

1067

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 How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name: **Paramount Theatre**

other names/site number: **Casa Grande 1982 Inventory No. CG-150**

2. Location

street & number: **420 North Florence Street**

city or town: **Casa Grande**

state: **Arizona** code: **AZ**

county: **Pinal** code: **021**

not for publication: N/A

vicinity: N/A

zip code: **85222**

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

James W. Garcia AZSAPPO
Signature of certifying official

27 JULY 1999
Date

ARIZONA STATE PARKS
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

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4. National Park Service Certification
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I hereby certify that this property is:
 entered in the National Register Edson H. Beall 9.3.99
 See continuation sheet.
 determined eligible for the National Register _____
 See continuation sheet.
 determined not eligible for the National Register _____
 removed from the National Register _____
 other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper Date of Action

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5. Classification
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Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- building
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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6. Function or Use

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Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Category: RECREATION & CULTURE Subcategory: Theatre

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Category: WORK IN PROGRESS Subcategory: N/A

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7. Description

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Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Category: LATE 19TH & 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS Subcategory: Spanish Colonial Revival

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation: CONCRETE
Walls: BRICK; with stucco on main facade
Roof: WOOD/OTHER
Other: N/A

Narrative Description (*SEE CONTINUATION SHEETS 6-8*)

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8. Statement of Significance

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

- X** 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 a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)
ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

Period of Significance
1929-1949

Significant Dates
1929 (Construction date)

Significant Person
N/A

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
Gilbert, Hugh

Narrative Statement of Significance (*SEE CONTINUATION SHEETS 9-10*)

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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Bibliography (*SEE CONTINUATION SHEET 11*)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested (Tax Act Certification - Part One).
- 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 # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: N/A

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10. Geographical Data
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Acreeage of Property __Less than one acre__

UTM References (See accompanying USGS map for point reference)
Zone 12 429660E 3637860N

Verbal Boundary Description

The property boundary is that of Tax Parcel 507-07-130, Pinal County, Arizona. The legal description is the north 50ft of the south 59ft of Lots 1, 2, 3, and 4; and the west 15ft of Lot 5; in Block 20 of the Casa Grande Townsite. The parcel includes approximately 5500 sq ft.

Boundary Justification

The boundary is drawn to include the building and lot comprising the property.

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11. Form Prepared By
=====

name/title: **Pat Haigh Stein**
organization: **Arizona Preservation Consultants** date: **April 1999**
street/number: **6786 Mariah Drive** telephone: **(520) 714-0585**
city or town: **Flagstaff** state: **AZ** zip code: **86004**

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Additional Documentation
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Continuation Sheets (pages 6-12)

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

Photographs

Photocopies of historical photographs (Photos 1 through 3)

Representative black and white current photographs of the property (Photos 4 through 6)

Additional items

None

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Property Owner
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name: **Tiffany's Crystal Theatre, Inc. (Bret & Deborah Barber)**
street & number: **P.O. Box 810** telephone: **(unlisted)**
city or town: **Stanfield** state: **Arizona** zip code: **85272**
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CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 6 Paramount Theatre
Pinal County, Arizona

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DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY

The Paramount Theatre is a two-story building of rectangular plan constructed of brick on a concrete foundation. The scored stucco front of Spanish Colonial Revival design has corner towers with ocular windows and pyramidal roofs of red clay tile. Built in 1929, the theatre was extensively remodeled in 1942 and 1970. The Arizona Heritage Fund recently provided a grant that made it possible to rehabilitate the main facade. The exterior now possesses sufficient integrity to qualify the building for listing on the National Register. The owners plan to rehabilitate the interior for use as a performing arts center.

Location and Setting

The Paramount Theatre occupies a prominent location in the historic commercial core of Casa Grande. The theatre is one of the largest buildings downtown, measuring approximately 50 ft wide and 110 ft long. The main (northwest) elevation faces Florence Street, with zero setback from the sidewalk. The building runs the full length and width of its lot, backing onto an alley. Commercial buildings dating from the 1930s and 1940s now adjoin the theatre; however, when constructed in 1929, the Paramount was one of the first buildings on its block.

