

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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" for "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: Ball Theatre

Other names/site number: Millstone Theatre (CRS#S12983)

Address: 214 Main Street Millsboro, DE 19966

State: Delaware County: Sussex County

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

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

2. State/Federal Agency Certification

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

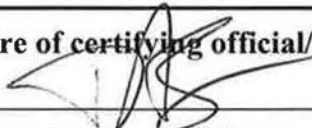
I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

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 ___ C ___ D

DE State Historic Preservation Officer		7/20/2018
 Signature of certifying official/Title:		Date
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	

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3. 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

9/13/18

Date of Action

4. 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>	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>1</u>	_____	Total

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

5. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Recreation and Culture – movie theater

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Work in Progress - restoration

6. Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Other – Vernacular 20th century

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7. Description

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: exterior: brick; foundation: brick and cement block; roof: milled-planed boards

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.)

Summary Paragraph

The Ball Theatre, constructed between 1937 and 1938 is a two-story, rectangular, brick movie theater located in Millsboro, Delaware. This historic edifice is situated within the downtown commercial district at 214 Main Street. The entire theater is constructed of red vertical score bricks and contains 6,800 square feet (5,200 square feet at the first floor level and 1,600 square feet in the balcony level). Though the overall design of the movie theater does not reflect a particular style, it nevertheless represents a modest expression of local vernacular architecture utilizing local building practices and materials characteristic of the 1930s. Although several movie theaters were built throughout the rural communities in Sussex County, Delaware during the Great Depression Era (1930 – 1939), this building retains the highest-known level of historic integrity; especially within its interior. As a rare example of a small town theater constructed in Sussex County during the 1930s it retains a variety of original features and amenities such as its spatial arrangement, wooden seating with upholstered seats in both the balcony and auditorium areas, balcony staircases with tongue-and-groove wainscoting, a projection room with RCA sound equipment and a Brenkert Rectifier, RCA speakers, exit and restroom signage, Art Deco style wall sconces, a stage with decorative valance above the original floral patterned stage curtain, and walls sheathed with their original acoustic fiberboard and gypsum board, and the hexagonal-shaped mosaic tile floor in the entryway. The private restoration of this once common building type which has disappeared from the cultural landscape is a significant preservation initiative.

Narrative Description

Main Façade Elevation

Oriented toward the west, this movie theater was built as a fireproof building with a solid brick façade measuring fourteen inches deep with bricks laid in a Flemish stretcher bond pattern. Though the first floor level is currently covered with removable vinyl material, evidence suggests that the original Carrara glass and plate glass window features on the left side of the building which was utilized as a tax office and the framing for the original wooden frames for movie posters on the right side of the building remain intact. Window fenestration is

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symmetrically placed at the second floor level with a recessed bricked-in window in the center. Since the bond pattern within this recessed brick window is laid in the same brick pattern as the façade, it is assumed that this feature is original to the period of construction. All windows have brick lintels and a row of bricks above which are laid in a soldier pattern that stretches across the width of the theater. The upper section of the façade wall is topped by a plain, slightly angled brick parapet wall with glazed tile flashing.

Within recent years, the original marquee and baseball and bat movie sign were removed and replaced by a frame vinyl covered portico and a new wooden double door entrance. As part of the future restoration plans, the owners intend to reconstruct the original marquee, replicate the baseball and bat sign, and return the façade to its original appearance as noted in period photographs.

Southern, Eastern, and Northern Elevations

These elevations are constructed of a combination of concrete blocks and bricks covered with a brick veneer laid in a nine-course common bond pattern. The interior walls feature an alternating pattern of three rows of concrete blocks topped by a row of bricks. A solid brick pier is constructed within the interior at regular intervals in order to accommodate the weight of steel girders. A flat, stepped parapet wall caps the exterior brick walls. The entire building is covered by a milled-planed wooden roof protected by the waterproof rolled paper (replaced in 2017). The edge flashing consists of glazed tiles.

A one-story brick building, originally constructed as a shoe store for the theater owner's brother around the same time as the movie theater, is attached to the southwest corner of the building. The brick wall of the east elevation is pierced by three solid doors (two used as exits and one used for stage deliveries) as well as two, original two-over-two frame windows which are currently boarded over. A later built brick commercial building with a frame two-story addition was constructed adjacent to the movie theater as part of Millsboro's enhancements during the 1940s and 1950s.

The Interior

The spatial arrangement of this 6,800 square foot 478-seat theater retains its original configuration. The first floor features a stage along the eastern wall with the original curtain, a commodious auditorium with stepped aisles, original wooden chairs with upholstered seats, a mezzanine, two sets of enclosed stairways to the balcony, as well as original Art Deco wall sconces, exit and restroom signage. The balcony area retains its original wooden chairs with upholstered seats, a tongue and groove balcony railing, and the fireproof projection room.

Opened by June 3, 1938, this historic theater advertised that it was "Air Conditioned." The original fan which blew air across blocks of ice is still hanging in the exit wall at the southeast corner of the auditorium. Speakers and sound equipment from the original state-of-the-art RCA sound system survive as well. Elements of Art Deco designs were characteristic of movie theaters constructed throughout the nation during the Great Depression Era. Evidence of Art Deco design motifs associated with the Ball Theatre include the geometric patterns found on the

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end panels of wooden seats in both the balcony and main auditorium, the wall-mounted glass light fixtures, the frames surrounding exit and restroom signage, and the decorative motif which embellishes the stage valance above the curtain. Walls remain sheathed with the original acoustic fiberboard and gypsum wallboard (manufactured by Kelley Plasterboard Company in Delawanna, New Jersey).

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.)

- 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.)

Entertainment/Recreation

Social History

Period of Significance

1937 – 1971 (construction date – ownership/operation by builder)

Significant Dates

1937 construction; 1938 opened to the public

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

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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 Ball Theatre in Millsboro, Delaware is a modest-built brick movie theater which was constructed in 1937 and opened for business by June 3, 1938. The theater's period of significance, 1937 - 1971, denotes its construction and period of ownership and operation under its builder, Walter McKinley (Huck) Betts. This historic edifice, which is significant at the local level, is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A as a rare example of a small town theater constructed in Sussex County during the Great Depression Era. During the mid-1970s, when the building was owned and occupied as a place of worship by the United Faith Church of Deliverance, the theater marquee and sign were removed and a portion of the main façade at the first floor level was covered with removable vinyl material. Physical evidence indicates that the original wooden frames for movie posters remain intact behind the vinyl siding on the right side of the façade. Therefore, in all probability this vinyl material covers the original plate glass store windows surrounded by Carrara glass of the tax office which occupied the northwest corner of the theater.

Despite these modifications, the interior retains a significant level of integrity unequal to other existing period movie theaters in the county. Eleven movie theater owners placed advertisements in the *Sussex Countian*, a local newspaper printed in Georgetown, Delaware between 1933 and 1938. Six of those movie theaters are demolished, one burned and was rehabilitated, three were adaptively reused and their interiors modified to accommodate other functions such as apartments, churches, commercial entities, offices, and a senior center. Therefore, the Ball Theatre epitomizes a once common place building type located throughout Sussex County during the early years of the twentieth century. As a rare surviving example of a 1930s movie theater in Sussex County, it remains on its original location, retains elements and features characteristic of the Art Deco style within the interior, contains its original spatial arrangement, displays building materials representative of the time period as well as traditional and local building trends, and continues to evoke the aesthetic expression of an early twentieth century movie theater.

