/shpom.htm](http://www.okhistory.org/shpo/shpom.htm)



April 21, 2015

J. Paul Loether, Deputy Keeper and Chief  
National Register and National Historic Landmark Programs  
National Park Service 2280, 8th floor  
1201 "I" (Eye) Street, NW  
Washington D.C. 20005

Dear Mr. Loether:

We are pleased to transmit *four* National Register of Historic Places nominations for Oklahoma properties. The nominations are for the following properties:

Hays-Kennedy/Rivoli Theater Building, Blackwell, Kay County  
Comer, C.A., House, Dewey, Washington County  
Elizabeth Manor, Tulsa, Tulsa County  
Czech Hall Oklahoma City, Laska Lodge, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma County

All members of the Historic Preservation Review Committee (state review board) were present for the public meeting at which each of these nominations was considered and the recommendation to the State Historic Preservation Officer was formulated. Therefore, the member possessing the requisite professional qualifications for evaluation of each nominated property participated in the recommendation's formulation.

We look forward to the results of your review. If there may be any questions, please do not hesitate to contact either Lynda S. Ozan of my staff or myself.

Sincerely,

Melvena Heisch  
Deputy State Historic  
Preservation Officer

MKH:lso

Enclosures