

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 06000216

Date of Listing: March 31, 2006

Property Name: Russell Theatre

County: Mason

State: Kentucky

none
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

for Daniel J. Vivian
Signature of the Keeper

March 31, 2006
Date of Action

Amended Items in Nomination:

Section 8. Statement of Significance

The area of significance is hereby changed to Entertainment/Recreation.

[This change was made in consultation with and approved by the National Register staff of the Kentucky State Historic Preservation Office.]

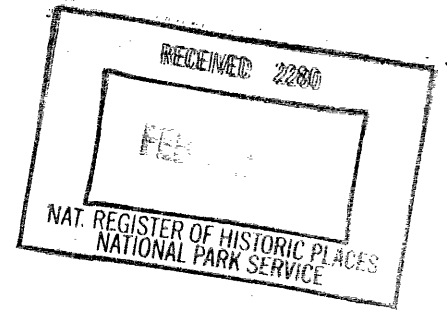
The Kentucky State Historic Preservation Office was notified of this amendment.

DISTRIBUTION:

- National Register property file**
- Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)**

216

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name Russell Theatre

other names/site number MSM-97

2. Location

street & number 9 East Third Street not for publication N/A
city or town Maysville vicinity state Kentucky code KY county Mason code 161
zip code 41056

3. 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 _____ nationally _____ statewide x locally.

David L. Morgan
Signature of certifying official **David L. Morgan, SHPO** Date 2-20-06
Kentucky Heritage Council/State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

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

Signature of commenting 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 Daniel J. Vivian
See continuation sheet.
 determined eligible for the 3/31/06
National Register
See continuation sheet.
 determined not eligible for the _____
National Register
 removed from the National Register _____
other (explain): _____

for
Signature of Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public/local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public/State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public/Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u> structures
<input type="checkbox"/> object		<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u> objects
		<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 1

Name of related multiple property listing N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Recreation and Culture Sub: Theater

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Work-in-progress Sub: N/A

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

Late 19th and Early 20th Century Revivals:

 Spanish Colonial Revival, Mediterranean Revival

Materials

foundation CONCRETE

roof Rubberized membrane

walls BRICK

other

Narrative Description (See continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

- 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

- 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 Recreation _____Period of Significance 1930-1955 _____Significant Dates 1930 _____Significant Person N/A _____Cultural Affiliation N/A _____Architect/Builder Frankel and Curtis, architects _____

Narrative Statement of Significance (See continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References (See 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 of Additional Data

 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	Maysville West Quad
1 17 259379 4280990	3 _____	
2 _____	4 _____	
_____ See continuation sheet.		

Verbal Boundary Description. (See continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (See continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title__Cynthia Johnson_____

organization____N/A_____ date_December 1, 2005_____

street & number_51 Mentelle Park #4_____ telephone_(859) 268-3199_____

city or town__Lexington_____ state_KY_ zip code __40502_____

12. Property Owner

name ____Russell Theatre Foundation_____

street & number_P.O. Box 371_____ telephone_(606) 564-4685_____

city or town__Maysville_____ state_KY_ zip code __41056_____

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1

Russell Theatre
Mason County, KY

General Description

The Russell Theatre (MSM-97) is located at 9 East Third Street in downtown Maysville, seat of Mason County in northeastern Kentucky. The building is near the intersection of Market Street. This major thoroughfare is in the heart of the central business district. A majority of the downtown buildings were constructed before 1930, giving the city a strong 19th century urban character. The site for the theater had originally been in the Russell family and was occupied wholesale grocery warehouses. The property sits within the Maysville Downtown Historic District, which was listed on the National Register March 1, 1982.

The Russell Theatre is a freestanding, three-story building that is oriented in a general southwest direction. The theater has a rectangular footprint of 80' by 165' and is approximately 13,000 square feet. The theater building has a concrete foundation and masonry walls. Steel trusses support a concrete roof that is currently covered with EPDM single ply membrane. The roof form is a shallow gable that is only visible from the rear façade. Narrow walkways run on either side of the east and west elevations. A narrow L-shaped, two-story brick masonry annex is attached at the rear of the building. This building was a portion of the remaining wholesale grocery warehouse that had been left on the site. It was incorporated into the theater and functioned as an area for additional dressing rooms.

Exterior

The main façade has blond brick with a terra cotta tile decorative roof. The façade is punctuated on the ends by piers that rise above the roofline. Each pier is capped with Moorish parapet and topped with an ornamental urn. A projecting marquee and recessed entry are on the street level. The second story is unadorned except for two decorative terra cotta tiles. The third story is dominated with a seven bay loggia with round arches and ornate columns. The central bay of the loggia projects slightly from the elevation. A small wrought iron balcony accents the central bay. A broken pediment with an urn caps the central bay. A series of terra cotta dentils punctuate the eaves.

The ground level of the façade is clad with Rookwood tiles that were produced in Cincinnati. Four large columns with decorative capitals mark the recessed entrance, creating three bays. The central bay has Moorish arch. The ticket booth is located in the center of this central bay. The booth is decorated with Rookwood tiles and has polychromatic tiles covering the floor in the recessed entryway. On either side of the ticket booth are double door entrances into the lobby. Some of the doors retain decorative wrought iron door handles. To the left and right of the ticket booth, the double door entrances to the segregated balcony are recessed into the piers. Four Moorish lanterns are suspended from the ceiling of the recessed entry.

The metal-clad marquee is supported in part by heavy-duty chains symbolically held in terra cotta tiles with faces embedded in the masonry the façade. Ornate metal pieces, a combination of castings and stamped metal, surmount the top of the marquee. Neon lighting outlines the heart-shaped logo with the name "Russell Theatre." A stamped metal ceiling covers the underside surface of the marquee. A single row of incandescent bulbs runs along the perimeter of the three projecting sides.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 2

Russell Theatre
Mason County, KY

The remaining elevations are relatively unornamented. The east and west elevations run the length of the theater. On both elevations, the blond masonry from the piers wraps partially on to the sides. Terra cotta tiles are at the base of the piers. The remaining portions of these elevations are red brick. Engaged pilasters serve as structural ribs along both elevations. The west wall has a pair of metal exit doors. Two small windows on this elevation have been filled with concrete block. The east wall has no fenestration.

The rear elevation is also unornamented except for a narrow, brick chimneystack and four engaged pilasters. The annex is also visible from this elevation. It is a six-bay two-story elevation with boarded window openings. There is no decorative ornamentation and it has a flat roof.

