

56-1884



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 an 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 SHEA'S SENECA BUILDING

other names/site number _____

name of related multiple property listing N/A

2. Location

street & number 2178 Seneca Street [] not for publication

city or town Buffalo [] vicinity

state New York code NY county Erie code 029 zip code 14210

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 as 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.)

Raymond Daniel Mack
Signature of certifying official/Title
DSK/PO
State or Federal agency and bureau

10/20/17
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 the 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) _____

[Signature]
Signature of the Keeper

12/8/17
date of action

SHEA'S SENECA BUILDING

Erie County, New York

Name of Property

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	0	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

_____ N/A _____

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(enter categories from instructions)

_____ COMMERCE/business, professional, organizational, _____

_____ Restaurant _____

_____ SOCIAL/club house _____

_____ RECREATION/sports facility, theater _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

_____ COMMERCE/department store _____

_____ VACANT _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

_____ LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY _____

_____ REVIVAL/Neo-Classical _____

_____ _____

_____ _____

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation _____ Concrete _____

walls _____ Brick, terra cotta (clad) _____

_____ _____

roof _____ Asphalt _____

other _____

Narrative Description

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

SHEA'S SENECA BUILDING

Name of Property

Erie County, New York

County and State

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.)

- A** Property 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 that 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 boxes that apply.)

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location
- C** a birthplace or 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:

(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce

Social History

Architecture

Period of Significance:

1929-1965

Significant Dates:

1929, 1965

Significant Person:

N/A

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect/Builder:

Henry and William Spann

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

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. **NPS #33,667**
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by historic American Building 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 repository: _____

SHEA'S SENECA BUILDING
Name of Property

Erie County, New York
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property 1.63 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>1</u> <u>7</u>	<u>679200</u>	<u>4746886</u>	3	<u>1</u> <u>7</u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u>1</u> <u>7</u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	4	<u>1</u> <u>7</u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>	<u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u> <u> </u>

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 Derek King, Matthew Shoen, Caitlin Moriarty PhD, Kelsie Hoke M.Arch [Edited by Jennifer Walkowski, NYSHPO]

organization Preservation Studios, LLC date September 27, 2017

street & number 60 Hedley Place telephone 716-725-6410

city or town Buffalo state NY zip code 14208

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 SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

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

name _____

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

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 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, D.C. 20503

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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 1

SHEA'S SENECA BUILDING

Name of Property

Erie County, New York

County and State

Narrative Description of Property

The Shea's Seneca Building is located at the northeastern corner of Seneca and Cazenovia Streets in the South Buffalo neighborhood of Buffalo, New York. Seneca Street runs roughly northwest to southeast. It is the main commercial corridor north of the Cazenovia Creek in South Buffalo, and most of the buildings which line it are commercial in nature. The surrounding area is primarily composed of residential neighborhoods. Two blocks to the south is Frederick Law Olmsted's Cazenovia Park (NR 82005028; 1982). The large Shea's Seneca Building is oriented east-west and sits at the center of the block on the east side of Seneca Street. It faces west and is on axis with the termination of Cazenovia Street as it intersects Seneca Street. To the north are a wood-framed, nineteenth-century commercial building along with some early twentieth century homes which have been converted to commercial use. South of the building is a large commercial building from the late twentieth-century. The Shea's Seneca Building is by far the largest and grandest building in this neighborhood of South Buffalo and has long functioned as a prominent local landmark and commercial venue.

Measuring eleven bays wide by ten bays deep, Shea's Seneca is Neoclassical Revival in style, two stories in height, and L-shaped with a brick and steel structure. The double-height theater entry sequence is located in the southernmost bay of the building while, in the ten bays to the north, storefronts occupy the ground floor and offices originally occupied the second floor. Currently, the theater entry sequence, with its profusion of plaster, gilt, and marble finishes, is almost entirely intact and has been shuttered for over three decades. The storefront spaces have continued to be active throughout most of the building's history and retain a number of historic finishes and details such as trimwork, display cases, and some mezzanine levels. The second floor has been used variously as offices, a bowling alley, and, most recently, a nightclub. As such, it is the most altered portion of the building, but some historic finishes and layouts remain in places. Overall the building is in good condition on the interior with its most architecturally detailed rooms fully intact and, from the exterior, it continues to play a significant role in the streetscape of the neighborhood.