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

The Ball Theatre

This historic property is a significant building within the downtown commercial district of Millsboro, Delaware. Having retired from professional baseball in 1935, Walter Mckinley (Huck) Betts returned to Millsboro and on January 1, 1937 purchased a lot in the downtown area which contained one-quarter acre as well as a popular establishment known as the Millsboro Hotel. This hotel accommodated guests, travelling salesmen, and offered boarding facilities to local teachers for many decades. Shortly after Mr. Betts acquired the property, the hotel was relocated within the town just south of its original location but was eventually demolished. After the hotel's removal, Mr. Betts began constructing the Ball Theatre. Completed within a year, it was designed as a free-standing, two-story, vertical-strike brick building bordered on the west by

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Main Street, on the south and east by two public alleys, and on the north by property owned by William Ellingsworth, a local store merchant.¹

It is assumed that Mr. Betts may have been cognizant of the town's fires during the early 1900s which consumed several wooden buildings including a Methodist Church, private residences, and the cannery warehouse. These circumstances may have influenced his decision to build a sturdy brick building and possibly served as the catalyst which helped to transform the appearance of the downtown commercial area since several brick buildings were constructed after the theater. Constructed in 1937, it provided the community with an air conditioned theater.² It was designed as a 478-seat theater and contained 6,800 square feet. Interior amenities include cushioned wooden seats, a balcony, a fire proof projection room, public restrooms, and a stage for live performances. The adjoining one-story brick building south of the theater originally housed a shoe store operated by a family member. Typical of many movie theaters built during the Great Depression Era, a portion of a theater was utilized for commercial/investment purposes. In keeping with this national tradition, the Ball Theatre contained an independent office in the northwest corner of the building which originally housed an office for Mr. Bett's neighbor and friend, W.B. Mitchell. This section of the theater served the community as a tax office for many decades.

Though construction records do not survive, research compiled by analyzing 1930 and 1940 census statistics for Millsboro, resulted in the identification of several individuals associated with building construction activities. It is, therefore, plausible to assume that one or several of the craftsmen listed below may have been hired by Mr. Betts to assist with the construction of the Ball Theatre.

1930 and 1940 U.S. Census Statistics for Millsboro and the Surrounding Area

Name	Trade	Industry
Noah W. Atkins	carpenter	building construction
*Harvey P. Betts	house carpenter	building construction
Brainard Clough	carpenter	building construction
Arthur Kapp	carpenter	building construction

1940 U.S. Census Statistics for Millsboro and the Surrounding Area

Name	Occupation	Industry
Fred Steele	laborer	mason
Howard Steele	laborer	mason
Emmett Whitmore	carpenter	building construction

* Harvey P. Betts was Walter M. Betts' cousin.

¹ Sussex County Deed, Book Volume 19, pages 240-243.

² *Sussex Countian*, classified section – Ball Theater Advertisement, June 3, 1938.

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Personal recollections of several town residents recall that many local people were hired to work at the theater including Ebe Atkins, Jr., the only employee listed in the 1940 U.S. Census associated with the theater. He was identified as the person who operated movies. According to oral histories other local residents were employed by Mr. Betts including Davis Carlisle (a projectionist) and Catherine Carlisle (sold tickets and made the original weighted stage curtains which remain hanging on the stage).

Movie Operator Regulations

Operating a movie theater in Delaware required a license. Legislation enacted by the Delaware General Assembly in 1935 required Amusement Park Operators (which included every person engaged in the business of moving pictures) to secure a license on an annual basis. Individuals living within corporate limits with a population over 5,000 people paid a fee of \$100; those in communities with a smaller population paid a fee of \$25.³ During the period of segregation, movie balconies were reserved for African American and Native American patrons. The majority of Native Americans who frequented Millsboro resided in Indian River Hundred, a political subdivision located east of the town. The 1940 U.S. Census records for Millsboro and its surrounding area revealed that only two African Americans resided in town and at least 250 lived within Representative District 6, Election District 3-29, a geographic area which included Millsboro, property along U.S. 113, and multiple roadways northeast, south and southeast of the town including roads leading to Dagsboro and Frankford. Oral history interviews conducted recently by the current owners verified that attending movies in the theater was a popular form of entertainment for regional patrons from diverse cultural backgrounds. Segregated seating continued in theaters until the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act (Pub. L. 88-352) which provided relief against discrimination in public accommodations including movie theaters.

Open for Business

The earliest-known advertisement for the Ball Theatre appeared in the *Sussex Countian*, a weekly newspaper printed in Georgetown (the county seat) the week of June 3, 1938. It promoted two showings of a movie on a nightly basis, Monday through Saturday. The first five movies consisted of a western romance titled "Rangers' Round-Up" – released by Stan-Laurel productions on January 13, 1938, a romance comedy titled "You're Only Young Once" – released by MGM on December 10, 1937, a drama titled "Stage Door" – released by RKO Radio Pictures on October 8, 1937, a romance movie titled "A Yank at Oxford" – released by MGM as their first British production on February 18, 1938, and a western adventure titled "Call of the Rockies" – released on April 12, 1938 by Columbia Pictures Corporation. These movie genres represent typical productions that were popular throughout the United States during the Great Depression Era. Other movie production companies whose features were shown at the Ball Theatre during its early years include Disney Studios ("Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" – 1939), Sunset Productions ("Heroes of the Alamo" – 1937, Warner Brothers ("Back in Circulation" – 1938), Republic Pictures ("Pals of the Saddle" – 1938), and Paramount Pictures ("Sing You Sinners" – 1938). Though the theater's original projector no longer exists, speakers

³ Laws of Delaware. Volume 40, Chapter 27, page 141.

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manufactured by RCA which amplified the sound of these new movie releases survive along with the original rectifier utilized to maintain a constant film speed.

During the theater's thirty-three year period of operation (1938 – 1971) some projection capabilities were enhanced. According to oral history interviews, the movie screen was enlarged in order to show new Cinema Scope movies. The first such movie shown in this theater on a wide screen was 20th Century Fox's 1953 epic titled "The Robe." Because of widescreen capabilities, the 1960s revival release of "Gone with the Wind" was shown at this theater as well.⁴

During the 1960s and 1970s Millsboro experienced a population increase from 479 people to 1,073 residents. The Ball Theatre also experienced competition from other popular means of entertainment including television, drive-in movie theaters, and the construction of new modern movie theaters within the region. Improved highways facilitated travel to nearby regional centers such as Salisbury, Maryland as well as numerous beach communities in both Delaware and Maryland. Such road improvements were quite a change since agricultural reports published at the time of the Ball Theatre's construction noted that few Sussex County roads had a hard surface.⁵ Consequently, Mr. Betts stopped running the theater in 1971 but chose to lease it to others. According to oral history accounts the new managers continued Mr. Betts' tradition of hiring local residents to work in the theater.

Millsboro: Home of the Ball Theatre

Early Town History

Millsboro, originally known as Washington, was renamed "Millsborough" in 1809 in recognition of number of gristmills and sawmills which operated in the area as early as 1773.⁶ As the town evolved, it became the principal community in Dagsboro Hundred, a political subdivision created in Sussex County, Delaware in 1773. This area was originally positioned within the territory whose ownership was disputed between the Calvert family of Maryland and the Penn family of Pennsylvania. With the boundary dispute settled between these two colonial proprietors in 1767, this former section of Worcester County, Maryland was officially ceded to Pennsylvania and was among the land ordered resurveyed by Governor John Penn in 1776. With the adoption of a state constitution on September 20, 1776, this area officially became part of the Delaware State.

Dagsboro Hundred is bounded on the north by Georgetown Hundred, east by the Indian River Hundred and the Indian River, southeast by Baltimore Hundred, south by Worcester County, Maryland, and west by Broad Creek Hundred. Historically, this area was known for its numerous sawmills, grist mills, and its forests of pine, cedar, and oak. Early industries included the burning of charcoal and the manufacturing of lumber and cedar shingles. Landings established along the Indian River, which flows into the Indian River Bay and eventually empties into the Atlantic

⁴ Interview with Richard Carter, a former resident of Millsboro on August 11, 2017.

⁵ Bausman, R.O. An Economic Study of Land Utilization in Sussex County Delaware. University of Delaware Agriculture Experiment Station, Newark. 1941. page 58.

⁶ Hudson, Dorothy Warren. Millsboro Delaware Bicentennial Commemoration. Dover Graphics, Dover, Delaware. 1985. page 10.

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Ocean, enabled locally grown produce and commodities to be transported by vessels to major cities such as Philadelphia and New York.

Unlike other Sussex County communities, Millsboro had a significant number of Native Americans living east of the town in neighboring Indian River Hundred. Archaeological surveys conducted in 1956, documented numerous sites along the Indian River which were occupied by the Nanticoke and Assateague Indians. A myriad of artifacts dated between 2,000 and 500 B.C. were recovered thus indicating that their economy was based upon hunting, foraging, farming, and fishing.⁷ Descendants of these early inhabitants remain in the area today and were among the patrons who frequented the Ball Theater.