Located in south-central Arizona, Casa Grande is about 45 miles southeast of Phoenix and 70 miles northwest of Tucson. The city lies along the Southern Pacific (now Union Pacific) Railroad near the junction of Interstates 8 and 10. It is situated in a broad alluvial plain called the Casa Grande Valley. Rich soils, a long growing season, and a developed water supply made the plain one of Arizona's most productive farming regions. Until the mid-1960s, agriculture was the economic mainstay of the area, with cotton the main crop. In recent decades, light manufacturing and service firms have made the economy more diverse. Today Casa Grande is the largest city in Pinal County. Its population (21,300 in 1996) is nearly twice that of the county seat of Florence (11,540 in 1996).

Original Appearance

The Paramount Theatre was constructed in 1929 by the Publix-Rickards-Nace organization. "Nace," as it was commonly called, ran a chain of Arizona theatres, the flagship of which was the Phoenix Orpheum, also completed in 1929. Like the Orpheum, the Paramount was designed for talking motion pictures as well as live performances. The *Casa Grande Dispatch* (5 December 1929) reported that Hugh Gilbert of Phoenix was in charge of constructing the Paramount, but it is unclear from that newspaper article whether Gilbert was the architect or the designer-builder. The cost of construction was about \$35,000.

The Paramount was built with a seating capacity of 550 people at a time when Casa Grande's population hovered around the 2,500 mark. Nace estimated that the theatre would serve not only the town but also the greater Casa Grande Valley community. The theatre's climate-controlled auditorium was indeed a drawing card, offering respite from searing temperatures of the Arizona desert.

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The theatre's grand opening occurred on Monday, December 23, 1929. Media coverage of the event (*Casa Grande Dispatch*, 19 December 1929), plus historical photographs (Photos 1 and 2), provide detailed information concerning the building's original appearance. The structure was of red brick laid in an American bond (common bond) pattern on a concrete foundation. The main elevation featured corner towers each with a bull's-eye oculus, pyramidal roof, and red clay-tile roofing. A red clay-tile awning supported by knee-braces extended between the corner towers. Below the awning were three second-story casement windows, each with 16 lights. At street level the building had a central ticket office crowned with a lighted metal marquee of moderately ornate design. The ticket office was flanked by two small, wood-frame storefronts having plate-glass display windows, five-light transoms, and paneled kickplates. Except for the storefronts and basal plinth, the front facade was stuccoed, then scored to give it the appearance of coursed ashlar. Each "block" of the ashlar was painted a slightly different, mottled hue, giving the overall composition the appearance of variegated dimensional stone (the Phoenix Orpheum Theatre had a similar treatment). The facade was of Spanish Colonial Revival design, a style popular in Casa Grande in the 1920s and early 1930s (Pry 1998:86).

The Paramount's roof was flat at the fly tower but had a low-pitched gable above the rest of the building. Stepped parapets along the two side elevations concealed the flat and gabled portions. The unsheathed rear and side elevations featured brick pilasters at approximately 12-foot intervals to provide additional vertical and lateral support. An off-center rear door was slightly recessed. A side door (not recessed) had a three-course, segmental-arched opening.

The *Casa Grande Dispatch* (19 December 1929) described the original interior. Behind the box office was the foyer, a space "heavily carpeted and attractively furnished," with red velour draperies to "emphasize the theatrical atmosphere." Leading from the foyer were steps to basement restrooms and a lounge. East of the smoking lounge was a small room that housed mechanical equipment. The balcony, reached via stairs from either side of the foyer, had a front that curved gracefully to harmonize with the lines of the rest of the auditorium. Behind the balcony, overlooking Florence Street, were the projection room and two small offices.

According to the December 19 *Dispatch* article, the auditorium had a sloping floor that permitted a good view of the stage from every seat in the house. At intervals along the walls were Egyptian-style silhouettes set in niches and illuminated with indirect lighting. Cove lighting flooded the ceiling of the auditorium to produce a sense of sky. On the ceiling toward the front of the auditorium was a large "peacock tail" grille that concealed a return-air ventilator. Red velour draperies added a further touch of elegance to the auditorium.

