

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received NOV 25 1986

date entered

DEC 29 1986

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Ventura Theatre

and/or common Ventura Theatre

2. Location

street & number 26 S. Chestnut

N/A not for publication

city, town Ventura

N/A vicinity of

state California

code 06

county Ventura

93001

code 111

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Chestnut Properties

street & number 1294 E. Main Street

city, town Ventura

N/A vicinity of

state California 93001

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Ventura County Government Center, County Recorder's Office

street & number 800 S. victoria Avenue

city, town Ventura

state California 93009

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Ventura City Survey

has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1983

federal state county local

depository for survey records City of Ventura, 501 Poli Street

city, town Ventura

state California 93001

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date <u>N/A</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Ventura Theatre is a long rectangular two and three story Spanish Colonial Revival concrete structure with a combination of red tiled hipped and shed roofs. The southeast portion of the building contains the tall rectangular stage portion of the theatre. The Ventura Theatre retains its integrity with its arched windows and entrances. The main entrance provides the focus with its recessed triple arched balcony divided by double Corinthian columns. The original 1920s movie palace interior has been restored to its former splendor. Originally designed as the theatre portion of a two building theatre-office complex, the Ventura Theatre retains a high degree of its original appearance; the adjacent office portion has been so substantially altered, it has not been included in this nomination.

The flat stucco surface of the Ventura Theatre is broken by decorative relief using arches, crests, pilasters, and wrought iron window coverings. A double row of narrow shed tile roofs extends the building out between the two hipped roof taller portions of the building.

The interior of the theatre auditorium retains its original features including the magnificent sunburst ceiling decoration. The theatre lobby contains the original lighting fixtures with changes occurring in the addition of a concession stand and the painting over of the stencil designs on the beams. The theatre also contains a balcony, orchestra pit, organ loft, and arched proscenium over the large stage. There are eight dressing rooms located on the side of the stage on the second and third floors.

Technically, the theatre was very advanced when it was constructed. The lighting effects, according to the souvenir program, were "spectacular and comparable with those in any of the large theatres in Los Angeles or San Francisco". The lights located in the ceiling, the walls and on the floor, are still in use today.

The first floor shops, south of the theatre entrance, have retained their original character with arched fronts and wooden doors and windows. Recessed arched entries to the theatre contain wood doors with wrought iron hinges. In the 1940s a terrazzo tile floor was laid outside the ticket booth.

A separate but adjacent building (Ventura Theatre Building) is located immediately to the north of the Ventura Theatre. The Ventura Theatre was constructed as a Class A building and the Ventura Theatre Building was built as a Class B building. Each building has its own wall with a small alley dividing the two in the rear. The buildings are connected on the facade, and there is no internal circulation between the two buildings. Both buildings were designed in 1928 to give the appearance of one building all executed in the Spanish Colonial Revival style. In 1958, the Ventura Theatre Building was substantially altered. The Ventura Theatre remains virtually intact with only the marquee having been changed in the 1950s.

The alteration of the Ventura Theatre Building, north of the theatre itself, was done in an attempt to "modernize" the structure for office and commercial use. The arched windows and entrances, as well as the cornice, were removed or modified. This building

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contains offices on the second floor and shops at street level. Although located within the same property boundary as the Ventura Theatre, the Ventura Theatre Building is a non-contributing structure and is not included as part of the nomination.*

The Ventura Theatre is located on South Chestnut Street and a block north of Plaza Park where the Mitchell Block, a locally certified historic district containing residences from the 1880s to the 1920s, stands.

*Nomination boundaries include only the Ventura Theatre.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1928 **Builder/Architect** Los Angeles Contracting Co./L.A. Smith
1958: Macleod Construction Co./Kenneth Hess

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Built in the style of the great movie palaces of the 1920s, the Ventura Theatre is significant as the only luxury theatre built in Ventura County in the 1920s in this tradition. Designed by architect L. A. Smith in the Spanish Colonial Revival style, the theatre was constructed in 1928 for Charles B. Corcoran and the Principal Theatres, Inc. The lavish interior of the theatre was designed by Robert E. Power Studios of San Francisco.

Charles B. Corcoran, theatre manager and co-owner, came to Ventura in 1918 and opened the American Theatre on Main Street in 1919. In 1923, he opened a second Main Street theatre known as the Apollo. Enjoying success in both theatres, he was approached by the Principal Theatres of Los Angeles to manage and become co-owner of a new luxury theatre they were planning to build, the Ventura Theatre, which opened in 1928. Both the American and Apollo Theatres are no longer in existence.

In the 1920s, with the rise of the movie industry in Southern California, large numbers of elaborate movie palaces were built in California. Ventura felt the impact of these 1920s movie palaces when Hollywood developers, Saul Lesser and Mike Rosenberg, of Principal Theatres financed the Ventura Theatre in 1928. These two partners built other elaborate theatres in California including one similar to the Ventura Theatre in Santa Maria.

The Ventura Theatre fit the movie palace concept of ornateness and grandeur. Those visitors to the theatre felt they were in another world, one of gilt and opulence as evidenced by the lobby's elaborate ceiling decorations of gold leaf, carved figures, chandeliers and wall sconces, and wrought iron balcony. The interior of the huge theatre auditorium with its stenciled ceiling beams, magnificent chandeliers, tremendous lighting system, and sunburst ceiling decoration all contributed to this feeling of elegance.

The architect, L. A. Smith, was also known for his design of the Beverly Theatre on Beverly Drive in Beverly Hills. The Robert E. Powers Studio of San Francisco, one of the largest interior decoration firms in the United States, created the interior design scheme including the magnificent blue ceiling with the large silver sunburst in the center.

According to an article in the Ventura Star Free Press for January 15, 1965, "the grand opening of the lavish \$400,000 theatre on August 16, 1928, created perhaps more excitement in the bustling oil boom town of Ventura, (population 11,000) than any other grand opening before or since". All 1,190 seats were filled with theatre-goers whose

9. Major Bibliographical References

City of Ventura Archives, landmark form, Ventura City Hall.

Interview with Trudy Clark, 3-83

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 0.65 acres

Quadrangle name Ventura

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	1	2	8	9	1	5	0	3	7	9	5	4	5	0
Zone			Easting					Northing						

B

Zone			Easting					Northing						

C

Zone			Easting					Northing						

D

Zone			Easting					Northing						

E

Zone			Easting					Northing						

F

Zone			Easting					Northing						

G

Zone			Easting					Northing						

H

Zone			Easting					Northing						

Verbal boundary description and justification Beginning at the southwestern corner of Assessors Parcel #73-044-43, proceed 130' north along South Chestnut Street, then 110' east, then 80' south, then 10' west, then 50' south, and then 100' west to the point of beginning. Boundary is drawn to encompass only the historic theatre: See section 7

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries for further justification.

state N/A code county N/A code

state N/A code county N/A code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Judy Triem, Historical Consultant

organization N/A

date March 17, 1984

street & number 627 E. Pleasant

telephone (805) 648-5538

city or town Santa Paula

state California 93060

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Kathryn Guattieri

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 9-11-86

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register
Entered in the
National Register

date 12-29-86

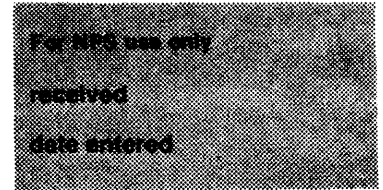
Alfred Byers
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

Chief of Registration

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souvenir program listed the following: organ solo, latest news, Our Gang Comedy, a vaudeville act and the movie, Excess Baggage. Stars were on hand to greet the audience. The film shown was the first talking picture in Ventura; however, only the last reel was talking.

The movie palace differed from the ordinary theatre in its elaborate detail and plush interiors. Therefore, the Ventura Theatre is a unique local example of a bygone era, which for financial and practical reasons, could never again be duplicated.

Y-4041H