Interior

The interior has a T-shaped lobby area with heavy wooden beams on the ceiling. Stairs on either side of the lobby area lead to the lower balcony. Decorative niches embedded in the walls mark the stairways. Office space and restrooms also flank the lobby area. The main auditorium space is accessed directly from the lobby through two sets of double doors. The decorative Mediterranean elements—featuring balconies, loggia, and windows—in bas-relief, line the east and west walls. The curved stage and orchestra pit are on the north wall. The stage is enframed with decorative Moorish columns on the sides and a loggia that echoes the primary façade on the top. A curved ceiling featured the changing displays of stars, clouds, and the moon.

The two-tiered balcony is aligned along the south wall. The theater seats on both levels are intact. The decorative wall ornamentation is found on the first level balcony, as well as plush seats. The top tier balcony was intended for African Americans who were segregated from the rest of the audience. This balcony level has no ornamentation on the walls and very basic theater seats. The projection booth is also accessed on the balcony and two original projectors are still in place.

Current Condition

Little alteration has occurred to the building since its original construction. The exterior has not been altered except for the removal of the glazing in the third story loggia. During the time that the theater was vacant, a heavy wind and rainstorm ripped off a section of the roof. This allowed a damaged interior gutter to drain into the theater. Exposed to the elements for a long period, the sodden plaster on portions of the west interior wall collapsed into the auditorium. Additionally, the seats in the lower section of the auditorium were sold to help restore another theater. The principal spaces, however, remain in their original form.

The Russell Theatre Foundation, a not-for-profit organization in an effort to restore the theater, purchased the building for \$37,000 in 1996. A new rubber roof was installed on the building to protect it from further damage. The organization hired the architectural firm, KZF from Cincinnati to help with the restoration. The Russell Theatre Foundation is using the restoration plan proposed by KZF in March 2000. The first phase of restoring the marquee was completed in 2002. Further restoration is planned when more funds become available. Individually listing the Russell Theatre to the National Register of Historic will help to highlight the importance of this local entertainment landmark in Maysville.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Russell Theatre
Mason County, KY

Section 8 Page 1

Statement of Significance

The Russell Theatre (MSM-97) in Maysville, Kentucky meets National Register Criterion A, and is significant in the Area of Entertainment. The Russell Theatre is a locally significant movie palace within the context "Movie Theaters in Maysville, Kentucky, 1900 -1955." The Period of Significance is 1930 -1955, which reflects the time that the theater operated as a successful entertainment center. The significant date is 1930 when the Russell Theatre opened to the public. The end date for the period of significance relates to the close of the 50-year period. It also coincides with the decline of the downtown movie theatre, as the television age, suburban movie theaters and drive-in theaters eclipsed the movie palace. The historic Russell Theatre represents the era of the movie palace, which is regarded as the "Golden Age" of movie theaters.¹ The building was placed on the National Register in 1982 within the Maysville Downtown Historic District. This nomination seeks to confer individual listing for the property.

Historic Context: Movie Theaters in Maysville, Kentucky, 1900 - 1950

Research Design

To evaluate the historic significance of the Russell Theatre, and to understand its role in providing local entertainment in Maysville during the context period, a context was required for Maysville's theaters. In order to construct the historic context, primary and secondary sources were sought to gain an understanding of the motion picture industry on a national scale. Various local sources were consulted to develop the theater context for Maysville. The vertical files at the Mason County Museum provided newspaper clippings and accounts concerning the various theaters in Maysville. Local city directories and Sanborn Fire Insurance maps also provided valuable information about these entertainment venues in Maysville.

The Rise of Public Amusements

The idea of modern public amusements was introduced during the last quarter of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Fueled by the increasing industrialization of urban areas and changing labor conditions, citizens of all classes were beginning to acquire leisure time. Public amusements were characterized by their accessibility to people of all means. Public amusements, however, were not available to all citizens since persons of color were either excluded or segregated.²

Prior to this time, entertainment venues were primarily reserved for the wealthy class. The domain of theaters, sporting events, and concerts was populated by those who could afford the time and cost of such amusements. With the introduction of public amusements, theaters, ballparks, bowling alleys, dancehalls, and amusement parks became available to the masses. The key to the commercial success of public amusements was to convey the sense that they were not affiliated with any one particular group. This differentiated them from the lodges, halls, and churches that catered to a specific social group.³

These new public amusements placed an emphasis on wholesomeness, since proprietors of public amusements had an interest in profit; they wanted to make sure the environment was respectable for women and children.

¹ Hall, Ben. *The Best Remaining Seats*, p. 1

² Nawsaw, David. *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements*. p. 2-5

³ Ibid.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Russell Theatre
Mason County, KY

Section 8 Page 2

This widened the available audience for public amusements. These venues sought to separate themselves from male-only entertainments sites such as peep shows or pool halls.⁴

Theaters

One of the most popular forms of entertainment was the theater. Most communities had some sort of permanent facility used specifically for live performances and other public gatherings. Various called an opera house, theater, or town hall, these structures housed a variety of activities. Live performances in the early theaters could include amateur dramatics presented by local theatrical troupes, professional dramatics presented by traveling theatrical troupes, music shows, and individual performances by a magician, hypnotist, or other artist.⁵

During the nineteenth century, class separated theater audiences, with the wealthy sitting in plush box seats and the middling and working class relegated to the "pit" and "gallery".⁶ After the Civil War, theater prices began to rise precipitously. This excluded many of the middling and working class citizens from the touring productions.⁷

To capture this disenfranchised audience, the vaudeville entrepreneur developed shows that were decent and affordable. Vaudeville theaters provided theatrical entertainment in the form of dozens of acts for just a dime. The vaudeville theaters were also open six days a week for as much as twelve hours a day. These theaters were often located in existing commercial buildings, which were converted to include a stage and seating areas. By the 1890s, vaudeville theaters could be found on the main shopping streets of most large and small cities.⁸

The Motion Picture Industry

Coinciding with the maturing of vaudeville at the turn of the century was the creation of motion pictures. Thomas Edison unveiled the Vitascope in 1896, and projected a "living picture" on the screen on Koster and Bial's Music Hall in New York City. From this beginning, movie pictures captured the interest of the country.⁹ Soon, motion pictures or "shorts" began to be shown commercially at established places of public amusement such as vaudeville theaters.¹⁰

The invention of motion pictures served as one of the most significant innovations in communal or mass entertainment. The medium provided inexpensive amusement that could be presented in a public space. Movie theaters quickly became the center of entertainment and leisure time activity across the nation. Particularly in smaller cities, movie houses provided a valuable role in community social life.¹¹

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Morton-Keithly, Linda. "Motion Picture Theaters in Idaho, 1897-1949." National Register MPL, 1998

⁶ Nawsaw, David. *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements*. p. 10-12. Nawsaw points out that African Americans and prostitutes were further segregated in restricted sections of the upper gallery to separate them from the rest of the audience.