A Select Twentieth Century Overview

During the twentieth century, Millsboro's population increased significantly. The Indian River which forms the eastern boundary of Millsboro contributed greatly to the community's economic development. Because of the number of landings along this river, Millsboro became an important shipping center for the holly wreath industry as well as the transportation of locally grown seasonal produce including strawberries and tomatoes processed at the local cannery. Another economic advantage was the late nineteenth century railroad which eventually enabled Millsboro to function as a distribution center from which carloads of poultry feed were shipped regularly during the early 1900s. Rail and truck farming activities facilitated the transportation of locally made containers and baskets for berries and vegetables which were transported throughout Delaware and Maryland.⁸ Electricity was introduced to the town in 1922. This electrical service was first owned by the town and later transferred to subsequent companies including Eastern Shore Public Service, which eventually became the Delmarva Power and Light Company. By 1957, Delmarva Power had constructed its first turbo-generator at the facility located on Burton's Island east of Millsboro.⁹

Authors of the 1938 W.P.A. publication titled Delaware a Guide to the First State described Millsboro as a "quiet southern crossroads village" with one traffic light."¹⁰ Local historian Dorothy Warren Hudson provides a social history perspective about the town of Millsboro in her 1975 publication titled Millsboro Delaware Bicentennial Commemoration. She recounts the community's traditional events such as concerts by the town band, serenades (or chivarees) for newlyweds, box socials, Friday night dances, and sleigh rides. She also mentions that the town's baseball team played rival teams from other nearby towns, especially during the 1920s and 1930s. Other entertainment included watching movies, first at the Dodd's Hall where silent movies were shown with a piano accompaniment and secondly at the Ball Theater which operated for thirty three years (1938 to 1971).

Throughout its history the Ball Theatre functioned as a cornerstone of the community. During its early years it served as a place for people to catch-up on current events by watching newsreels

⁷ IBID page 8.

⁸ IBID

⁹ Hudson, Dorothy Warren. Millsboro Delaware Bicentennial Commemoration. 1975.

¹⁰ Eckman, Jeanette, Anthony Higgins, William H. Conner editors. Delaware A Guide to the First State. Stratford Press. 1938. page 385.

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before feature movies. One can only speculate that its “air conditioning system” (a sizeable fan which blew air over large blocks of ice) and electricity in general must have been a special experience for some spectators. The use of electricity is especially important to note since a 1941 economic study of land use in Sussex County referenced that of the 3,876 occupied farms in the county, only 21.6% had electricity.¹¹

Walter McKinley (Huck) Betts

Walter Betts is a native-born Delawarean who was raised in the Millsboro area. He was born on February 18, 1897 and died on June 13, 1987. Raised by his parents, Abraham Lincoln Betts and Rita Jane Betts, he lived on a farm in Indian River Hundred along with four siblings. Shortly after graduating from Wesley Collegiate Institute (now Wesley College- Dover, Delaware) which had been established as a two year college in 1918, he began a professional career in baseball. As a major league player he pitched for the Philadelphia Phillies (1920 – 1925) and the Boston Braves (1932 – 1935). In between the years associated with the Philadelphia Phillies and the Boston Braves, Mr. Betts played for the St. Paul Baseball Club and resided in St. Paul, Minnesota. He retired from baseball in 1935 and returned to Millsboro and began purchasing real estate in the Millsboro and Indian River Hundred areas. In 1980, at the age of 83, Walter McKinley (Huck) Betts was inducted into the Hall of Fame at the Delaware Sports Museum in Wilmington, Delaware.

Modifications Made during the 1970s

Adaptively reused as a church during the 1970s, a few modifications were made to the exterior and interior of the building. A photograph illustrates that wood furring strips and plywood were placed over the Carrara and plate glass windows of the commercial unit at the northwest corner of the theater and vinyl siding was applied across the façade at the first floor level. Interior modifications, complementing its repurposed function included the removal of the original double door entrances, ticket booth, marquee, and sign. These historical components will be reconstructed as part of upcoming restoration activities. Diagonal wood paneling measuring between 4 and 8 inches wide were added to the walls of the lobby. Today this main entrance area features a period movie projector as well as framed historical materials showcasing information about the Ball Theatre, “Huck” Betts (owner and builder of the theater), copies of advertisements promoting movie features, and vintage movie posters. Glass double doors with aluminum frames were also placed in the wall between the lobby and auditorium. Church hangings, placed within frames surmounted by a triangular pediment decorated the walls of the auditorium. A semi-circular plywood wall, adorned with three symmetrically placed round arches made of a hard foam material, was built upon the stage. A platform with side steps was also constructed in front of the stage. Though these stage-area embellishments helped to provide a sanctuary-like feeling and were appropriate for a house of worship, they were recently removed without damaging the historic fabric of the stage.

¹¹ Bausman, R.O. An Economic Study of Land Utilization in Sussex County Delaware. University of Delaware Agriculture Experiment Station, Newark. 1941. page 58.

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Restoration of the Ball Theatre

The current owners of the Ball Theatre in Millsboro initiated the private restoration of this locally iconic movie theater in 2017 in order to preserve perhaps the best-known surviving example and most intact sample of a 1930s movie theater in Sussex County. The owners recognized that the Ball Theatre had a great appeal to its middle class patrons throughout its history and proved to be a successful investment of its builder, Walter McKinley (Huck) Betts. By the number and variety of the contemporary films the theater featured in weekly advertisements, attendance obviously contributed to the nation's weekly movie attendance statistics which, according to several film historians, generally averaged between 60 and 80 million patrons during the Great Depression Era.

Since the theater's closing in the mid-1970s, the building was acquired by and functioned as a church for weekly worship services conducted by the United Faith Church of Deliverance until 2017. During the church's tenure a few exterior modifications were made to the theater which included the removal of its original cast iron marquee and baseball and bat movie sign. A portion of the first floor of the main façade was covered with vinyl material to conceal the original wooden movie poster display panels (right side of theater) and the Carrara glass and plate glass windows associated with the tax office portion of the building (left side of the main façade). The original entrance was removed and a new double door entrance was added and surmounted by a modern portico. Historic photographs and conversations with local residents have provided the owners with significant information that will enable them to reconstruct the marquee and movie theater sign, as well as replicate the original entrance with a ticket booth in the future.

A high level of original historic fabric survives within the interior and will be preserved. The main auditorium includes wooden chairs with upholstered seats with Art Deco end panels, poured cement stepped aisles, a stage with an Art Deco embellishment positioned above the center of the locally-made curtain weighted with a linked chain, Art Deco wall-mounted sconces, exit and restroom signage, and a large wall-mounted fan/air conditioner. The original staircases, positioned along the north and south exterior walls feature narrow tongue and groove wainscoting. The balcony also contains original flooring, wooden chairs with cushioned seats and Art Deco end panels, a fire proof projector room, and two lavatories fitted with one-over-one paneled doors. The projection room retains its original Brenkert Rectifier, which synchronized the speed of movie film reels and according to its manufacturing label, was obtained from a Theatre Equipment Company in Philadelphia, RCA sound equipment, as well as speakers from the original RCA sound system.

Plans to reopen the theater as a Class B theater will allow classic movies to be shown and will make its original stage available for use by local performers. This will enable the current owners to contribute to the town's plans to promote and develop Millsboro's downtown community. Obtaining the status as a listed historic property in the National Register of Historic Places will acknowledge the theater's significance as a building worthy of preservation and will provide an opportunity for the owners to apply for federal historic preservation tax credits.

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Correlation with Delaware's State Historic Preservation Plan

Preparing a nomination for the Ball Theatre in Millsboro, Delaware compliments the following two goals and strategies from the Delaware State Historic Preservation Plan 2013 – 2017:

Goal IV: Expand opportunities for public education to increase support for historic preservation.

Strategy 2: Identify and utilize effective outlets for conveying information and interpretation to the public.

Action: Continue historical research training for property owners, focusing on researching individual historic properties.

Goal V: Maintain and expand access to information about historic properties and preservation.

Strategy: Increase information on Delaware's historic properties and improve its quality.