The front of the auditorium held an orchestra pit that could accommodate several musicians. Behind the pit was the brick proscenium arch of the stage. The stage had a 34-ft high fly tower that housed electrical and mechanical equipment capable of producing a variety of theatrical effects. Beneath the stage were several artists' and performers' dressing rooms, accessible via stairs from the stage as well as from the orchestra pit.

Later Modifications

The Paramount did not survive the Great Depression, closing in the late 1930s. It reopened in 1942 when Long Theatre Enterprises acquired the building and began to renovate it (Pantelis 1994a). At that time the manager removed the

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orchestra pit because it was not being used and was easy to fall into. He also replaced the house seating with new chairs. He took some of the original seats home and buried them in his backyard as a foundation for a fence he was building.

In 1970 the theatre was again remodeled (Graham 1997). Layers of acoustic panels were added to the walls of the auditorium. The brick proscenium arch was removed to make room for a larger screen. The two stores were removed so that their square footage could be allocated to new restrooms. The entire lobby was remodeled, leaving virtually nothing of the original fabric and character. Basement areas below the lobby were abandoned. The facade was also severely modified (Photo 3). Plaster was applied to block the second-story windows and the corner-tower oculi. Motifs intended to resemble arched windows were painted where the oculi had been. Knee-braces supporting the awning between the corner towers were covered with a new sign reading "Paramount Theatre." The storefronts were filled in with movie poster cases. The box office was removed; a new one was placed behind and to one side of modern, glass entry doors. The original curved marquee that had projected over the sidewalk was also removed. In its place was installed a tile-roofed rectilinear marquee, mounted nearly flush with the facade. So extensive were the changes to the facade that the Paramount was rejected by the National Register when first nominated in the 1980s.

Current Appearance

The Paramount closed its doors in 1978, then reopened for a few years in the 1980s before closing again. Burdened with back-taxes, the property was eventually deeded to the State and sold at auction in 1993. The successful bidders purchased the building so that Casa Grande -- particularly its children -- could have a venue for arts and gymnastics (Edmond 1993). They collaborated with the City of Casa Grande, a Certified Local Government, to secure an Arizona Heritage Fund/AHF grant to rehabilitate the building's exterior. The work was accomplished in the winter and spring of 1999, with David W. Wilson as the architect (in association with PAA Architects & Planners) and LVH Construction as the general contractor.

The AHF project restored most of the character-defining elements of the main facade (Photos 4 through 6). The second-story windows and the bull's-eye windows were reopened. The 1970 "Paramount Theatre" sign was removed to again expose the knee-braces supporting the parapet awning. The two storefronts were rebuilt in the style and materials of the originals. The theatre entry was reworked by rebuilding the central box office and placing a recessed entry behind it. The 1970 marquee was removed. Two small poster cases matching those on the original facade were installed to the sides of the entry.

The restored exterior matches the 1929 appearance in all but two aspects. To contain costs, the ornate marquee was not reproduced, nor was the complex paint finish replicated. The building is now a rich cream color with dark reddish-brown trim. The original scoring of the stucco (to resemble coursed ashlar) has been retained. The owners are currently exploring options to have the 1929 marquee reproduced and installed. Currently vacant, the interior will be rehabilitated in the future for use as a performing arts center. In its current state, the exterior possesses sufficient integrity of location, design, setting, materials, feeling, and association to qualify for listing on the National Register

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SIGNIFICANCE

SUMMARY

The Paramount Theatre is significant under Criterion A because it was the leading entertainment center for Casa Grande and the Casa Grande Valley for nearly fifty years. Its screen introduced talking motion pictures to the community. Its stage provided live performances by local amateur and professional touring groups. Acts and films presented at the Paramount exposed audiences to ideas and trends of a much larger world. The period of significance extends from the theatre's construction in 1929 to the end of the historic period in 1949 (as defined by the National Register). The level of significance is local.