⁷ Ibid. p. 12

⁸ Nawsaw, David. *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements*. p. 22-23

⁹ Powers, Robert M. "Movie Palaces of the Tri-Cities." National Register MPL, 1979

¹⁰ Valentine, Maggie. *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk*. p. 5

¹¹ Morton-Keithly, Linda. "Motion Picture Theaters in Idaho, 1897-1949." National Register MPL, 1998

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Russell Theatre
Mason County, KY

Section 8 Page 3

Buildings, which had been constructed or adapted for live performance theater, began sharing the stage with motion pictures. In many cases, these structures intended for live entertainment would add moving pictures to their repertoire as demand for film grew. Little was needed to convert the existing theater for the use of moving pictures; primarily the only elements needed were projection equipment and a screen. The ticket booth, lobby, auditorium, and other public spaces were already in place.¹²

As short motion pictures increased in popularity, this new amusement required its own venue.¹³ Nickelodeons were developed to provide a place to view the "moving pictures" for an inexpensive price of a nickel starting about 1905. By 1910, most cities had opened one or more of these small movie houses, which were generally in a retrofitted existing commercial space.¹⁴ Nickelodeons were characterized by a simple interior décor with benches or hard chairs and projection equipment. The exterior front was generally more eye-catching, with distinctive facades as a method of attracting customers.¹⁵ By the end of World War I, nickelodeons were diminishing in popularity because they could not accommodate the newer feature length motion pictures.¹⁶

During the period of 1904 -1917, a type of theater called a "combination house" emerged. Like the nickelodeon, the combination house offered regular, cheap entertainment, live and film, intended for the working class public.¹⁷ The combination house, however, recognized that the popularity of motion pictures was overtaking vaudeville acts for a source of entertainment. Owners of these theaters increased seating capacities and provided more comfortable accommodations. Interior treatments were also considered with more care, including decorative plasterwork, carved beams, draperies, carpet runners, and ornate lighting fixtures. Exterior facades also received more embellishment with the addition of projecting marquees and recessed entries.¹⁸

As technology advanced, Hollywood movie studios began producing feature length films. These were silent films at first, and then in 1927 sound was introduced in movies. The studios sought to distribute their films in theaters across the country. Paramount, Fox and MGM Studios constructed theaters to show their films exclusively. Movie palaces emerged out of this process, as a way to enhance the movie-going experience.¹⁹ The prime construction years for movie palaces were 1925 to 1930, though they were still being constructed until approximately 1935.²⁰ The "Golden Era of the Movie Palace" reached its peak with the opening of the Roxy in New York City in 1927.²¹ These "palaces" are generally considered the zenith in decorative design for movie theaters. They were intended to bring the opulence and luxury of cathedrals, royal palaces and opera houses to the mass public.²²

¹² Morton-Keithly, Linda. "Motion Picture Theaters in Idaho, 1897-1949." National Register MPL, 1998

¹³ Valentine, Maggie. *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk*. p. 6

¹⁴ Morton-Keithly, Linda. "Motion Picture Theaters in Idaho, 1897-1949."

¹⁵ Austin, Kay. "Movie Theaters in Washington State 1900 - 1948" National Register MPL, 1991

¹⁶ Powers, Robert M. "Movie Palaces of the Tri-Cities." National Register MPL, 1979

¹⁷ Morton-Keithly, Linda. "Motion Picture Theaters in Idaho, 1897-1949."

¹⁸ Austin, Kay. "Movie Theaters in Washington State 1900 - 1948" National Register MPL, 1991

¹⁹ Kinerk, Michael D. and Dennis W. Wilhelm. *Popcorn Palaces: The Art Deco Theater*. p. 15-18.

²⁰ Austin, Kay. "Movie Theaters in Washington State 1900 - 1948" National Register MPL, 1991

²¹ Hall, Ben. *The Best Remaining Seats*, p. 95

²² Austin, Kay. "Movie Theaters in Washington State 1900 - 1948" National Register MPL, 1991

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Russell Theatre
Mason County, KY

Section 8 Page 4

Consequently, the decade of the 1920s was dominated with the construction of hundreds of large, palace-like theaters ranging in styles from Roman temples to Hispano-Persian gardens.²³ Both the exterior and interior treatments exhibited exotic styles. Designers gave special attention to interiors, to create an "atmospheric" experience. This involved the inclusion of special effects like twinkling stars and changing scenery on the ceiling and walls to dramatize the interior.²⁴ This sometimes created more of interest in the theater than in the actual film being featured. Owners saw this as a method of selling more tickets as Marcus Loew emphasized: "We sell tickets to theaters, not movies."²⁵

The movie palace was designed to accommodate large audiences, with the number of seats ranging from 500 to over 1000. As a consequence, movie palaces were large in scale and often times were one of the most prominent structures in a community.²⁶ Emphasis was placed on providing a special experience for the public, so theaters incorporated plush seating, restrooms, and lobby areas.²⁷ The majority of these palaces, though conceived from the outset as movie houses, were actually proper theaters containing large stages, dressing rooms, and other needs for live performances.²⁸

The Depression era saw the end of the grand movie palace. In its place, movie theaters with streamlined designs began to take their place. The theater became more functional, as opulent ornamentation was supplanted by minimalist expressions. The scale and seating capacities were also reduced to be more economical. This trend in movie theater design continued until 1948. Though the movie theater experience had been scaled down, the popularity of the entertainment medium continued.²⁹

Maysville, Kentucky Overview

The city of Maysville is the seat of Mason County, which is located in the Outer Bluegrass region in north-central Kentucky. Geography greatly influenced the city's growth after establishment in the 1780s. Surrounded on three sides by steep wooded slopes and on the fourth by the Ohio River, most of the present city occupies a narrow riparian plain nearly three miles in length and ranging from only 625 to 3400 feet in width. Maysville serves as the commercial, industrial, and agricultural center for the surrounding five Kentucky counties and two Ohio counties. The largest urban centers nearest to Maysville are Cincinnati, 75 miles to the northwest and Lexington, 65 miles to the southwest.³⁰