Action: Carry out survey in areas with a concentration of 20th century buildings

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9. Major Bibliographical References: Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Delaware Public Archives (Dover, Delaware):

Primary Resource Materials

1933 – 1939 Advertisements published in *The Sussex Countian*, a newspaper published in Georgetown, Delaware.

Delaware Tercentenary Commission. Delaware Tercentenary Almanack and Historical Repository. 1938

Laws of Delaware. Volume 40, Chapter 27. 1935.

Sussex County Deeds:

Book 182 pages 550 – 552, 1933.

Book 188 pages 355-357, 1936.

Book 214 pages 385-387, 1945.

Book 226 pages 26 – 27, 1945.

Book 229 pages 444-445, 1948.

U.S. Census Records – 1930 and 1940. Delaware - Representative District 6, Senate District 1.
Publications

Atkinson, Wilmer Company. Farm Journal-Farm Directory Sussex County, Delaware. Philadelphia 1913.

Bausman, R.O. An Economic Study of Land utilization in Sussex County Delaware. Newark, Delaware: University of Delaware Agriculture Experiment Station, 1941.

Sussex County Recorder of Deeds Office (Georgetown, Delaware)

Book 19 pages 240 – 243, 1937. (theater property)

Sussex County Register of Wills Office (Georgetown, Delaware)

Probate Records – Walter Mckinley Betts (1987).

Oral History Sources:

E-mail communication Dick Carter to Madeline Dunn - August 11, 2017; June 6, 2018.

E-mail communication Glen Rolfe to Eric Clarke May 20, 2018.

Miscellaneous:

Magill, Kerin. “Nanticoke elders tell stories of Rosedale Beach.” Coastal Point May 11, 2018.

Tyson, Rae. “Defunct movie theater may come back to life in Millsboro, offering a taste of the 1930s.” Delmarva Now March 28, 2018.

Private Collection:

Hudson, Dorothy Warren. Millsboro Delaware Bicentennial Commemoration. Dover, Delaware: Dover Graphics, 1985.

Carter, Richard B. Clearing New Ground: the Life of John G. Townsend, Jr. Dover, Delaware: Delaware Heritage Press, 2001.

Federal Writers Project – WPA for the State of Delaware. Delaware A Guide to the First State. First printing 1938, second printing 1948.

On-Line Resources:

<https://search.ancestry.com>

<http://www.desports.org/inductees/1980>

<https://web.viu.ca/davies/HollywoodAsHistory.htm>

<http://courses.wcupa.edu/jones/his480/reports/dep-movi.htm> [The Great Depression and Its Effects on the Movie Theatres of West Chester, Pennsylvania]

Ball Theatre
Name of Property

Sussex County, DE
County and State

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: Delaware Public Archives, Sussex County Recorder of Deeds and Register of Wills

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): S12983

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property .25 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 38.591060 | Longitude: -75.291420 |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Ball Theatre
Name of Property

Sussex County, DE
County and State

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: |

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

The Ball Theatre, situated at 214 Main Street in Millsboro, Delaware is a quarter acre parcel of land identified as lot number 99.01 on the Sussex County Tax Parcel Map. It is bounded by Main Street on the west, tax parcel lot Number 99 on the south, Johnson Alley on the east, and tax parcel lot number 98 on the north.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

These boundaries were selected because they represent the current property boundaries associated with the Ball Theatre and represent the property's current descriptions.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Staff Delaware State Historic Preservation Office
organization: _____
street & number: 21 The Green
city or town: Dover state: DE zip code: 19901
e-mail madeline.dunn@state.de.us
telephone: 302-736-7417
date: June 20, 2018

*Principal Researchers: Dr. Julia Hattier and Eric Clarke (owners and individuals responsible for private restoration of this historic movie theater).

Ball Theatre
Name of Property

Sussex County, DE
County and State

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.)

Time Period: 1880 – 1940 Urbanization and Early Suburbanization
Geographical Zone: Lower Peninsula/Cypress Swamp
Historic Period Theme: Entertainment/Recreation and Social History

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.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Ball Theatre

City or Vicinity: Millsboro

County: Sussex State: DE

Photographer: Eric Clarke

Date Photographed: 2017 - 2018

Ball Theatre
Name of Property

Sussex County, DE
County and State

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

- 1 of 13 Façade view of the Ball Theatre fronting Main Street looking east.
- 2 of 13 Three-quarter view of Ball Theatre looking northwest.
- 3 of 13 Commercial district of Main Street looking northeast.
- 4 of 13 Milled-planed roof with glazed tile flashing looking southwest.
- 5 of 13 Auditorium view looking east.
- 6 of 13 Original wooden balcony chairs with upholstered seats with geometric style Art Deco end panels.
- 7 of 13 Original balcony staircase with tongue-and-groove wainscoted walls and ceiling.
- 8 of 13 Example of RCA Theatre Sound system equipment in projection room.
- 9 of 13 Miscellaneous equipment on east wall of projection room overlooking auditorium including an original RCA boxed speaker in center of wall.
- 10 of 13 Original wooden frame for movie posters found behind the vinyl covered exterior at the southwest corner of theater.
- 11 of 13 Detail of floral pattern of the original stage curtain.
- 12 of 13 Original Art Deco style multi-colored wall sconce attached to original acoustic fiberboard wall sheathing in the auditorium.
- 13 of 13 Original label found on the back of the Kelley gypsum wallboard material installed in the mezzanine area.

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.

