

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

OCT 8 1987

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16).

1. Name of Property

historic name Lincoln Theater and Commercial Block other names/site number n/a

2. Location

street & number 301-329 Kincaid St./710-740 First St. city, town Mt. Vernon state Washington code 053 county Skagit code 057 zip code 98273

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: private (checked), public-local, public-State, public-Federal. Category of Property: building(s) (checked), district, site, structure, object. Number of Resources within Property: Contributing 1, Noncontributing 0, Total 1.

Name of related multiple property listing: n/a. Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0.

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. See continuation sheet. Signature of certifying official: Jacob E. [Signature] Washington State Office of Archaeology & Historic Preservation. Date: 9/29/87.

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet. Signature of commenting or other official: Date: State or Federal agency and bureau:

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is: entered in the National Register. (checked) See continuation sheet. determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet. determined not eligible for the National Register. removed from the National Register. other, (explain:). Signature of the Keeper: [Signature] Date of Action: 11-5-87.

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture: TheaterCommerce/Trade: Specialty Stores

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Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture: TheaterCommerce/Trade: Specialty Stores

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals:Renaissance Revival

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Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concretewalls ConcreteBrick; common constructionroof Other: compositionother \_\_\_\_\_

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Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Lincoln Theater and adjacent commercial block is a blunt wedge-shaped building which occupies half of a city block in downtown Mount Vernon. The two and one-half story theater, designed in a modified Mediterranean Renaissance style, is located on the north-west third of the property with a one story block of storefronts flanking the theater entrance and continuing south on First Street and east on Kincaid Street. The other half of the block is occupied by various commercial and office structures not included in this nomination. At the center of the block, abutting the north side of the theater, is a narrow alley which provides theater egress and freight access. Another pedestrian alley runs behind the rear (east) exit of the theater and penetrates the storefront block at 315 Kincaid.

The Lincoln Theater is built of common frame construction, veneered with brick and complemented with terra cotta ornament. The front (west) facade of the theater dominates the design. Above the marquee, the facade is divided into three panels separated by thin engaged terra cotta colonettes which rise from a terra cotta sill course through a terra cotta cornice molding to the parapet. The central panel is faced with stretcher bond brick punctuated by a pair of double-tiered multi-paned casement windows set within round arch frames. The frames are composed of fluted terra cotta columns, round heads, and lunettes ornamented with a shield above crossed swords. The tiers of windows are separated by terra cotta spandrels.

Blind panels faced with a veneer of basketweave brick flank the central panel. The side panels are outlined with terra cotta colonettes and a terra cotta frieze. Above the frieze, a thin terra cotta cornice, with modillions, runs across the facade. Above the cornice, a crenelated parapet is faced with basketweave brick and ornamented with decorative shields in terra cotta panels, vertical terra cotta moldings, and terra cotta coping and finials.

On the street level below the marquee, the theater has a recessed entry with two double doors with glazed upper panels. The metal marquee, which is suspended from the wall above, replaced the original about ten years after construction and the historic "Lincoln" sign (which was not contemporary with original construction) has been removed. The floor of the entry bay is tiled and originally an ornate freestanding ticket booth stood in the center of the entry. The booth was removed about ten years after construction.

A flat roof one story commercial block surrounds the theater. The block is a series of storefronts composed of plate glass display windows on either side of a recessed central entry. The storefronts are separated by brick piers with terra cotta capitals ornamented with rosettes. Bulkheads beneath the windows are faced in tile and banded transom windows (with vertical mullions) run across the top of the windows. Some transoms have been

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covered with nonhistoric materials. A crenelated parapet with terra cotta coping spans the commercial block. An arched entry bay on the Kincaid Street elevation penetrates the commercial block and provides access to the rear of the theater. The shop fronts are sheltered by a continuous canopy roof which is held in place by tie rods anchored in polychrome rosettes set in the parapet above. The canopy retains its original rope molding detail. Most of the original storefront doors have been replaced and one storefront has been covered with aluminum.

Although the interiors of the shops retain few distinctive features, the lobby and auditorium of the theater still reflect much of their historic character. The entry lobby is relatively small but made to feel larger by the addition of a pair of "Spanish" framed mirrors. The south frame now holds the ticket booth (installed when the outside booth was removed) and the mirror has been relocated behind the ticket seller's desk; the north mirror is still in place. Directly opposite the double doors, where the office used to be, is a concession stand constructed after the period of significance. To either side of the concession stand are the restrooms which remain in original condition except for the floor covering.

Two ramps lead from either side of the lobby to the auditorium, entering the space at midpoint along the side aisles. The auditorium is a rectangular space, with a stage at the east end and the slightly expanded projectionist's booth along the west wall. The booth is built of fireproof steel and has been expanded with a closet underneath. The original 700 wooden seats were removed and replaced with 500 upholstered seats after the period of significance. The original chandeliers have been removed. The walls of the auditorium and lobby are faced in a decorative plaster finish, with alternating rough and smooth faced sections, intended to suggest travertine. Slight water damage is visible in the plaster ceiling. Five false timber beams span the ceiling and are "supported" by piers along the side walls. The beams and piers are ornamented with decorative stencilling in a classical motif. The side walls of the theater curve inward at the east end of the auditorium to enframe the proscenium stage and are pierced with lattice-like grills which cover the organ lofts. The stage is 42 feet wide, and 15 1/2 feet deep. Two small dressing rooms flank the stage. Beneath the auditorium is a full basement with boiler room, workshops, and storage spaces.

Perhaps the most notable feature of the interior is the Wurlitzer Organ which is centered below the stage. The organ, a D Special Model, was one of about 200 built and one of only four of the type remaining at the original location. The console is an excellent example of a two-manual, seven-rank organ. The organ creates a full range of sounds, including orchestral music and special effects like car horns, train whistles, and bird songs. Cathedral chimes are located on the columns along the side walls; the chimes light up when played. The organ loft on the south wall originally housed all the pipes; recently, the percussion section was moved to the north loft to provide better sound. Since 1977, the Peace Arch Organ Society has been restoring the instrument and returned it to working order.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)  
Entertainment/Recreation

Period of Significance  
1926 - 1937

Significant Dates  
1926 - 1937

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation  
n/a

Significant Person  
n/a

Architect/Builder  
William Aitken, architect  
Alexander and McNeil, contractor

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Lincoln Theater was the premiere center of entertainment in Mount Vernon, Washington, from its construction in 1926 until the 1980s. Designed in a modified Renaissance Revival style by Seattle architect William Aitken, the theater was built to accommodate both live stage and film presentations, and included a 700 seat auditorium with Spanish period decor, a proscenium stage, and a giant Wurlitzer pipe organ. On opening night, the theater was hailed as "unrivalled" in the region in its amenities and for the next 50 years it was the leading Skagit County showcase for vaudeville acts, travelling road shows, local musical concerts, and big screen Hollywood features. The adjoining one-story commercial block was constructed at the same time as the theater, creating the only mixed-use commercial development in the city in the era.

Historical Background: The Lincoln Theater and commercial block was built on the site of Captain David Decatur's homestead by Decatur's son-in-law, Seattle businessman Elden Weigel Pollock. Pollock had been sent to Mount Vernon before the turn of the century by his employer, the Seattle Post Intelligencer, to establish a Republican newspaper. While in Mount Vernon, Pollock met and married Decatur's daughter; later, he travelled to Alaska for the Gold Rush and returned to Seattle in 1902 where he established what became a highly successful appraisal business.

The profits from Pollock's business provided capital for construction of the Lincoln Theater on his father-in-law's land. The project was unique in the city, combining Mount Vernon's first full sized motion picture palace with a low scale block of storefronts which could house up to 12 businesses. Pollock's associate, E.A. Halberg, managed the theater and was largely responsible for the special features of the facility, including the Wurlitzer organ and the special lighting which was synchronized with the performances.

Construction of the building was expensive, costing \$100,000 for the theater, an additional \$25,000 for the commercial block, and almost \$39,000 for the interior finishes, furnishings, and equipment. The size of the venture was matched by the enthusiasm of the opening night crowd which sold out two shows, spilled into the street, and blocked traffic in the downtown area. A special edition of the local newspapers celebrated the new theater, businessmen predicted that the show house would attract new visitors and new money to the Mount Vernon business district, and theater operators from as far away as Tacoma, Puyallup, and Aberdeen came to observe the facility first-hand.

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

- "An Illustrated History of Skagit and Snohomish Counties, Washington," Interstate Publishing Co., 1906.
- "Big Wurlitzer All But Talks," Mount Vernon Argus, May 13, 1926, Special Section.
- "Crowds Greet New Theater," Mount Vernon Argus, April 22, 1926.
- "Finest in West For Cities Near This Size; Some Peeps Behind Scenes," Mount Vernon Argus, May 13, 1926, Special Section.
- "Lincoln Theater Wins Coastwide Fame," Mount Vernon Argus, May 13, 1926, Special Section.
- Naylor, David, American Picture Palaces: The Architecture of Fantasy, Van Nostrand Reinhold, New York, 1981.
- "\$160 A Week for Payroll," Mount Vernon Argus, May 13, 1926, Special Section.
- Pollock, Elden D., 211 South Sixth, Mount Vernon, Washington, 98273, Interview with Earlene Beckes and Margaret K. Pederson, August 5, 1987.

See continuation sheet

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

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreeage of property less than one

UTM References

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Zone      Easting      Northing

C 

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D 

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Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property is described thusly: That portion of Government Lot 7, Section 19, Township 34 North, Range 4 East, Willamette Meridian, in the City of Mount Vernon, Washington; beginning at a point marked by a gas pipe at the intersection of the centerline of First Street and Kincaid Street in the city of Mount Vernon; thence running northerly along centerline of said First Street in said city of Mount Vernon 148 feet 5 inches; thence

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the entire parcel associated with the Lincoln Theater and Commercial Block.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Earlene Beckes & Margaret K. Pederson (Revised by Leonard Garfield, OAHP)

organization Lincoln Theater Center, Inc. date August 1, 1987

street & number P.O. Box 2312 telephone (206) 424-1696

city or town Mt. Vernon state Washington zip code 98273

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Although built in the age of the movie palace, Halberg promised his patrons a variety of live "concerts and musical novelties" as part of the "Lincoln Deluxe programs." Halberg saw the theater as an "entertainment center" and he consistently offered the "finest and most charming in musical performances" as well as motion pictures. For the next several decades, the theater offered a variety of entertainment including vaudeville troupes, dancing girls, songstresses, the local orchestra, and daily organ recitals.

Even without live performances, however, the customer was treated to a variety of entertaining effects designed to enhanced the motion picture. "The effect is theatrical," Halberg told the local paper. "When picture houses were first built, the picture itself provided the only medium of expression," he noted. But Halberg carefully selected an organ to "synchronize with the picture. And in the Lincoln we have added a third medium of expression--lights." The Wurlitzer could imitate rain, wind, auto horns, birds, a fire alarm, an ocean liner, sleigh bells, as well as provide the sounds of a full orchestra, including violin, bugle, flute, mandolin, and a percussion section. The lights could wash the stage or screen in an appropriate hue.

The creation of a theatrical atmosphere was typical of the period as was the choice of historical architectural motifs. While the exterior design of the Lincoln Theater was a restrained design of Mediterranean Renaissance motifs, Halberg selected a "Spanish" decor for the interior, purposefully rejecting the popular Egyptian and Chinese modes as out-dated. Architect William Aitken was a Seattle architect, born in Scotland, whose previous designs included the Salem Lutheran Church in Mount Vernon (1912) as well as the original Rainier Brewery buildings and Sicks Stadium in Seattle. Contractors were Alexander and McNeil of Mount Vernon.

The Lincoln remained the leading theater in the county for many years. During the Depression the movie house was managed by Pollock's son, Elden Decatur Pollock. E.D. ran the business as well as several other theaters in the region. Today, the organ (one of the few of its kind still in operation at the original location) has been fully restored and the entire theater is scheduled for renovation by the Lincoln Theater Center, a local non-profit organization that hopes to convert the theater into a community cultural and performing arts center.

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deflecting to the right 89 degrees, 37 minutes, 30 seconds and running 30 feet to east line of said First Street, which is the initial point of description; thence continuing easterly on same bearing to the west line of Second Street in said city; thence running southerly along the west line of Second Street to the north line of Kincaid Street in said city; thence west along the north line of Kincaid Street in said city to the east line of First Street; thence northerly along the east line of said First Street to the point of beginning.