Historical Significance

The Paramount Theatre was constructed in 1929 by the Publix-Rickards-Nace theatre chain. The chain was founded by Harry L. Nace (1885-1953), who arrived in Phoenix in December of 1910 while working for the Sells-Floto Circus. Nace was literally "top man" in a hand-balancing act; he also worked on the trapeze. Noting that the warm, dry air of Phoenix eased his rheumatism, Nace decided to stay, eventually building the largest chain of theatres in Arizona (*Arizona Republic*, 6 December 1950).

In its day, the Paramount was considered to be as modern and fine a theatre as money could buy. It cost about \$35,000 to build, in a year when the entire town budget for Casa Grande was only \$27,750 (Pantelis 1994a). The Nace organization regarded the Paramount as one of the finest showplaces in Arizona outside the larger centers of population. Town leaders viewed the Paramount as a facility that put the small community in the ranks of such cities as Phoenix and Tucson. Appreciative patrons saw the theatre as more than the entertainment center of the Casa Grande Valley. With conditioned air and opulent seats, the Paramount provided an escape from rural life, a respite from the heat, a point of contact with the outside world, and the place to see and be seen.

The Paramount indeed seemed a Christmas gift to the people of Casa Grande when it opened its doors on December 23, 1929. The gala was an ambitious event, featuring the musical comedy "The Flirting Widow," a short feature by the *Arizona Republican* about a North Pole expedition to find Santa Claus, a series of "contrast dances" by the Arizona Sunshine Girls, and a "talkie" -- the first talking motion picture ever presented in Casa Grande (*Arizona Republican*, 24 December 1929). The film, called "The Trespasser," starred Gloria Swanson as a stenographer who married into the smart set and was branded a "trespasser" by the elite. The local newspaper characterized the film as a poignant tale of "woman's God-given right to happiness" (*Casa Grande Dispatch*, 19 December 1929).

The Paramount presented years of live performances and movies before it closed in the late 1930s. The theatre next opened in 1942 when the Long Theatre chain used the Paramount to screen "Sergeant York." That temporary arrangement led to a more permanent one. By the end of the year, Long had acquired the Paramount and had begun renovating it. In charge of the operation was Henry Bowers, who would remain the Paramount's manager for the next 36 years.

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Under Bowers, the Paramount regained its reputation as the premiere showplace of Casa Grande. The manager used give-aways and gimmicks to fill the house, keep the regulars coming, and maintain a profit (Pantelis 1994a). He once gave away a ham each night for a week before Thanksgiving, a promotion that earned him the nickname of the "Ham Showman of Casa Grande." Every Wednesday was Photo Prize Night at the Paramount. As patrons entered, their pictures were taken; the following Wednesday, Bowers would project one patron's image on the screen, and the lucky person, if present, would receive a cash prize. Once, in 1954, Bowers even gave away a brand-new Dodge. Another trick of Bowers' trade was to insert intermissions in films that had none, to keep the patrons buying popcorn.

Although movies remained the main fare at the Paramount, live acts were also popular and regular features. Local amateur groups used the theatre for talent contests, fashion shows, and concerts. Professional touring groups danced, sang, acted, juggled, wrestled, contorted, and performed all manner of other entertainment on its stage. Bowers recalled (in an interview with Shannon Pantelis, 1994a) that a particularly popular act consisted of two women from Los Angeles who wore mermaid suits and swam in a tank on stage. There was little more to the act than that, but audiences loved it. Another popular billing (circa 1949) was "Aleene," called "burlesque's most beautiful thrill dancer" (*Casa Grande Dispatch*, 27 January 1949). That adults-only roadshow was presented at midnight. During Bowers' busiest years -- the 1940s and 1950s -- the theatre opened daily at 2 p.m. and sometimes did not close until 2 a.m.

The noted and the notorious passed through the Paramount's doors. In the latter category was Gary Tison, who was found viewing a Sunday flick following his escape from the Casa Grande Jail in the 1960s (Pantelis 1994b). An observant doorman fingered the fugitive and police officers quickly collared him. Years later, in 1978, Tison and fellow inmate Randy Greenawalt broke out of the Arizona State Prison in Florence and went on a crime spree that left several people dead in its wake.