The Maysville central business district is the core of the area in the city, which was first settled and developed. Situated on the western part of Maysville, the downtown is defined by a grid of streets laid out parallel to the northwest and southeast curve of the Ohio River. The area is essentially 4-1/2 blocks long and 2-1/2 blocks wide. Wall Street marks the core downtown area's western edge, while its northern extent is marked by West Front Street and McDonald Parkway. The central business district's eastern and southern boundaries generally

²³ Powers, Robert M. "Movie Palaces of the Tri-Cities." National Register MPL, 1979

²⁴ Valentine, Maggie. *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk*. p. 54-55

²⁵ Jones, Janna. *The Southern Movie Palace: Rise, Fall and Resurrection*. P. 18

²⁶ Austin, Kay. "Movie Theaters in Washington State 1900 - 1948" National Register MPL, 1991

²⁷ Morton-Keithly, Linda. "Motion Picture Theaters in Idaho, 1897-1949." National Register MPL, 1998

²⁸ Morton-Keithly, Linda. "Motion Picture Theaters in Idaho, 1897-1949." National Register MPL, 1998

²⁹ Austin, Kay. "Movie Theaters in Washington State 1900 - 1948" National Register MPL, 1991

³⁰ Patrick, Vanessa E. "Maysville Downtown Historic District" National Register Nomination 1982.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Russell Theatre
Mason County, KY

Section 8 Page 5

conform to the rear property lines of buildings on the east side of Limestone Street and the south side of Third Street respectively. Over 60% of the buildings in the central business are devoted to a commercial use.³¹

By 1901, Maysville's population was 9000;³² by 1914 it had risen to 10,000.³³ Maysville supported numerous industries, including cotton mills, garment factories, shoe factories, a large plow factory, brick plants, woodworking plants, and several large distilleries. By 1916, Maysville also boasted the second largest loose-leaf tobacco market in Kentucky.³⁴ The 28 clubs and lodges located in Maysville by 1916 served as a testimony of the city's prominence.³⁵

Maysville's status as an industrial and social center of the region made it a center for entertainment opportunities. During the context period, the city had a variety of amusements for the public, including bowling alleys, billiard and pool halls, a baseball park, a skating rink, city parks, a racetrack, a gymnasium, and numerous theaters.³⁶ Throughout this time period, the theaters were a prevalent source of entertainment in Maysville.

Maysville Movie Theaters

The first theater in Maysville actually opened in 1817. It was a live-performance theater that featured both local and traveling theatrical troupes. The theater was located at the northwest corner of 2nd and Wall Street (originally Fish Street). A devastating fire destroyed the theater in 1850.³⁷

The Opera House was constructed to replace the theater destroyed by the 1850 fire. It originally opened in 1851, located at 116 West 2nd Street. The Opera House became the center of community entertainment by hosting stage performances, dramatic theater, minstrel shows and vaudeville acts. It also served as a community auditorium where school graduations, lectures, patriotic rallies and political debates were held.³⁸ It was enlarged in 1884, doubling the seating capacity to 900 seats.³⁹ The theater burned in 1898.⁴⁰

Once again, the theater was rebuilt and was named the Washington Opera Theatre. It continued to provide the same entertainments as the previously. In 1910, the Washington Opera Theatre opened a "first-class moving picture show" sponsored by William C. Walker.⁴¹ The theater converted into a "movie house" placing less emphasis on theatrical performances. By the late 1920s, only one live performance was featured.⁴² The Washington Opera House continued to show movies until 1963, when it was put up for sale.⁴³

³¹ Patrick, Vanessa E. "Maysville Downtown Historic District" National Register Nomination 1982.

³² Maysville, KY Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1901

³³ Maysville, KY Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1914

³⁴ Caron's 1916-1918 City Directory of the City of Maysville, p. 10

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Maysville City Directories 1897-1958

³⁷ "History of the Washington Opera Theatre" p. 1

³⁸ "Down Memory Lane...Opera House Story Told," p. 1

³⁹ "History of the Washington Opera Theatre" p. 1

⁴⁰ Calvert, Jean and John Klee. *Maysville, Kentucky: From Past to Present in Pictures* p. 176

⁴¹ "Washington Opera House Artistic Moving Pictures" p. 1

⁴² "Down Memory Lane...Opera House Story Told," p. 2

⁴³ Ibid.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Russell Theatre
Mason County, KY

Section 8 Page 6

Maysville's first nickelodeon was named the Theatorium. It was located in an existing commercial building at the northeast corner of 2nd and Sutton Streets.⁴⁴ The Theatorium opened in 1907 and was owned by James W. Outten. Advertisements for the nickelodeon promised, "All the latest and best moving pictures and illustrated songs" and "we cater to the ladies and children."⁴⁵ The Theatorium remained in operation only for a short time, as it did not appear in the 1914 City Directory.

Three other theaters listed in the city directories included the Gem Theater, the Pastime Theater and the Hollywood Theater. All three were located in existing commercial buildings in the central business district. The Gem Theater appears in the 1914 city directory and is listed at 21 West 2nd Street. By 1924, the Gem Theater had closed. It operated as a nickelodeon⁴⁶

The Pastime Theater opened in April of 1909 and was managed by T. Neal Hubbard. The Pastime billed itself as "a beautiful, modern and best arranged moving picture theater."⁴⁷ Located in the Knights of Pythias building, it had a seating capacity of 225 seats. The theater also featured electric lights and frescoed walls.⁴⁸ The theater was situated across the street from the Washington Opera Theatre at 113 West 2nd Street, which served as direct competition. The Pastime Theater was successful until it was sold in 1926.

T. Neal Hubbard, who managed the Pastime, purchased it from the owner Charles Triebel. He renamed the theater the "Hollywood Theater."⁴⁹ The Hollywood Theater showed the first "talkie" in 1929 called "Should A Girl Marry."⁵⁰ The Hollywood was purchased by the Washington Opera Theatre in 1938 and then closed in 1941.⁵¹

Evaluation of the Historic Significance of the Russell Theatre

In 1929, local businessman Col. J.B. Russell envisioned a new kind of theater for Maysville. He built the Russell Theatre as a movie palace for the relatively small town. He articulated his desire for a grand theater, or at least promoted his new enterprise, saying, "What the Roxy is to New York, the Russell will be to Maysville."⁵² Referring to the well-known movie palace of the era, Col. J.B. Russell sought to make his theater "handsome, luxurious and fireproof."⁵³ At that time, the Russell Theatre became the first purpose-built theater in Maysville.

He hired the Lexington architectural firm, Frankel and Curtis, to design the movie palace.⁵⁴ The theater occupied the site of a former wholesale grocery warehouse on 9 East Third Street.⁵⁵ Constructed at a cost of \$125,000, the theater was built of steel, concrete, brick and terra cotta. The exterior exhibited many visual cues of the exotic and of luxury.

⁴⁴ Maysville, KY Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1908

⁴⁵ Calvert, Jean and John Klee. *Maysville, Kentucky: From Past to Present in Pictures* p. 131

⁴⁶ *Caron's 1924 City Directory of the City of Maysville*

⁴⁷ "The Pastime Theater," p. 8

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ "T. Neal Hubbard Retired Theatre Owner, Is Dead," p.1

⁵⁰ "Hollywood Theater Shows First Talkie" p. unknown

⁵¹ Mason County Museum Vertical Files: Theaters

⁵² Calvert, Jean and John Klee. *Maysville, Kentucky: From Past to Present in Pictures* p. 190

⁵³ Kelly, William. "Weather Takes Its Toll on Theater."

⁵⁴ Furby, Brian Matthew. "Uniqueness of the Russell Theatre Adds to Downtown."

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Russell Theatre
Mason County, KY

Section 8 Page 7

The building featured a Spanish-Moorish Revival style with a tower on either end of the principal facade.⁵⁶ The box office was clad with Rookwood tiles, and Moorish lanterns illuminated the recessed entrance. A large marquee was suspended above the sidewalk and held in place with the faces of lions. The theater's interior designer, Ralph Culpepper, created an appropriately atmospheric auditorium space. A Mediterranean garden complete with ivied colonnades, Lombardy poplars, and literary busts set into wall niches. The theater was also atmospheric with the usual twinkling stars and flying clouds on the ceiling. A rainbow would appear over the stage when a movie ended. The auditorium featured an orchestra pit in front of a curved stage.

The theater's less-obvious public side, however, indicate the owner's need for cost-cutting measures to balance the impression of opulence. The dressing rooms were located beneath the stage, immediately off stage right. This forced liver performers using the state to exit, stage left. The theater owner converted the remnants of the wholesale grocery warehouse building behind the theater to provide needed additional space for dressing rooms.

Inside the recessed entrance, the lobby area contained restrooms and stairs to the lower balcony. The 700-seat auditorium had two balconies. The uppermost balcony was intended as segregated seating for African Americans. This area was accessed on the exterior by separate entrances flanking either side of the building. A separate restroom was also located on this balcony. The projection booth was situated in the middle of the lower balcony.

The Russell opened as an independent theater on December 4, 1930 with the movie "Whoopie" starring Eddie Cantor. An advertisement for the Russell proclaimed that the theater was "the showplace of the show world" and "the deluxe house, luxurious entertainment." Russell continued to operate the theater until 1935.

At that time, the Schine Group took over operations and leased the building from the Russell family. The theater remained successful during this tenure and continued to offer first run films. Native daughter, Rosemary Clooney, opened the world premiere of her movie "The Stars are Singing" at the Russell in 1953.⁵⁷

In the early 1970s, the Panther Group became managers of the theater. It was during this time that the interior was painted, replacing the original jewel tone colors with coats of bright, primary colors. Despite the change in color scheme, the lobby, main auditorium space, and ornamentation remained intact. The exterior also remained unaltered.⁵⁸

The Panther Group continued to operate the Russell Theatre until it closed in 1983. In the years that followed, the Russell served the community as a restaurant, a used furniture store, a used clothing store, and finally a newspaper filler operation. Eventually, the building closed completely.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Maysville, KY Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1914

⁵⁶ Calvert, Jean and John Klee. *Maysville, Kentucky: From Past to Present in Pictures* p. 190

⁵⁷ Calvert, Jean and John Klee. *Maysville, Kentucky: From Past to Present in Pictures* p. 139

⁵⁸ Furby, Brian Matthew. "Uniqueness of the Russell Theatre Adds to Downtown."

⁵⁹ Furby, Brian Matthew. "Uniqueness of the Russell Theatre Adds to Downtown."

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Russell Theatre
Mason County, KY

Section 8 Page 8

General Integrity Considerations for Theaters in Maysville

These integrity specifications are based upon the Registration Requirements found in the Multiple Property form for "Movie Theaters in Washington State 1900 - 1948".⁶⁰ Since most surviving movie theaters are associated with a nation-wide phenomenon, it is believed that adoption of general integrity perspectives can prove appropriate in many cases. These general attitudes, however, must be applied to the local context. Thus, to be considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, a Maysville movie theater must convey its historic character in both physical and associative ways. Eligible movie theaters should possess a high level of integrity in location, setting, design, as well as integrity of feeling and association.

An eligible movie theater will be said to have a high level of integrity of **location** if the theater is in its original location. Theaters during the context period were located in central business districts. The **setting** must also retain a high level of integrity. A sufficient amount of the surrounding downtown core must be present. In particular, movie palaces were prominent buildings in a central business district. The requisite setting should provide an architectural context that distinguishes the movie palace from the surrounding buildings.

An eligible movie theater will be said to have a high level of integrity of **design** if the original scale, massing, exterior cladding, ornamentation, and fenestration remain intact. The distinct character of a movie palace requires that the scale and massing of the theater be unaltered. Additionally, the unique character of a movie palace is expressed in its architectural style often associated with a particular exotic revival design. The original architectural style must remain largely unaltered. The interior spatial relationships associated with the movie palace must be retained. Lobbies, lounges, balconies and the auditorium spaces should be unaltered.

An eligible movie theater will be said to have a high level of integrity of **feeling and association** if the primary features that define a theater are present. Character-defining elements which identify a theater, including distinctive facades, ticket booths, projecting marquees, recessed entryways, and decorative lighting treatments, are integral to establishing the integrity of feeling and association. Since the interiors of movie palaces played a pivotal role in this theater property type, character-defining features such as decorative ornamentation, atmospheric qualities, stages, screens, projection booths and balconies must also be evident. These features serve to convey the feeling and association that is distinct to the movie palace.

Evaluation of the Integrity of Russell Theatre

The historic significance of the Russell Theatre is conveyed through its high level of integrity of location, setting, design and feeling and association. The **location** for the Russell Theatre is the same as it was when it first opened for business in 1930. The theater has not been moved. The Russell is located at 9 East Third Street, which is near Market Street in the center of the central business district. The historic **setting** of the Russell Theater has a high degree of integrity. Many of the surrounding buildings were constructed before 1930.⁶¹ The Russell is particularly prominent due to its distinct architectural style.

⁶⁰ Austin, Kay. "Movie Theaters in Washington State 1900 - 1948"

⁶¹ Patrick, Vanessa E. "Maysville Downtown Historic District" National Register Nomination 1982.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Russell Theatre
Mason County, KY

Section 8 Page 9

The Russell Theatre retains a level of integrity in **design**. The original scale and massing of the theater are intact. The Spanish-Moorish Revival architectural style is quite evident and the stylistic features have been retained. The glazing of the window in the theater's upper story has been removed but the original window openings and ornamentation are intact. A non-ornamented brick building situated behind the rear of the theater was annexed to provide more dressing room space. This addition does not impact the overall design, scale or massing of the main theater. It is not visible from the principal façade and can only be seen on from an alley on the east side of the theater and from the rear side which faces 2nd Street. The interior design of the Russell has remained largely unaltered. All the principal spaces, including the lobby, auditorium, balconies and projection booth, are retained and undivided. Additionally, original circulation routes remain in place, including the exterior stairs to the segregated balcony.

A high level of integrity in **feeling** and **association** is present in the Russell Theatre. The principal elements associated with an historic movie theater are intact. The character-defining exterior features, such as the projecting marquee, recessed entry, ticket booth, and decorative lighting, remain in place. The distinctive Spanish-Moorish façade also enhances the feeling and association of the movie-palace property type. Though there has been some loss of interior finish due to water damage, a large majority of these decorative features are intact. The interior of the auditorium retains the atmospheric Mediterranean garden features, original stage, starry ceiling, and ornate balconies and alcoves, all of which convey a sense of the movie palace experience as it was originally intended.

These elements of integrity serve to underscore the historic significance of the Russell Theatre. The Russell Theatre was Maysville's way to participate in a nation-wide development in theater design during the 1920s. For the citizens of Maysville, the theater played an integral role in the social and cultural environment of the city. The Russell Theatre has become an enduring landmark and testimony to the "Golden Era" of movie theaters in Maysville. The Russell Theatre's historic significance as a movie palace in Maysville, Kentucky establishes that it should be individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 9 Page 1

Russell Theatre
Mason County, KY

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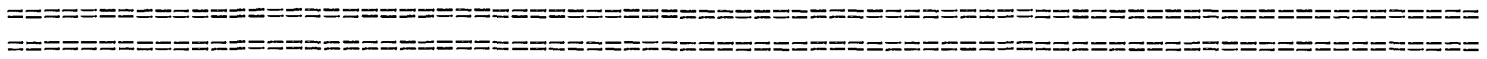
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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 10 Page 1

Russell Theatre
Mason County, KY



Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries of the Russell Theatre are indicated from the deed description dated April 5, 1996 in Deed Book 264, page 370 housed in the Mason County Clerk's office:

Parcel No. 1: The certain lot of ground situated in Maysville, Kentucky and fronting on the north side of Third Street between Market and Limestone Streets 33 feet, and running back north the same width one-half way to Second Street.

Parcel No. 2: The certain lot of ground situated on the North side of Third Street in Maysville, Kentucky, fronting 481/2 feet on said street and extending back therefrom same width 165 feet, and bounded on the west by R.H. Newell's lot (now Russell) and on the east by the Wilson property, formerly known as the Cooper Shop lot (now Willey).

The foregoing property however, is subject to the off-conveyance and there is hereby excepted therefrom that portion of the second parcel which was conveyed by J. Barbour Russell, et ux, to Anna S. Mitchell by deed dated June 2, 1949, recorded in Deed Book 147, page 2, said Clerk's records, and which exception is described as follows, to-wit:

That certain brick building thereon, on the north side of East Third Street, Maysville, Mason County, Kentucky, between Market Street and Limestone Streets, described as follows:

Beginning in the north dedication line of East Third Street at a point corner to Willey, which point is 83 feet 8 inches west of the west right of way line of Cherry Alley; thence westwardly with this north dedication line of East Third Street and with the face of the brick building thereon 17 feet 6-5/8 inches; thence northwardly with the west face of said building and at an interior angle of 90 degrees 6 feet 2-1/8 inches; thence eastwardly and at an interior angle of 90 degrees 4-3/8 inches; thence northwardly and at an interior angle of 258 degrees and 57 minutes 54 feet 1-5/8 inches; thence westwardly and at an interior angle of 270 degrees 1 foot 2 inches; thence northwardly and at an interior angle of 90 degrees 35 feet 4 inches; thence eastwardly and at an interior angle 90 degrees 5 feet 5 inches; thence northwardly and at an interior angle of 270 degrees 3 feet 5 inches to a point in the plane of the south wall of the grantor's brick warehouse; thence eastwardly with this plane and passing through a concrete block wall at an interior angle of 90 degrees 12 feet 11-1/4 inches to a point corner to Willey; thence southwardly and with the east face of the building on this lot hereby conveyed and at an interior angle of 90 degrees 98 feet 7-1/4 inches to the beginning; together with the entrance and exits thereto, both front and side, as they presently exist in the building on said lot, and appurtenances thereto belonging.

This property hereby conveyed is that property upon which is situated the building known as the Russell Theatre, together with the building in the rear or north thereof.

Verbal Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes all parcels historically associated with the Russell Theatre and is occupied by the structure. This acreage maintains the integrity of setting and location and is appropriate for nomination.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 10 Page 2

Russell Theatre
Mason County, KY

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Additional Documentation

Maps:

Map 1 USGS topographic map showing location of property.

Map 2 PVA map showing property boundaries.