Site Plan and Photo Key

Ball Theatre - 214 Main Street Millsboro, Delaware

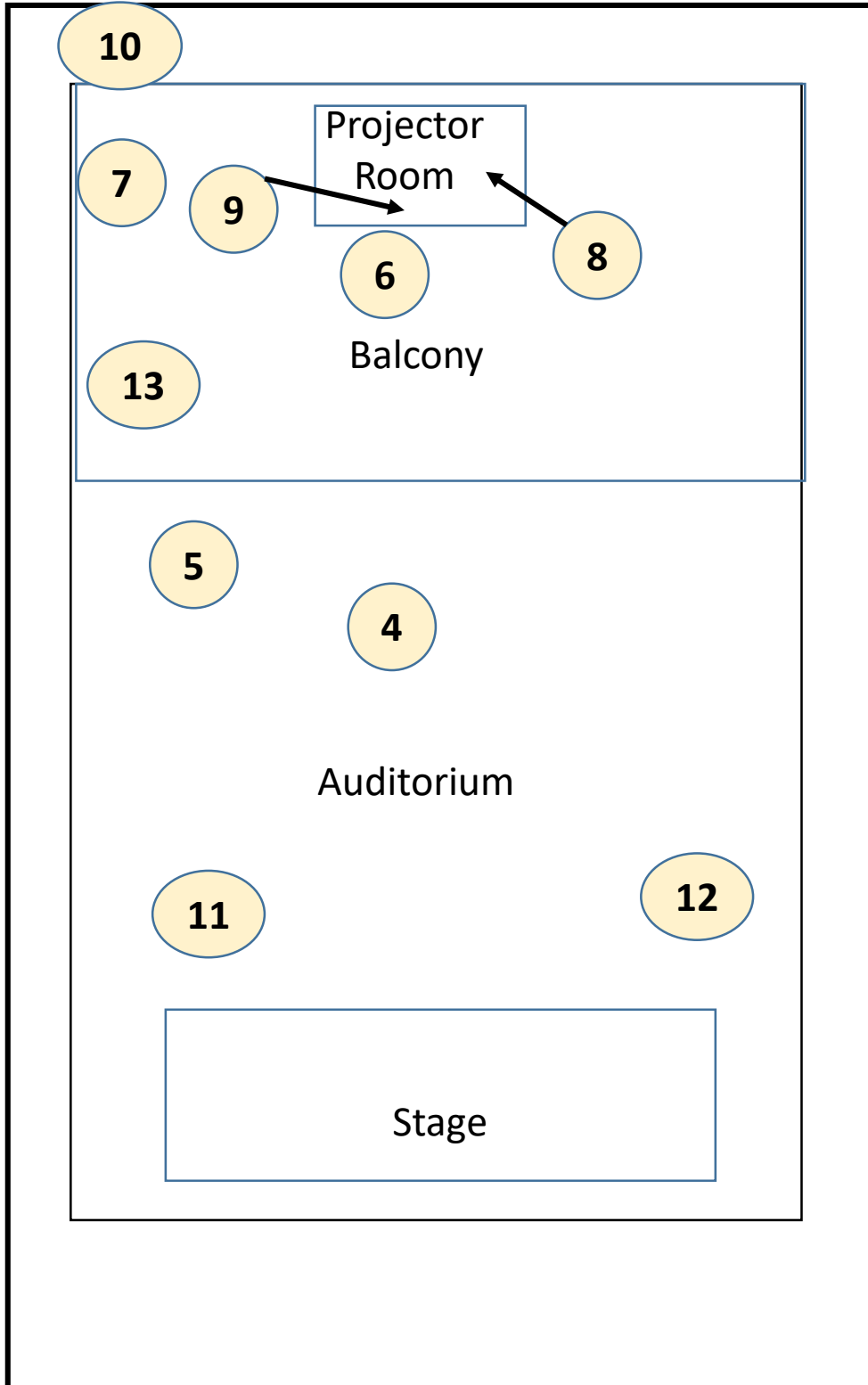
3



N

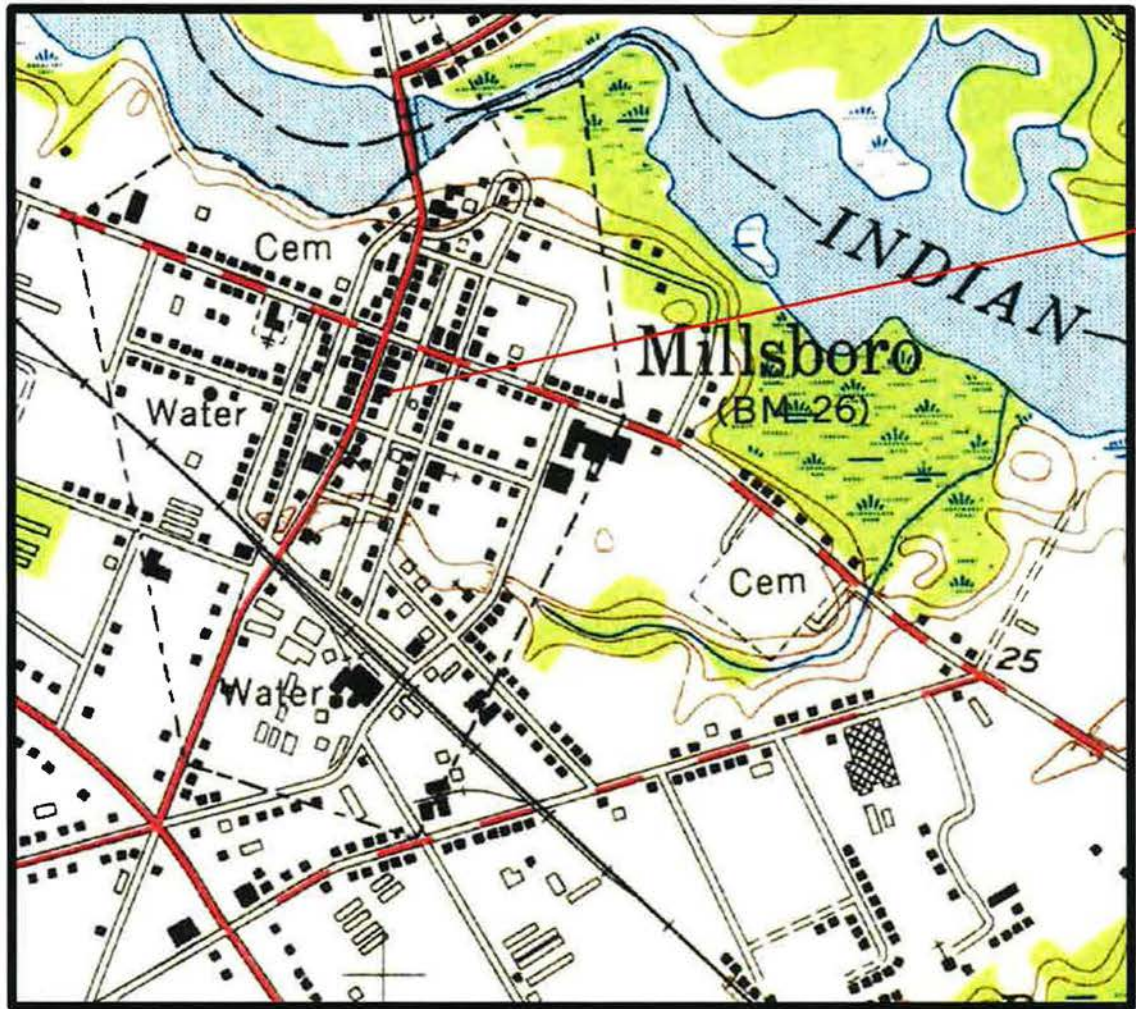
1

Main Street



2

Sussex County Tax Parcel 99.01



Ball Theatre 214 Main Street
Millsboro, Delaware

Latitude: 38.591060
Longitude: -75.291420

1954 USGS Map
Town of Millsboro
Millsboro Quadrangle
Sussex County, DE

Nomination Photographs
Ball Theatre
214 Main Street
Millsboro, Delaware



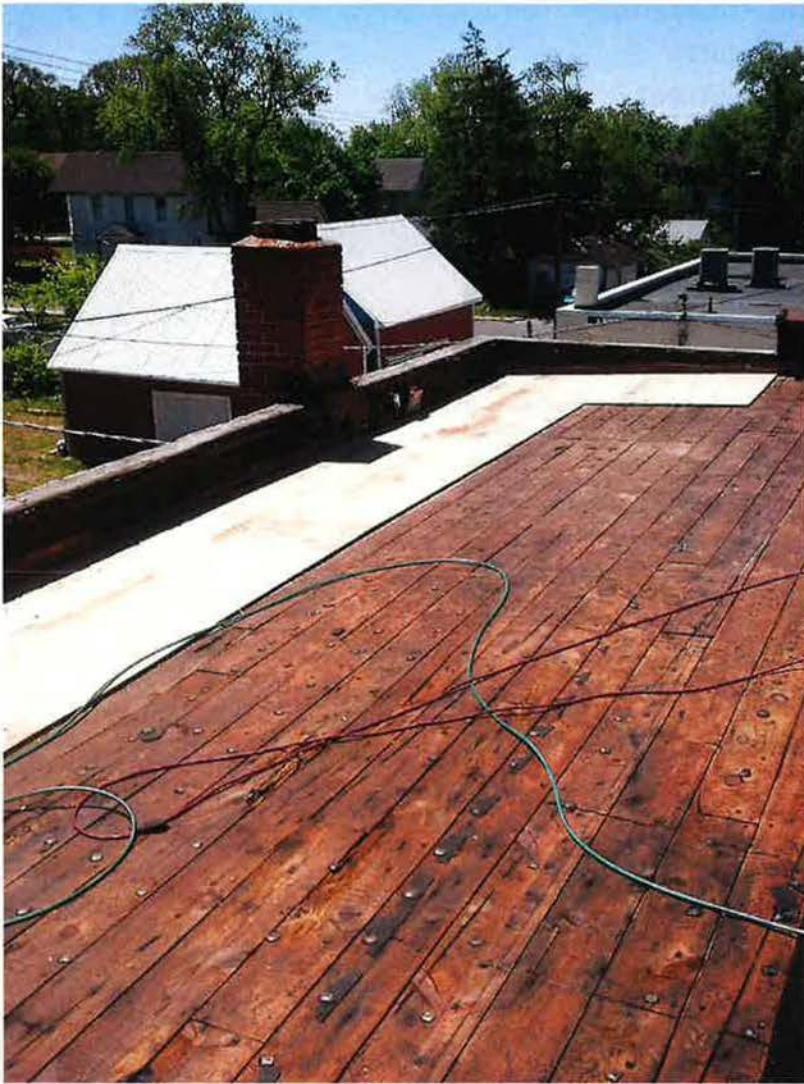
1 of 13



2 of 13



3 of 13



4 of 13

5 of 13



6 of 13



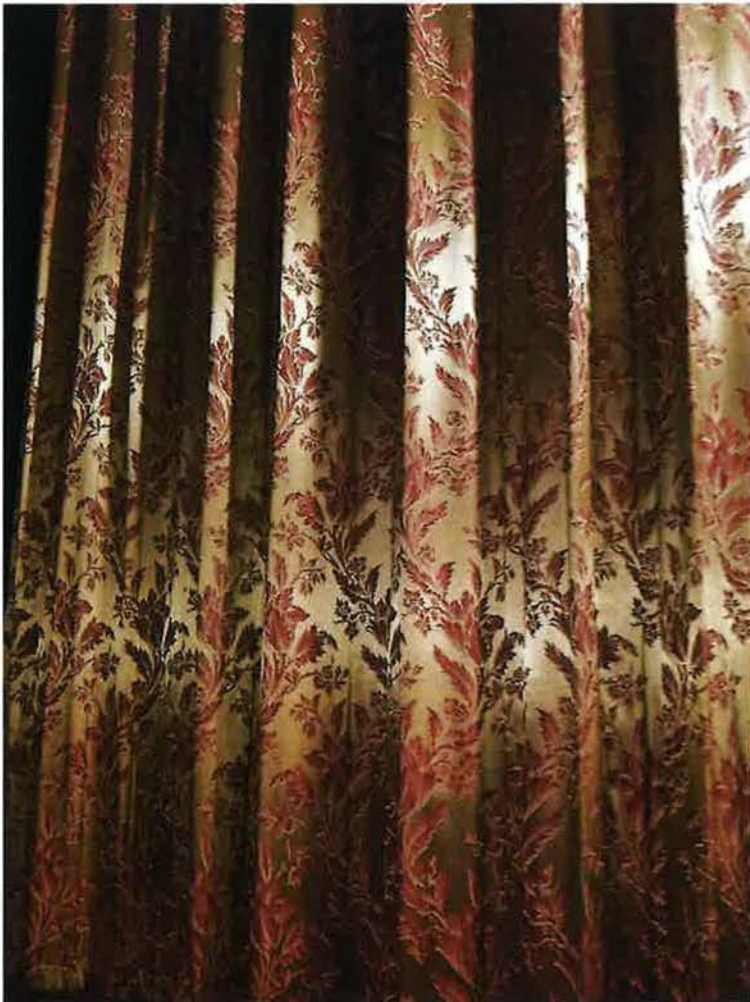
7 of 13

8 of 13



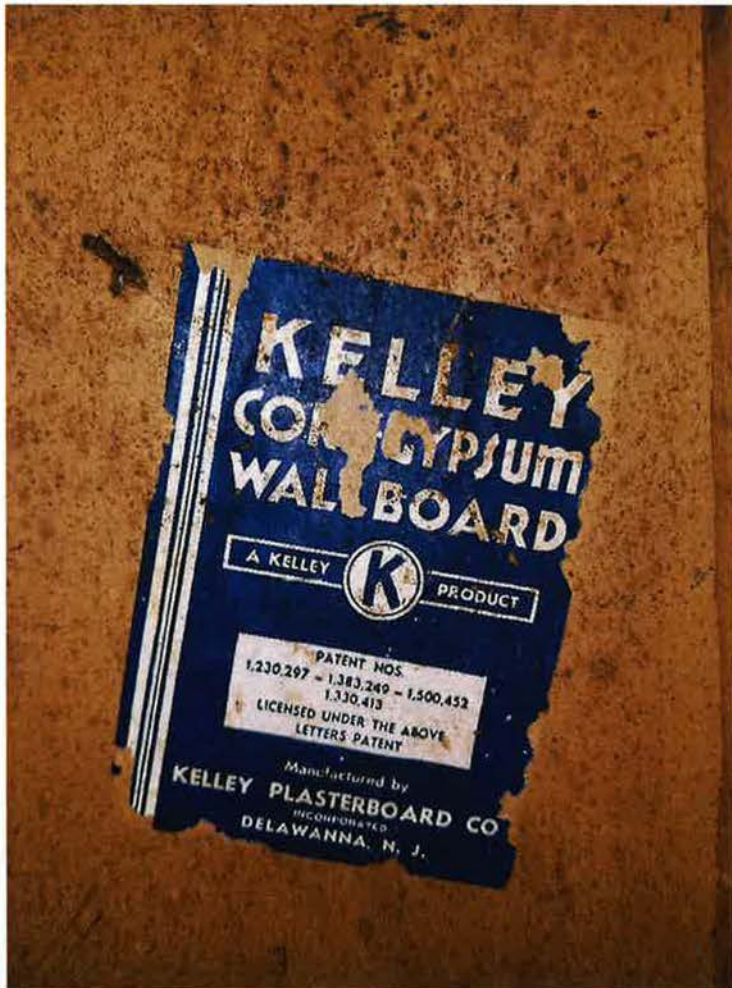
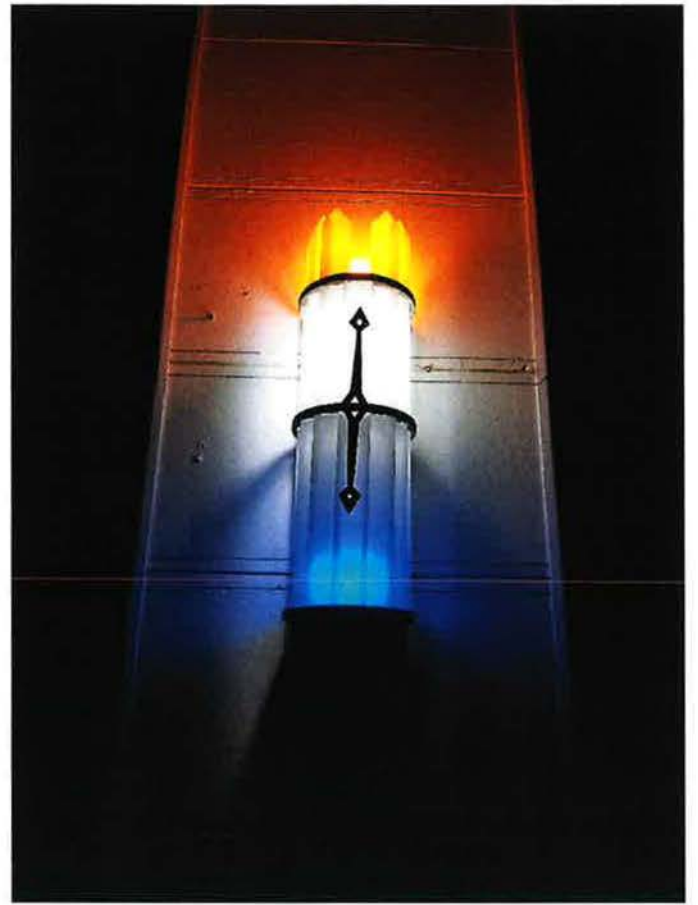
9 of 13

10 of 13



11 of 13

12 of 13



13 of 13



Ball Theatre constructed in 1937 and opened by June 3, 1938.
214 Main Street – Millsboro, DE



Figure 1 DE_Sussex County_ Ball Theatre

List of Sussex County Movie Theatres advertising in the *Sussex Countian*, a weekly newspaper printed in Georgetown, Delaware (County Seat of Sussex County) between 1933 - 1938

Year	Name	Location	Status	Comments
1933	Sussex Theatre	Georgetown	demolished	advertised weekly
	New Plaza	Milford	standing	advertised weekly; interior modified; now functions as a church
1935	Auditorium	Lewes	demolished	advertised weekly
	Palace Theater	Seaford	demolished	advertised weekly
	Hub	Millsboro	standing	formerly known as "Dodd's Opera House;" Grand Opening advertisement November 14, 1935
1936	Blue Hen	Rehoboth Beach	demolished	advertised weekly
	Pierce's Theatre	Bethany Beach	demolished	advertised seasonally; summer (1936)
1937	New Hub Theatre	Millsboro	standing	few advertisements printed; interior modified (same as Hub); now a store
	Diamond Theatre	Selbyville	demolished	few advertisements
1938	New Waller Theatre	Laurel	standing	interior modified; now a senior center
	Ball Theatre	Millsboro	standing	under restoration; began weekly advertising for the week of June 3, 1938; two shows nightly Monday through Saturday; referenced that it was "Air Conditioned"
	Milton Theatre	Milton	standing	original building burned; rehabilitated as a multi-use performing arts, cultural center, and cinema house