When Bowers started managing the Paramount in 1942, movie tickets were a dime for children and a quarter for adults. The first time the admission price reached a dollar was for the 1955 blockbuster "To Hell and Back." By the time the Paramount closed in 1978, ticket prices had reached \$2. The Paramount reopened as a movie house in the 1980s, but soon closed when it found that it could not compete against newer theatres offering state-of-the-art facilities. Since then, the Paramount has remained largely vacant. Its most recent use occurred in the winter and spring of 1999 when Warner Brothers studios was filming near Casa Grande and used the theatre to view daily rushes. The current owners plan to rehabilitate the interior as a performing arts venue.

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MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Arizona Republic (The)

1950 Harry L. Nace Marks 40 Years in Phoenix. 6 December 1950, p. 12. Microfilm copy on file, Arizona Department of Library, Archives, and Public Records, Phoenix.

Arizona Republican (The)

1929 "Talkies" Make Formal Debut in Casa Grande. 24 December 1924. Microfilm copy on file, Arizona Department of Library, Archives, and Public Records, Phoenix.

Casa Grande Dispatch

1929 New Paramount Theatre Will Open on November [sic] 24. 5 December 1929. Also, special section on the Paramount, 19 December 1929. Microfilm copy on file, Arizona Department of Library, Archives, and Public Records, Phoenix.

1949 Advertisement for "Aleene." 27 January 1949. Microfilm copy on file, Arizona Department of Library, Archives, and Public Records, Phoenix.

Edmond, Susan

1993 3 Historic Theaters Sold. *Casa Grande Dispatch*, 8 November 1993. Copy on file, "Paramount Theatre" file, Planning Division, City of Casa Grande.

Graham, Robert G.

1997 *A Building Condition Assessment Report for the Paramount Theater, Casa Grande, Arizona*. Prepared for the City of Casa Grande by Alliance Architects, Phoenix. Copy on file, "Paramount Theatre" file, Planning Division, City of Casa Grande.

Pantelis, Shannon I.

1994a Theater Brought "Talkies." *Tri-Valley Dispatch*, 27 and 28 April 1994. Copy on file, "Paramount Theatre" file, Planning Division, City of Casa Grande.

1994b Early Escape Ended at Paramount. *Tri-Valley Dispatch*, 27 and 28 April 1994. Copy on file, "Paramount Theatre" file, Planning Division, City of Casa Grande.

Pry, Mark E.

1998 *Historic Resource Survey, Casa Grande, Arizona*. Copy on file, State Historic Preservation Office, Arizona State Parks, Phoenix.

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Section Photos Page 12 Paramount Theatre
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Photographic Information

The following information applies to all photos:

1. Paramount Theatre
 2. Pinal County, AZ
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3. Photographer unknown
 4. 1934
 5. Casa Grande Valley Historical Society, Casa Grande, AZ (Bottruell Collection)
 6. View south showing original appearance of theatre
 7. PHOTO 1
-
3. Photographer unknown
 4. 1936
 5. Casa Grande Valley Historical Society, Casa Grande, AZ (Bottruell Collection)
 6. View northeast showing theatre seven years after construction
 7. PHOTO 2
-
3. Robert G. Graham
 4. 1997
 5. Alliance Architects, L.L.C., Phoenix, AZ
 6. View southeast showing appearance after 1970 remodeling
 7. PHOTO 3
-
3. Pat H. Stein
 4. April 1999
 5. Arizona Preservation Consultants, Flagstaff, AZ
 6. View southeast showing appearance resulting from 1999 rehabilitation
 7. PHOTO 4
-
3. Pat H. Stein
 4. April 1999
 5. Arizona Preservation Consultants, Flagstaff, AZ
 6. View northeast showing appearance resulting from 1999 rehabilitation
 7. PHOTO 5
-
3. Pat H. Stein
 4. April 1999
 5. Arizona Preservation Consultants, Flagstaff, AZ
 6. View south showing appearance resulting from 1999 rehabilitation
 7. PHOTO 6