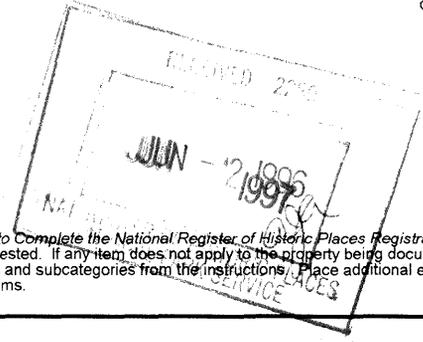


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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 Midwest Theater  
other names/site number NeHBS # SF11-110

2. Location

street & number 1707 Broadway not for publication [n/a]  
city or town Scottsbluff vicinity [ ]  
state Nebraska code NE county Scotts Bluff code 157 zip code 69361

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.)

*Wanda Samma*  
Signature of certifying official  
Director, Nebraska State Historical Society  
State or Federal agency and bureau

May 20, 1997  
Date

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

- I, hereby certify that this property is:
- entered in the National Register.  
 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): \_\_\_\_\_

*Edson H. Beall* 7.3.97  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper Date of Action

Midwest Theater  
Name of Property

Scotts Bluff County, Nebraska  
County and State

**5. Classification**

Ownership of Property  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-state
- public-Federal

Category of Property  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register  
0

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Current Functions  
(Enter categories from instruction)

Recreation and Culture  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Modern Movement/Modernistic  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Materials  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete  
walls Brick  
\_\_\_\_\_  
roof Asphalt  
other Tower & Front facade—Stucco, Glazed Tile  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**  
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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.)

- [X] A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patters of our history.
[] B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
[X] 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.)

Property is:

- [] 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.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Entertainment/Recreation

Architecture

Period of Significance

1946

Significant Dates

1946

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Strong, Charles D.

Moore, Art, Contracting Co.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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 #

Primary Location for Additional Data:

- [X] State Historic Preservation Office
[] Other State agency
[] Federal agency
[] Local government
[] University
[] Other

Name of repository:

---

### 10. Geographical Data

---

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

UTM References (place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet).

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1.	13	611030	4635290	3.			
2.				4.			

[] See continuation sheet.

#### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

#### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

---

### 11. Form Prepared By

---

name/title Robert Hurst, Advisory Board Member  
organization Panhandle Landmarks, Inc. date April 1, 1997  
street & number 1952 Independence Ct. telephone 402 476-9719  
city or town Lincoln state NE zip code 68521

---

### Additional Documentation

---

Submit the following items with the completed form:

#### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

#### Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

---

### Property Owner

---

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name/title First International Theaters  
street & number 1402 E 20th telephone 308 632-3436  
city or town Scottsbluff state NE zip code 69361

---

**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. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the 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 chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Midwest Theater

Name of Property

Scotts Bluff County, Nebraska

County and State

## Section 7 Page 1

## Description

The Midwest Theater is located in Scottsbluff, Scotts Bluff County, Nebraska, approximately 400 miles west of Lincoln, the State Capital, and approximately twenty miles east of the Wyoming state line. The two story rectangular-shaped building was constructed in 1946 at the center of the city's downtown commercial district. The theater is an excellent example of Modernistic-style architecture found in 1940's motion picture theater design, and exhibits exceptionally high and rare interior and exterior integrity. The Midwest Theater's Corporate owner, First International Theaters, closed the theater on September 12, 1996. The corporation has since donated the building and fixtures to the Oregon Trail Community Foundation for use as a community performing arts and entertainment center. The theater building is the nomination's only contributing historic resource.

The Midwest Theater is located in the Western Nebraska city of Scottsbluff (1990 Population 13,711) and faces west onto Broadway Avenue, the city's main street. The Modernistic style theater was designed by prominent Denver, Colorado architect, Charles D. Strong. The general contractor for the project was Art Moore Contracting Company also from Denver. The theater opened to the public May 3, 1946.