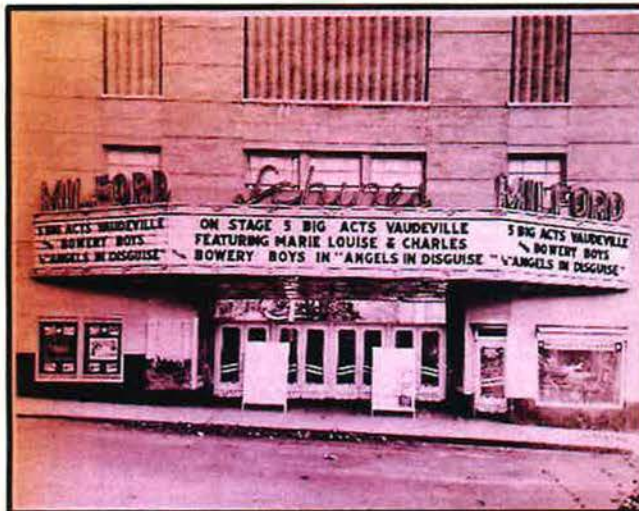
Surviving Examples of Movie Theatres Constructed During the Great Depression Era in Sussex County, Delaware



Waller Theatre – Laurel, DE
Renovated and now functions as a senior center.



Milton Theatre – Milton, DE
Survived several fires and was renovated to accommodate a multi-use performing arts and cultural center



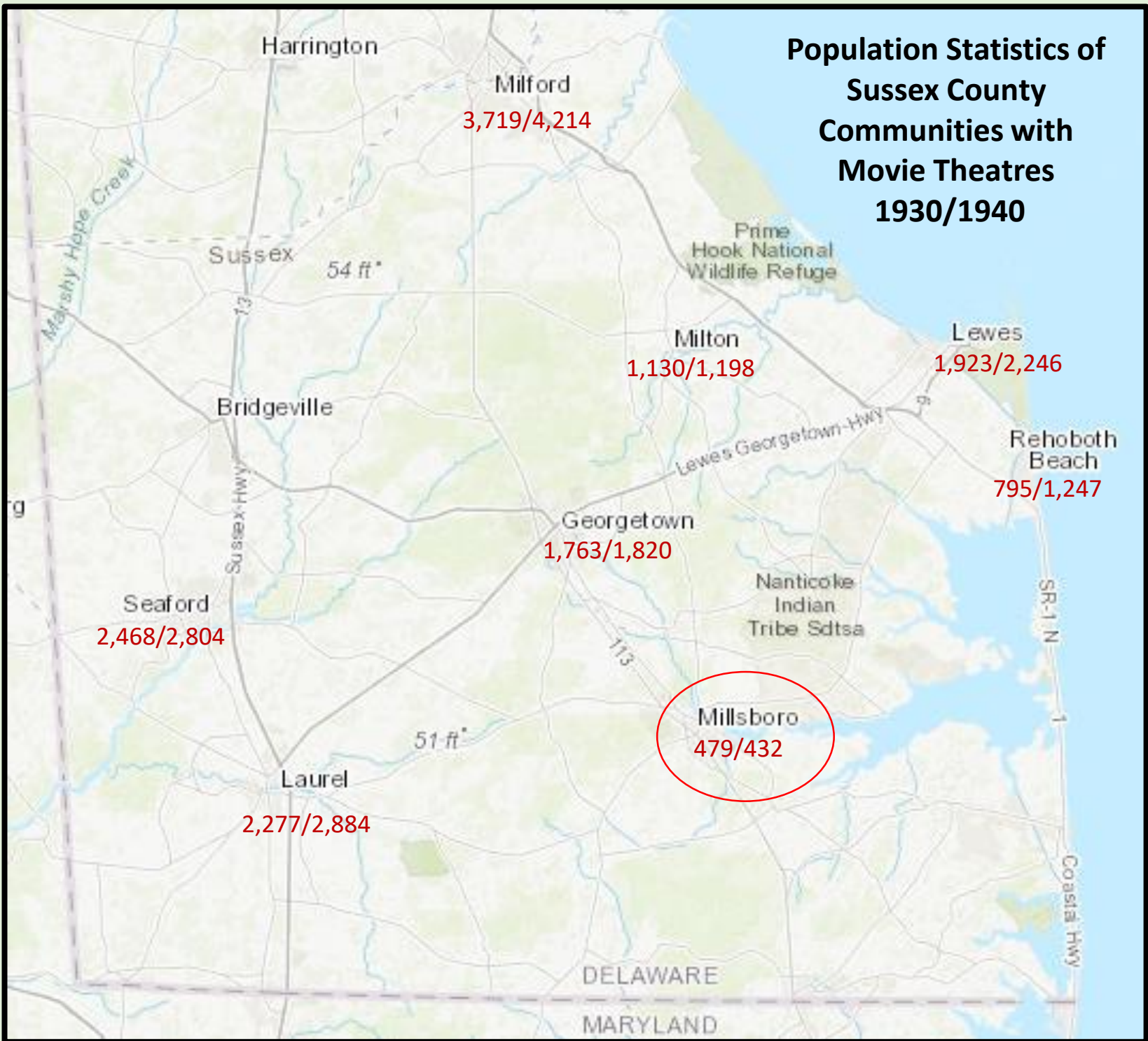
c. 1949



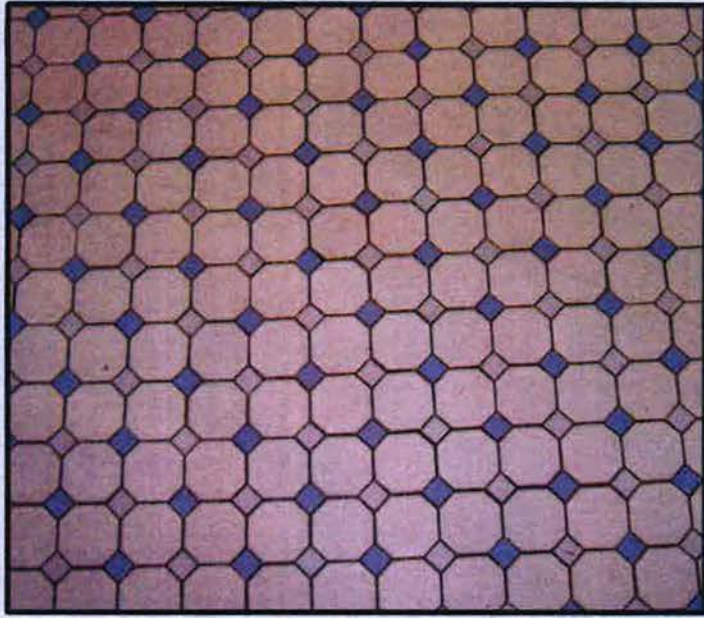
New Plaza Theatre – Milford, DE

Now

**Population Statistics of
Sussex County
Communities with
Movie Theatres
1930/1940**



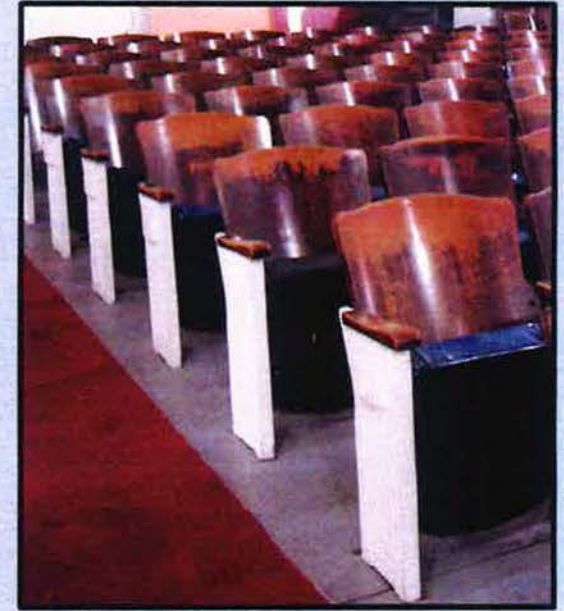
*Special Features
Ball Theatre
214 Main Street
Millsboro, DE*