Historic Photos

Figure 1 1931 photograph showing the interior of Russell Theatre showing stage and screen area

Figure 2 1931 photograph showing the interior of Russell Theatre showing the east wall

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section _Misc._ Page _1_

Russell Theatre
Mason County, KY

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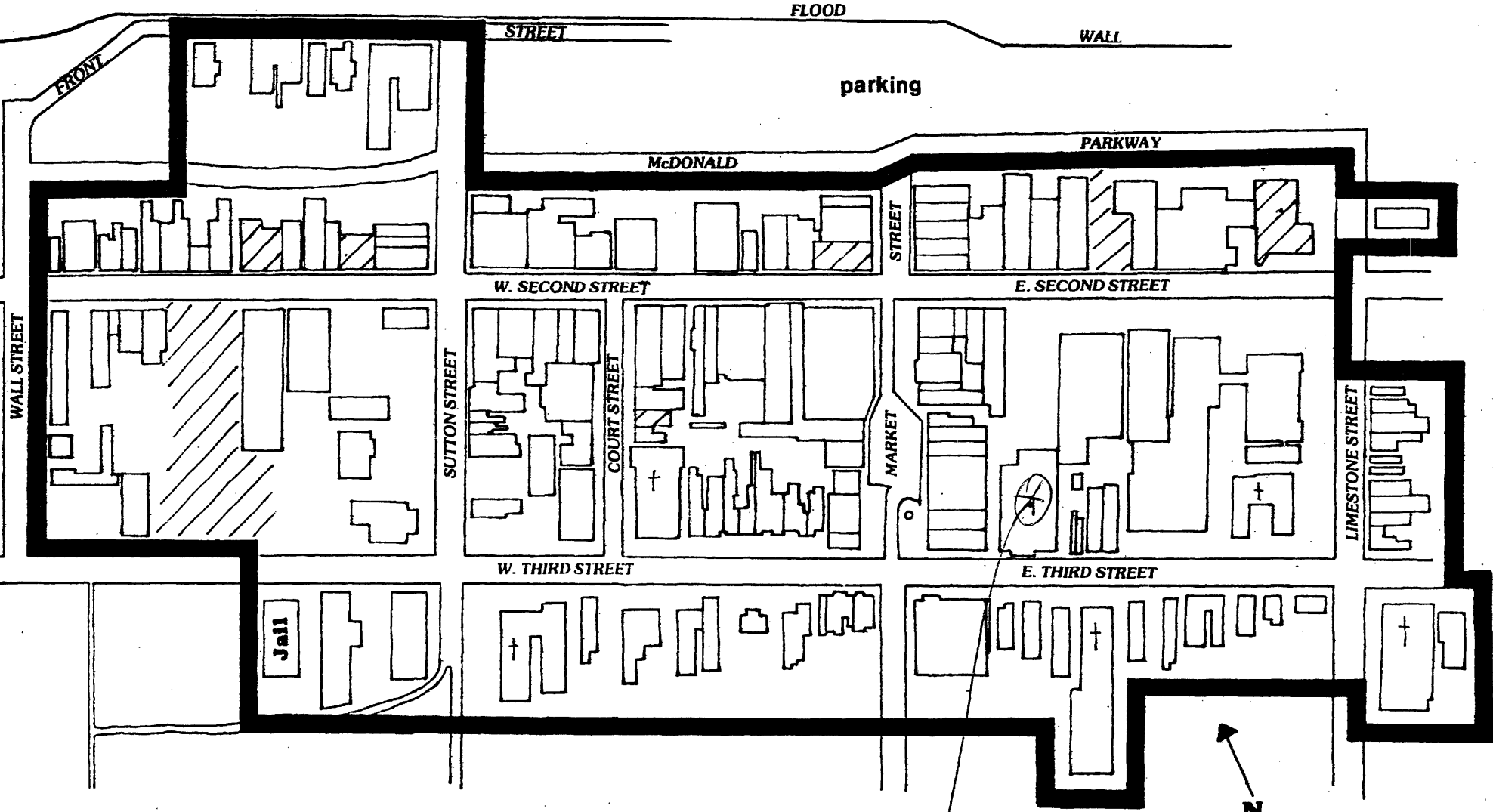
Photo Key

All photographs represent the building, streetscape features and surrounding geographical context of Russell Theatre. The property is located at 9 East Third Street in Maysville, Kentucky. Cynthia Johnson took all photographs on November 8, 2005 and the negatives remain in her possession.

- 1 Looking northwest at the south elevation showing the primary facade.
- 2 Looking northwest at the south elevation showing a detail of the third story loggia detail.
- 3 Looking northwest at the south elevation showing a detail of the marquee.
- 4 Looking east showing the south facade's recessed entry.
- 5 Looking north at the south elevation showing the ticket booth, Moorish light fixtures and main entrances.
- 6 Looking north at the south elevation showing a detail of the ticket booth with the Rookwood tiles.
- 7 Looking west at the south elevation's recessed entry with a detail of the doors that lead to the segregated gallery.
- 8 Looking southwest at the east elevation from Cherry Alley.
- 9 Looking northeast at the west elevation.
- 10 Looking south at the north elevation from Second Street. The two story masonry building is the annex to the Russell Theatre.
- 11 Looking east at the intersection of Market and Third Streets. The Russell Theatre is shown in its historic setting.
- 12 Looking northwest at the south elevation and surrounding buildings along Third Street.

MAYSVILLE DOWNTOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT

← OHIO RIVER



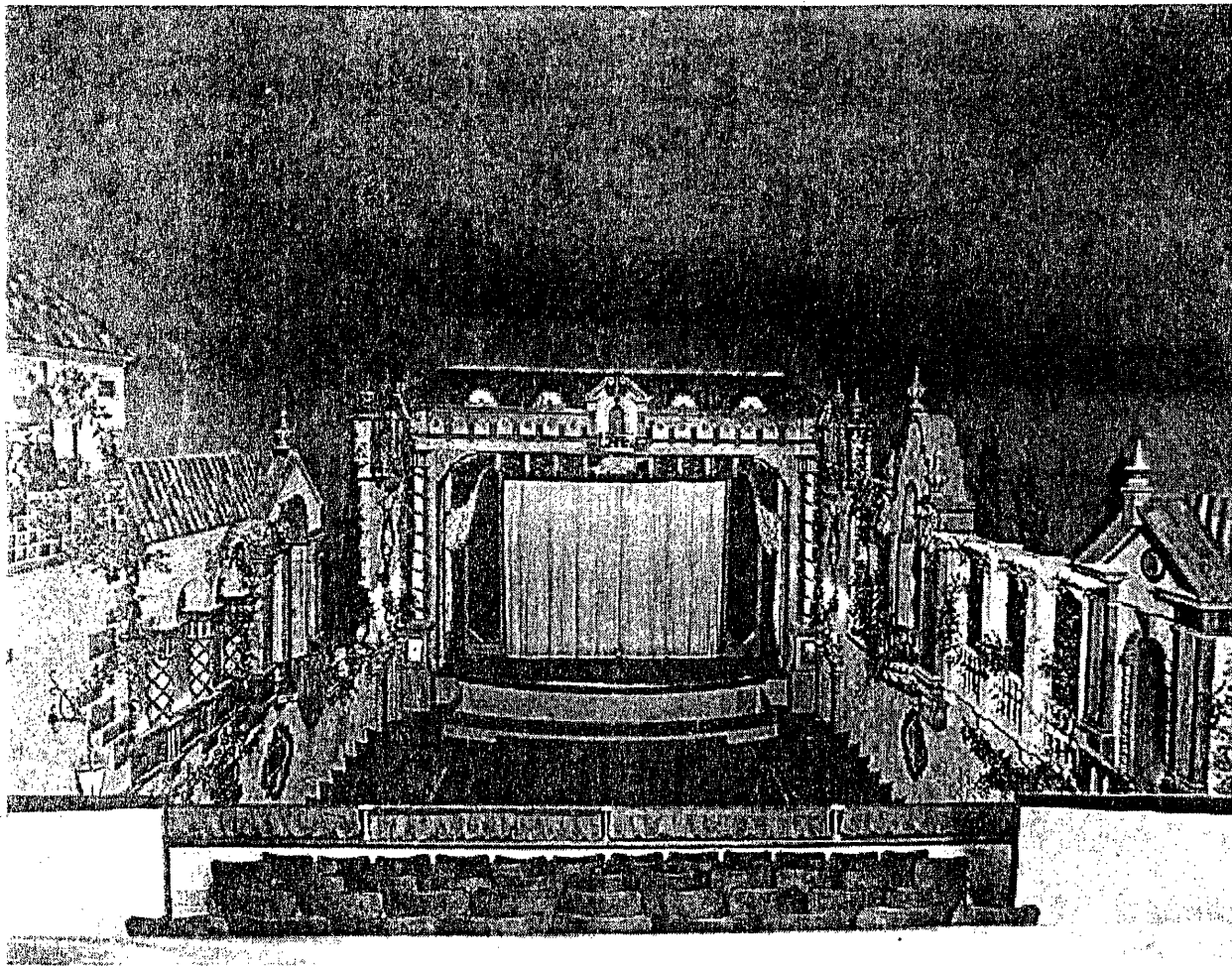
Though simplified above, the historic district boundary actually conforms to the property boundaries of those buildings shown at the north, east, and south.

Russell Theatre

scale: 1 inch = 200 feet

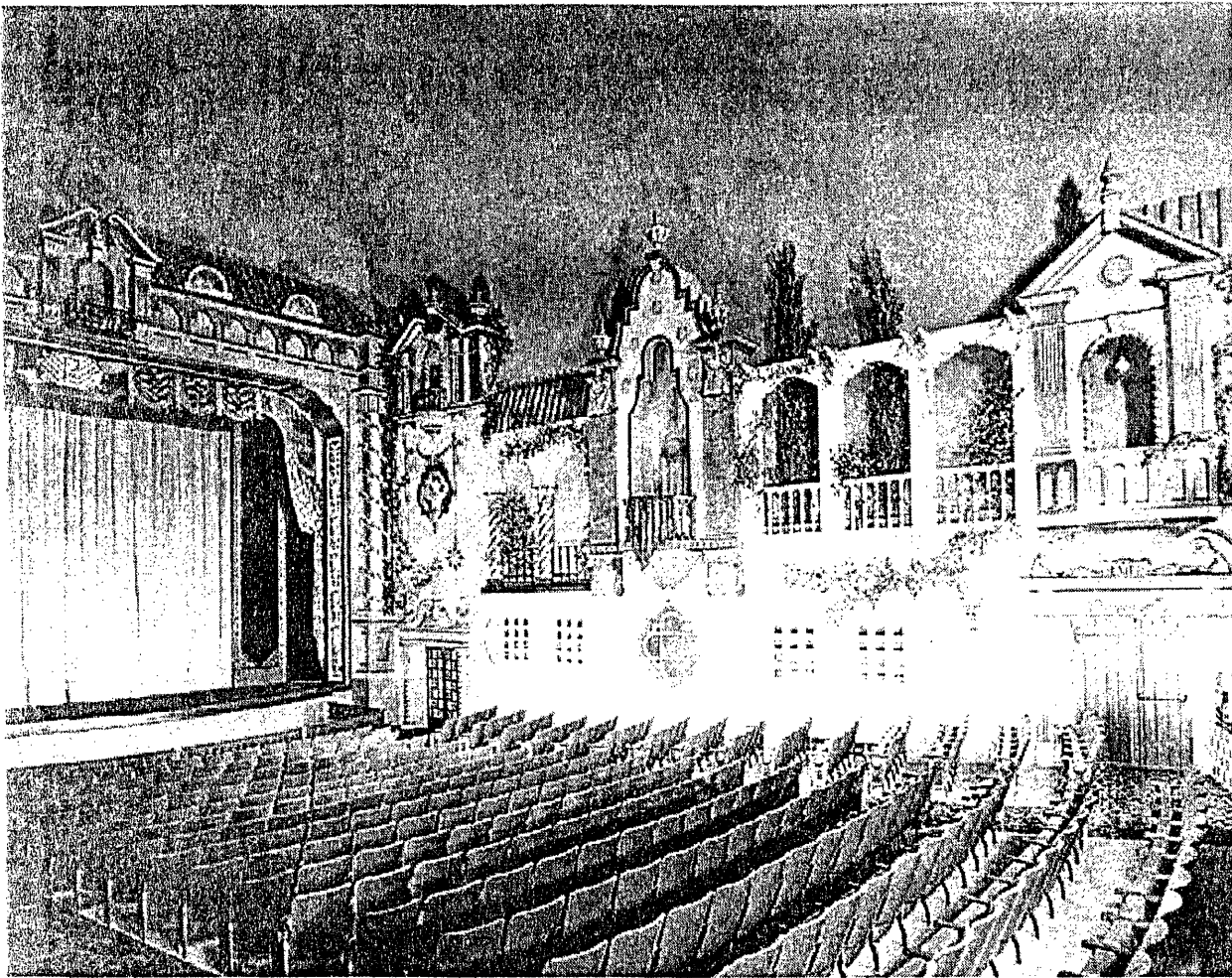
 incompatible intrusion





MUSEUM CENTER
215 Sutton Street
Maysville, KY 41056

Figure 1



MUSEUM CENTER
215 Sutton Street
Maysville, KY 41056

Figure 2

1931 JAN