The theater is constructed of brick on a 140' X 50' reinforced concrete foundation and basement. The wooden roof deck is covered with an asphalt composition roofing material and is structurally supported by wood joists. The first level of the primary facade features glazed masonry panels, two aluminum movie poster cases, four aluminum framed glass doors in the south main entry/exit, and an aluminum framed glass door in the north service entrance. Fenestration consists of a three window bay placed in the center of the building. A horizontal 50' x 3' illuminated marquee is positioned eight feet above the sidewalk surface. Directly above the marquee is a 50' X 11' aluminum canopy extending horizontally from the building toward the street. The canopy features three horizontal bands of neon lights. Mounted on the ends of the canopy are two 9' X 9' illuminated marquees. The canopy also supports decorative scrolls and theater's name, outlined in neon lights. The second level of the building is covered with ivory colored stucco. The rear facade is brick and features two steel emergency exit doors, leading from the theater's interior to a utility service alley.

The most striking feature of the primary facade is a stainless steel and aluminum tower extending 60' above the theater's entrance. The 15' wide tower is flanked by glazed masonry panels. The vertical center of the tower contains 132 pressed aluminum stars backed by 68 spotlights operated by an electric flasher system. Extending from the top of the tower's two aluminum poles are two stylized wings outlined with neon lights, and two starburst spheres with flashing mercury bulbs. The lighted tower is designed to be seen at night for a radius of twenty miles.

Modernistic style is also found in the interior design elements of the theater. The lobby exhibits very smooth lines, visually softened by curved walls and the glow of indirect lighting. The lobby's coffered ceilings are irregular shaped, suggesting a cloud formation or an atmospheric detail. On the right side of the lobby is the box office, two aluminum movie poster cases, and ribbed aluminum columns. The refreshment counter is placed on the left side of the lobby and is framed with decorative plaster scrolls.

Adjacent to the lobby is a large foyer providing access to the auditorium, restrooms, manager's office, and the balcony stairways. The walls are curved to ease the flow of patron traffic. The drinking fountain is recessed into the wall and is illuminated by indirect lighting. At opposite ends of the foyer are curved stairways leading to the auditorium's balcony. Satin aluminum handrails follow the streamline curve of stairways.

The theater's auditorium is an aesthetic blend of light, color and ornamentation. The focal point is the proscenium design elements surrounding the center stage and movie screen. Three dimensional plaster floral scrolls ascend 25 feet from the floor on either side of the screen. A layered drapery valance above the screen connects the decorative scrolls. The theme of the scrolls floral pattern continues to the colorful painted murals on the auditorium's walls and ceiling. Indirect lighting is designed to compliment the interior motif and can be dimmed during movie presentations.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetMidwest Theater

Name of Property

Scotts Bluff County, Nebraska

County and State

**Section 7, 8 Page 2**

---

The cantilevered balcony extends from the rear of the auditorium. Beyond the back wall of the balcony is the theater's movie projection room. This small area contains projection equipment, work counters, storage cabinets, and electrical controls for the auditorium's light and audio systems. In the far right corner is a passageway to the theater's exterior tower.

The Midwest Theater is an excellent example of the Modernistic style of architecture and exhibits an exceptionally high degree of architectural and artistic integrity, both on its interior and exterior. From opening day, the theater has provided entertainment for thousands of Scottsbluff moviegoers. The marquee and tower dominates the streetscape, adding a sense of architectural excitement to the downtown business district. The theater building is a significant component of Scottsbluff's main street economic revitalization program.

**Statement of Significance**

The Midwest Theater is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criteria A and C. The Theater is eligible under Criterion A for its long, significant association with the entertainment history of Scottsbluff. It is the only remaining motion picture theater of its era in Scottsbluff that retains physical historic integrity. The Midwest opened in 1946 as a motion picture theater with modern-day conveniences and contemporary styling. The property is also significant under Criterion C as an excellent and well-preserved example of a 1940s motion picture theater designed in the Modernistic Style of architecture. Remarkably intact, the building exhibits a high degree of historical and architectural integrity. The period of significance is derived from the theater's construction date of 1946.

---

**History**

Prior to his arrival in Scottsbluff, William H. Ostenberg, Jr. gained experience in theater operation in the Nebraska towns of Hoffman and Alliance. In December of 1919, Ostenberg bought the property on Broadway where the Midwest Theater is now located. The following year, in 1920, the Midwest Amusement and Realty Company was formed with Mr. Ostenberg as president. Beginning in the 1920s, the Company constructed and operated various dance halls and theaters in Scottsbluff and in the surrounding towns of Morrill and Bridgeport. In 1933, the Midwest Amusement company joined other theater syndicates in four states to form Gibraltar Enterprises, Inc. Mr. Ostenberg continued to serve as president of the Midwest Amusement and Realty Co. and as a director and officer of Gibraltar Enterprises, Inc.

On March 5, 1945, the Egyptian Theater (site of Midwest Theater) was destroyed by a fire. The fire gave Mr. Ostenberg the opportunity to build a grand theater for Scottsbluff. The fire-gutted theater was replaced in just over a year with the new Midwest Theater. Charles D. Strong, a prominent Denver, Colorado architect, was hired to draw the design plans for the new theater.

Art Moore Contracting Company, also of Denver, served as the builder. In a letter written to Mr. Ostenberg from A.M. Moore, he states: "In my eighteen years of theater construction the Midwest Theater takes the lead of the one hundred ten theaters we have built. The people of Scottsbluff little realize the effort and expense it took to build such a beautiful theater." The new theater could seat over nine-hundred moviegoers.

The Midwest Theater was opened on May 3, 1946 with much fanfare. The *Scottsbluff Star-Herald* published an eight page Midwest Theater Edition on Wednesday, May 1, 1946. Under the front page photograph of the theater it reads: "The new Midwest theater is described as "one of the finest in the United States" by W.H Ostenberg, Jr., president of the Midwest Amusement & Realty Co. The theater, which contains a host of unique features, has a tower entrance 68 feet high, containing stars of pressed aluminum and topped with flashing aluminum-encased bulbs which give a "diamond illumination" effect at night. A large screen, blue leather and rose plush "push-back" seats, wide aisles, and specifically-designed air conditioning and sound systems are among interior features." The feature attraction for the gala opening night of the Midwest Theater starred Rita Hayworth as *Gilda* with Glenn Ford.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Midwest Theater

Name of Property

Scotts Bluff County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 8 Page 3

The Midwest Theater provided entertainment not only for the citizens of Scottsbluff, but for those in the surrounding North Platte Valley region. Following World War II, Americans greatly desired leisure activities for diversion and amusement. For a very large segment of society, the post-war era was the first time in over fifteen years that entertainment was both available and affordable. The motion picture industry thrived during this period. In the era just before television became a prominent vehicle for mass entertainment, movie theaters provided an outlet for Americans with money to burn and a hunger to be entertained. The Midwest Theater is significantly associated with this period of entertainment history.

**Architecture**

The Midwest Theater embodies the distinctive characteristics of a post-war motion picture theater. Designed in the Modernistic style, the Theater, when opened in 1946, was an architectural showpiece in Scottsbluff and represented state-of-the-art technology in motion picture theaters. The Midwest theater has rare, excellent interior and exterior physical integrity from the date of its construction.

Motion picture theaters of the era offered moviegoers a place to escape and to experience their fantasies, not only through the images shown on the big screen, but through the flamboyant architecture of the theater itself. The Midwest Theater is an excellent physical representation of post-war entertainment attitudes and philosophy. Its extravagant, futuristic and almost gaudy architecture, both interior and exterior, tell us part of the story of the culture of American entertainment in the post-war era.

In addition to the detailed description of the Midwest's futuristic marquee and interior, the May 1, 1946 edition of the Scottsbluff *Star Herald* is replete with descriptions of futuristic-sounding materials used in the construction of the Midwest like Leverex, Plexiglass, Flexwood, Herculite, Ozite, and Absorbatone. Exciting, bold materials like "satin" aluminum, stainless steel and chrome are also described in the article. These descriptions are included with breathless details about the incredible modernity of the new theater. Plexiglass is described as the material used "in the nose of a B-29 bomber." The sound system is compared to that of Radio City Music Hall, the projection system is the "latest development"; the seats are described as identical to those used by the new United Nations Council at Hunter College in New York. The capabilities of the modern air conditioning system are extolled, and the modern electrical, emergency and repair systems merit an entire section of the article.

The great lengths to which the owners of the Midwest went to describe, in detail, the sleek, modern new Theater tell us much about the importance they attached to the concept of modernity. It is clear that, to the operators of the theater and to their patrons, this modernity was essential for a new theater. The opening film itself is barely mentioned. The event of attending a film was almost as important as the film itself.

The advent of theater complexes in the 1960s coupled with urban renewal and suburban migration limited options for downtown theater owners. Movie theaters were remodeled with little sensitivity to their original architecture or were demolished to make way for new construction. In Nebraska, historic motion picture theaters have declined in numbers over the last few decades. Unsympathetic remodeling to building exteriors and especially interiors, as well as demolition, has led to the systematic loss of historic theaters. In 1995, the Nebraska Historic Building Survey of Scotts Bluff County identified only two motion picture theaters as potentially eligible for the National Register. The Nile theater in Mitchell, constructed in 1939, is currently the only other theater known in the county eligible for the Register. Located in a separate community, the Nile is a much smaller, pre-war theater, and has a significantly different design from the Midwest theater.

Although the movie industry has thrived after the advent of television partly by building shopping center cinemas, Scottsbluff's motion picture theaters of the 1930s and 40s have been converted to super markets, a clothing store, private clubs or simply razed. The Midwest Theater has found new life as a community performing arts and entertainment center and has also become the flagship of historic preservation efforts in Scottsbluff's mainstreet. The

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Midwest Theater

Name of Property

Scotts Bluff County, Nebraska

County and State

Section 8, 9, 10 Page 4

---

Midwest retains a remarkably high degree of integrity, both exterior and interior. The theater remains today, in near original condition, with only cosmetic changes to the interior lobby and foyer during the 1970s.

The Midwest Theater is historically significant because of its ability to tell us something significant about our past. Historically speaking, the Midwest reminds us of a time when theaters existed exclusively in our downtown areas, and when attending a motion picture was truly an event. Through its architecture, the Midwest tells us something about how that event was perceived, and gives us a physical representation of the era's expectations regarding entertainment delivery.

**Bibliography**

- "Beauty of Design Combined With Latest Conveniences in New Midwest Theater." Scottsbluff Star-Herald. 1 May 1946.
- Meyers, Rick. "\$15,000 grant will accompany theater donation." Scottsbluff Star-Herald. 1 March 1997.
- Meyers, Rick, and Steve Hill. "Midwest Theater to end its run." Scottsbluff Star-Herald. 12 September 1996.
- Naylor, David. American Picture Palaces. Van Nostrand Reinhold Company. New York, New York. 1981.
- Pildas, Ave. Movie Palaces. Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., Publishers. 1980.
- Scotts Bluff County Assessor's Records. Commercial Property Record. Lots 10, 11, BLK 2, Original Town Addition.
- Scotts Bluff County Register of Deeds. City of Scottsbluff Book 7. Entries for Lots 10 and 11, Block 2, Original Town Addition.
- Sexton, R.W. American Theatres of Today. Architectural Book Publishing Co., Inc. New York, New York. 1930.
- Thies, Elizabeth. "New Midwest Theater Praised by Audience on Opening Night." Scottsbluff, Nebraska Daily Star-Herald. 4 May 1946
- U.S. Research, Inc. Nebraska Historic Building Survey Reconnaissance Survey Final Report of Scotts Bluff County, Nebraska. July 1995.
- Valentine, Maggie. The Show Starts on the Sidewalk. Yale University Press. 1994.
- March 18, 1946, letter from A.M. Moore to W.H. Ostenberg, Jr., copy in NeSHPO file.

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The boundary is described as Lots 10, 11, Block 2, Original Town, Scottsbluff, Scotts Bluff County, Nebraska.

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary includes all historically associated real estate.