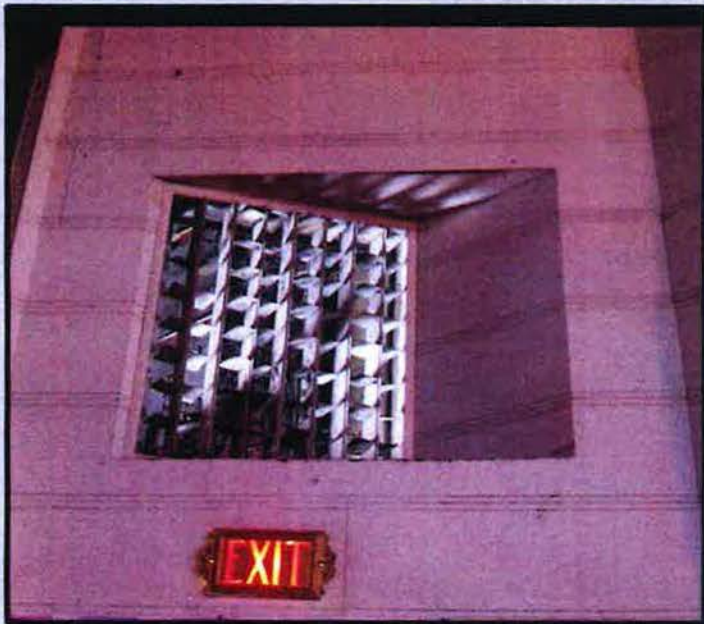
Original hexagonal-shaped mosaic tile floor in lobby



Original ladies room door with signage



Original wooden chairs with upholstered seats in first floor auditorium



Original "air conditioner" behind which blocks of ice were placed, acoustic fiberboard and gypsum wall covering, and exit sign



Original milled-planed wooden roof with glazed tile flashing



Figure 5 DE_Sussex County_Ball Theatre

Main Street Streetscapes – Millsboro, Delaware

Ball Theatre



c. 1939 Main Street streetscape looking south



2018 Main Street streetscape looking southeast

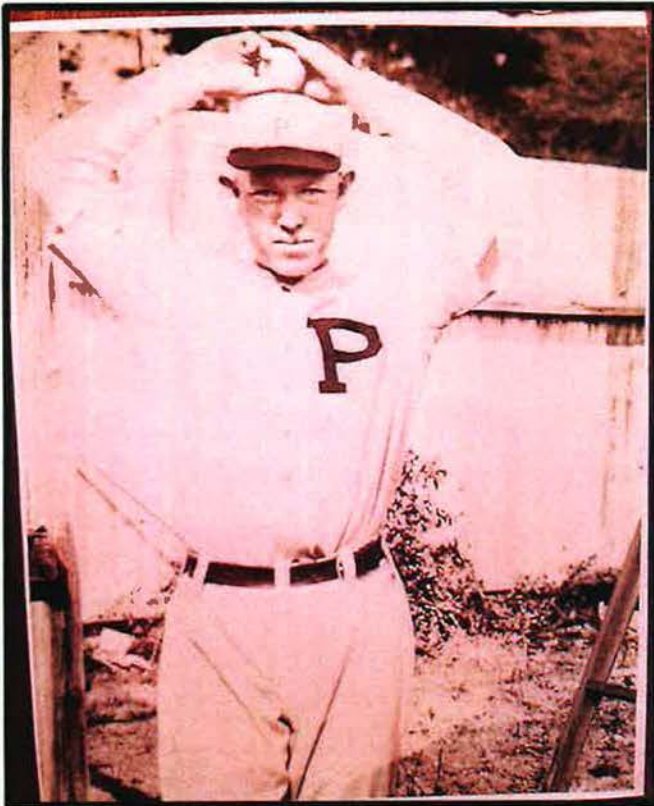


1974 façade renovations - fur strips and plywood cover Carrara Glass, plate glass store windows, and main entrance is modified



2018 Main Street streetscape looking northeast

Walter McKinley (Huck) Betts – Builder and Owner
of the Ball Theatre – Millsboro Delaware



St. Paul and Hartford
Baseball Clubs
(1922 – 1923)
St. Paul and Fort Worth
(1926)
Saints
(1927 – 1932)

Baseball Statistics

- A left-handed batter.
- A right-handed pitcher.
- Final game record, Huck Betts won 17 games, lost 10, and had an earned run average of 4.06.





WE BELIEVE YOU BELIEVE IN
UNITED in Faith
A Faith Community Initiative
A Faith Community Initiative

214 E. Main Street

ROCKY PIZZA

DELIVERY - 663-0622

PIZZA





CLASSROOM
CORNER

BUSINESS
PRINTING
COPY & FAX SERVICE
FLAIR SHOP
OFFICE SUPPLIES

PARTY
CORNER

CLASSROOM
SUPPLIES
EXCELLENCE
1991
Star Blue
Awarded
1992
1993
& 1994
1995
1996
1997
1998
1999
2000
2001
2002
2003
2004
2005
2006
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2019
2020
2021
2022
2023
2024

AVAILABLE
HERE
PROPANE
CYLINDER











Theatre Sound

FOR SOUND SERVICE CALL
W. B. KENNEDY, LTD. (INCORPORATED)
SALISBURY, MARYLAND
PHONE RA 9-7573 or PL 2-5924

—MAGN. CH. MONITORING—

NOHM — EMG —
2

This control section features four toggle switches arranged horizontally. Below them is a rotary switch with a knob. The rotary switch has two main positions: 'NOHM' (Normal) and 'EMG' (Emergency). The 'EMG' position is further divided into sub-positions '2' and '3'.

MONITOR VOLUME

A rotary knob for adjusting the monitor volume. The scale around the knob is marked with numbers 0, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, and 20. The knob is currently set to approximately 10.









KELLEY CONG GYPSUM WALL BOARD

A KELLEY



PRODUCT

PATENT NOS.
1,230,297 - 1,383,249 - 1,500,452
1,330,413

LICENSED UNDER THE ABOVE
LETTERS PATENT

Manufactured by
KELLEY PLASTERBOARD CO
INCORPORATED
DELAWANNA, N. J.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Nomination
Property Name: Ball Theatre
Multiple Name: _____
State & County: DELAWARE, Sussex

Date Received: 7/30/2018 Date of Pending List: 8/27/2018 Date of 16th Day: 9/11/2018 Date of 45th Day: 9/13/2018 Date of Weekly List: _____

Reference number: SG100002912
Nominator: State

Reason For Review:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appeal | <input type="checkbox"/> PDIL | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape | <input type="checkbox"/> Photo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waiver | <input type="checkbox"/> National | <input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission | <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource | <input type="checkbox"/> Period |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | <input type="checkbox"/> TCP | <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> CLG | |

Accept Return Reject 9/13/2018 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments: AOS: Entertainment/Recreation, Social History; POS: 1937-1971; LOS: local

Recommendation/ Criteria: Criterion A.

Reviewer Lisa Deline Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2239 Date 9/13/18

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.

July 20, 2018

Ms. Joy Beasley, Keeper
National Register of Historic Places
National Park Service
1849 C Street NW, Mail Stop 7228
Washington, DC 20240



Dear Ms. Beasley:

The enclosed disks contain the true and correct copy of the National Register nomination for the Ball Theatre which is located at 214 Main Street in Millsboro, Delaware. This historic property is being nominated under Criterion A as a rare example of a small town movie theater constructed in Sussex County, Delaware during the Great Depression Era. Research indicates that it is the oldest-surviving movie theatre within the county and that its interior retains a significant level of integrity unequal to other existing movie theatres.

If there are any questions regarding this nomination, please contact Madeline E. Dunn, National Register Coordinator and Historian for the Delaware State Historic Preservation Office at the following contact addresses: email- madeline.dunn@state.de.us or by phone at 302-736-7417.

Sincerely,

Timothy A. Slavin, State Historic Preservation Officer and
Director, Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs