

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received JAN 21 1987
date entered

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

1. Name

historic Liberty Theatre

and or common same; also The Liberty Center for the Performing Arts

2. Location

street & number 200 West Park Avenue N/A not for publication

city, town Eunice N/A vicinity of

state LA code 22 county St. Landry Parish code 097

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name City of Eunice

street & number P. O. Drawer 1106

city, town Eunice N/A vicinity of state LA 70535

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. St. Landry Parish Courthouse

street & number corner of Court and Landry Streets (P. O. Box 750)

city, town Opelousas state LA 70570

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title LA Historic Sites Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1977 federal state county local

depository for survey records LA State Historic Preservation Office

city, town Baton Rouge state LA

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

Built between 1919 and 1924, the Liberty Theatre is a two story brick commercial building located in downtown Eunice. The building has recently been restored and is in a good state of historical integrity.

The theatre was begun in 1919 to the plans of the firm of Duncan and Barron of Alexandria, Louisiana. The plans called for a two story corner commercial building ornamented with pilasters and a high parapet. Unfortunately, the building consortium experienced financial difficulties and work ceased. Work began again under a new building consortium, and the theatre was completed in 1924, but the original plans were not carried out. Mainly the east side of the building was never completed to its full height and the ornamentation was simpler. This gave the building the somewhat lopsided exterior it has today. The corner entrance is marked by a stylized pediment shape and a pair of strongly projecting pilasters. The east side of the building is not part of the theatre proper, but contains a range of shops and offices. The corner entrance leads to the linear lobby which runs along the south side of the building in front of the theatre space. At one time there was a barrel vault, but in the early 1930's the rear wall of the theatre was moved back to provide for more seating. As a result, now there is only a half barrel vault. The lobby also contains a set of stairs leading to the theatre gallery.

The auditorium space is acoustically designed with side walls which curve inwards to meet the proscenium. The side walls themselves are ornamented with marbled Tuscan pilasters (there is no entablature). The proscenium has rounded corners and a recently repainted drop curtain.

In the early 1930's the Liberty was refitted for "talkies." At that time new lighting was installed, some new pilaster capitals were added, and an ornamental tile ceiling was hung. In addition, modernistic sculptural devices were installed atop some of the pilasters and female figures were painted in the open wall areas between the pilasters. Also, as previously mentioned, the rear wall of the auditorium was moved back. These, of course, are considered historic alterations.

Non-Historic Alterations:

The present marquee and aluminum and glass front door are relatively recent. In addition, the stores on the east side have received new shopfronts and a pent awning. Finally, one of the stores at the north (rear) end of the row has received a "slipcover" front.

Assessment of Integrity:

Despite these non-historic alterations, the building retains most of its original exterior appearance. In addition, it retains virtually all of its significant historic interior features. There is no doubt that the Liberty still conveys its historic role as an early twentieth century 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 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 1919-1924 **Builder/Architect** Architects: Duncan & Barron (Alexandria, LA)
 (1919 plans subsequently modified, as noted in Item 7)

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph) Criterion A

The Liberty Theatre is locally significant in the area of theatre because of its historic role as the performing arts focal point for the City of Eunice and vicinity. In addition, it was the place for all community gatherings in general.

From its completion in 1924 until the construction of the Queen Cinema in 1937, the Liberty Theatre was the only "Temple of Amusement" in the Eunice area. After that time it was the area's principal theatre because the Queen was started by the Liberty owners as a secondary outlet. The Liberty was the entertainment and performing arts mecca for the region. In addition to popular films, the proprietors supplied the public with operas, serious plays, musical comedies, and "high class vaudeville."

Much of the Liberty's success was due to the extraordinary promotional activities of part owner J. C. Keller, Sr. Year after year Keller filled downtown Eunice with eager theatregoers and curious crowds anxious to see the Liberty's latest promotional gimmick. For example, at the theatre's opening Keller invited worthies from around Louisiana as well as Hollywood. The opening ceremonies were attended by Fattie Arbuckle. On another occasion a wire was strung from the Liberty across Second Street and a tightrope walker was hired to perform. Festivities were also attended by Walt Coffman, billed as the "principal clown" for the Barnum and Bailey organization. In October 1924 Keller sponsored a car raffle at the theatre with an attendance of 7,000. (The population of Eunice today is only about 11,000.) During the week of the raffle the Liberty drew 3,000 theatregoers. Over the years personal appearances at the Liberty were made by the likes of Tex Ritter, Jimmy Clanton, the Bowery Boys, and Roy Rogers.

In many ways the Liberty became the heart of downtown Eunice, not only as a "Temple of Amusement," but in other respects as well. It was the place where meetings were held, where campaigning politicians came to speak, and where clubs met. It was also the place where fundraising events were held such as the locally legendary "womanless wedding" sponsored by the Rotary Club in March 1925. J. C. Keller himself contributed to the event by playing the part of the mother of the bride. Of course, this secondary role as a gathering place for community events was often assumed by theatres in Louisiana communities of the period.

9. Major Bibliographical References

1919 blueprints on file at Eunice City Hall.
 The New Era (Eunice) newspaper collection at LSU, Baton Rouge, miscellaneous issues.
 Old photo collection in possession of Charles Seale of Eunice. Photos show theatre and some of promotions.
 Personal communication with Reginald Keller, son of J. C. Keller, Sr.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property @ 1/5th of an acre
 Quadrangle name Eunice South, LA Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A	<u>1</u> <u>5</u>	<u>5</u> <u>5</u> <u>6</u> <u>0</u> <u>2</u> <u>8</u>	<u>3</u> <u>3</u> <u>7</u> <u>3</u> <u>3</u> <u>8</u> <u>0</u>	B	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	D	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
E	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	F	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
G	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	H	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

Verbal boundary description and justification

Boundary lines follow property lines. See attached property plat map.

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

state	<u>N/A</u>	code	county	code
state	<u> </u>	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	<u>National Register Staff</u>	<u>ASSISTED BY CITY OF EUNICE AND LIBERTY THEATRE RESTORATION COMMITTEE</u>		
organization	<u>Division of Historic Preservation State of Louisiana</u>	date	<u>November 1986</u>	
street & number	<u>P. O. Box 44247</u>	telephone	<u>504-922-0358</u>	
city or town	<u>Baton Rouge</u>	state	<u>LA 70804</u>	

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

 national state X 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

Robert B. DeBlieux

Robert B. DeBlieux

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date January 22, 1987

For NPS use only

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

 in the National Register

date

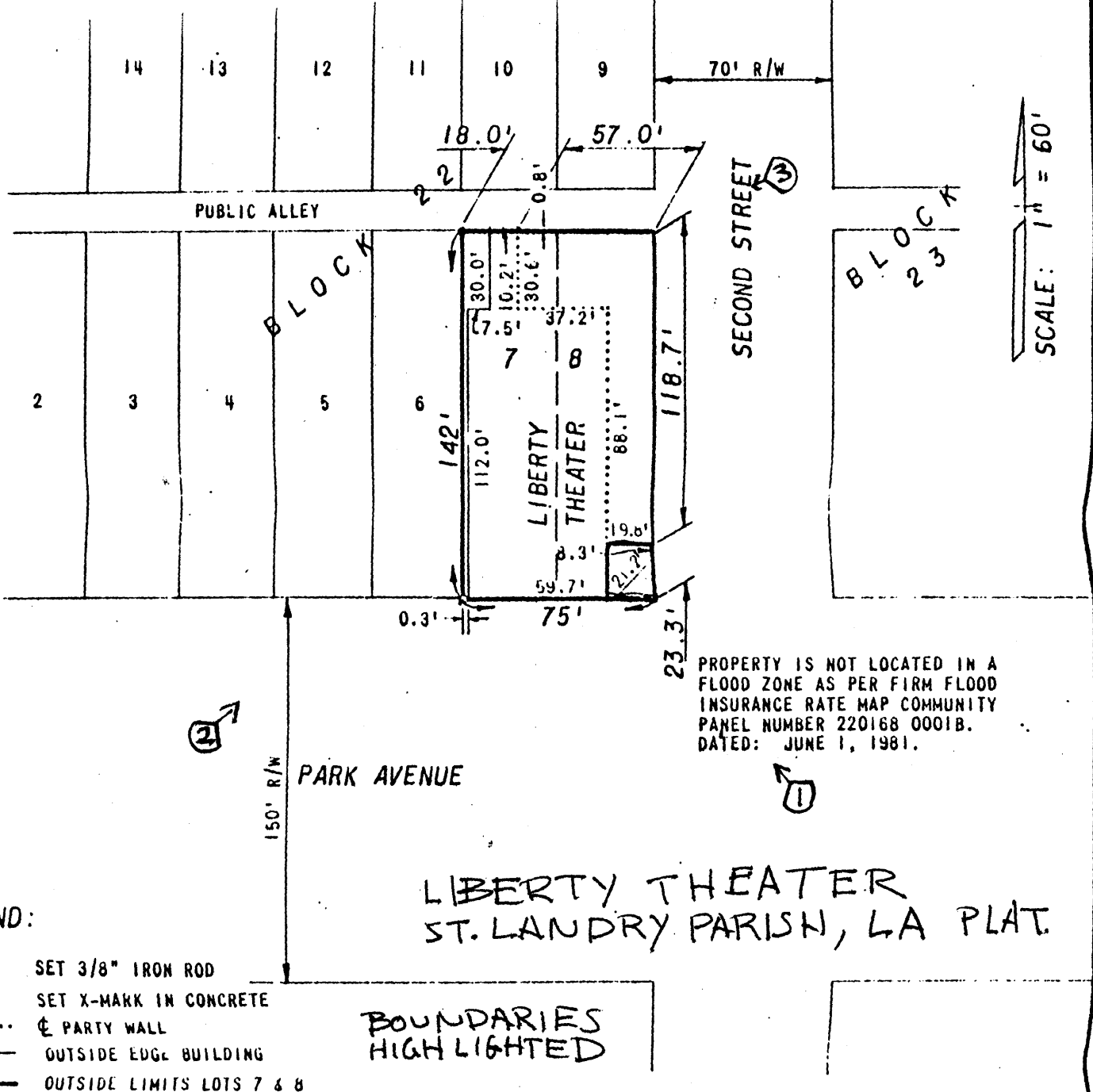
2/19/87

Julius E. Ryan
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration



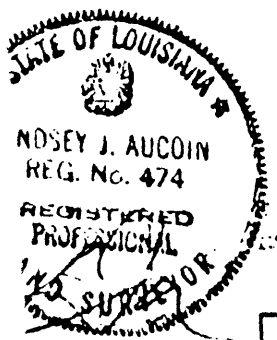
LEGEND:

- SET 3/8" IRON ROD
- SET X-MARK IN CONCRETE
- PARTY WALL
- OUTSIDE EDGE BUILDING
- OUTSIDE LIMITS LOTS 7 & 8

**LIBERTY THEATER
ST. LANDRY PARISH, LA PLAT.**

**BOUNDARIES
HIGHLIGHTED**

MAP OF SURVEY MADE FOR:
CITY OF EUNICE
SITUATED IN LOTS 7 AND 8 WITH
IMPROVEMENTS IN BLOCK 22 ORIGINAL TOWNSITE
TO THE CITY OF EUNICE,
ST. LANDRY PARISH, LOUISIANA



AUCOIN AND ASSOCIATES, INC.
CONSULTING ENGINEERS
AND
LAND SURVEYORS
EUNICE, LOUISIANA

DRAFTSMAN	KOV	DATE	2/20/86
VARIETYPER	LPD	DATE	2/20/86
CHECKED	LJA	DATE	2/20/86