Exterior

The Shea's Seneca Building has only one prominent elevation and this is clad in a pale grey glazed terra cotta tile. The three remaining sides are each exposed red brick laid in common bond atop a twelve-inch concrete base. A low-sloped roof covers the building and is concealed behind a tall terra cotta clad parapet along the primary façade and a shorter brick parapet with a camel-back clay-tile coping on the remaining sides. On the primary façade, almost all of the existing second-floor window openings have been covered over with plywood; however, a majority of the original Chicago-style, double hung wood sash windows remain behind. On the sides and rear elevation, all of the openings have been filled in with CMU or, in some cases, smaller vinyl windows within a plywood panel.

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SHEA'S SENECA BUILDING

Name of Property

Erie County, New York

County and State

Primary (west) façade.

The primary, west, façade can be divided into two portions: the commercial portion which extends to the north and the wide bay at the south end which contains the theater entry sequence. To the north, the commercial portion consists of ten two-story bays which feature a storefront at the first story and a large window above at the second story. The first story bays are separated from one another by simple pilasters. Running above the storefront level is a large inset panel that originally contained space for advertisements and the names of the shops below. Currently, the bays and the inset panel are largely obscured by plywood and vinyl siding; however, several historic storefronts remain behind. Capping the first story is a molded terra cotta cornice which acts a sill course for the second floor windows. At the second floor, the window openings are separated by terra cotta pilasters. Each of the openings is currently filled in with plywood but most contain the original, wood, Chicago-style windows with a central, single-pane, center-pivot window flanked by one-over-one, double-hung windows. Capping the second story are a terra cotta architrave, frieze, and cornice, with colorful rosettes present in the frieze above each bay. A tall terra cotta parapet completes the elevation.

The second portion of the primary façade, the wide southernmost bay, corresponds to the theater lobby entry and rises like a tower anchoring the southern end of the building. This end of the building is two-and-a-half stories in height with entry doors at the first story and tall, grand, arched windows in the second story. At the first story, the entry doors are set into a recessed porch framed by simple piers at either end. Currently, the original entry doors are hidden behind modern siding materials. Just above these, the theatre's original marquee has been removed and its location has been filled in with stucco matching the color of the terra cotta. In the second story, the three, tall, arched windows are centered over the entry doors. Each is set into a deep, canted reveal featuring decorative terra cotta panels and reliefs with a twisted rope trim. To either side of the windows, the sill course, pilaster, and entablature elements of the northern portion of the building carry through, creating paired pilasters which flank the windows. A cornice and a molded terra cotta relief containing swags, urns, and medallions is present above and crowning the elevation is a stepped parapet featuring additional molded terra cotta swags and a central medallion.

South (side) elevation.

The south side of the building was originally constructed as a party wall and so is unembellished and largely solid. At the west end, there are four non-original openings at the second floor level which appear to date to the mid-twentieth century. Each opening has concrete sill and a steel header; one retains its original four-light wood sash, but the others have been filled in with a plywood panel and a smaller vinyl window.

North (side) elevation.

The north elevation of the building is also unembellished and has window openings at both the first and second story, each with a concrete sill and a soldier-coursed brick lintel. At the first story, four small openings are centered on the middle of the building and have all been filled in with a later red brick. At the second story, the

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SHEA'S SENECA BUILDING

Name of Property

Erie County, New York

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six eastern bays each contain a pair of tall openings. The three westernmost pairs of the openings retain the original casings which indicate that the windows originally contained double-hung sash with a fixed transom above. Currently these are each filled in with plywood while the remaining eastern openings are filled in with CMU. At the western end of the elevation, there are four irregular openings at the second floor, all of which have been filled in with CMU.

Rear elevation.

The rear elevation is formed by the projecting southernmost bay of the theater portion to the south, and the ten bays of the commercial portion extending to the north.

Typical of large theater design from this period, the double-height auditorium block of the building was originally oriented north-south and located behind the street-facing commercial functions. Unfortunately, the theater wing was demolished in 1970.

The northern portion of the rear elevation originally functioned as a private alley and loading dock area which served both the commercial and theater portions of the building. With the loss of the auditorium volume adjacent to the east, it now forms the majority of the rear elevation and serves the commercial block. The first story has irregular window openings and a concrete loading dock at the center with a small projecting CMU enclosure to the north. The second story has regular window openings of various widths, all of which are filled in with CMU. At either end of the elevation, there is a modern, projecting, two-bay CMU stair tower containing an egress stair. Both additions have steel double doors at the first story and a steel, daylight-factory style window at the second story.

The southern portion of the elevation projects forward twenty feet and corresponds to the large vestibule that originally connected the lobby to the auditorium. It is articulated by three brick piers but is otherwise clad in speed-tile. A large opening at its southern end has been filled in with CMU.

Interior

The interior, like the exterior of the building, is divided into two portions. The northern commercial portion is a large and open space at the first floor punctuated by regularly spaced columns and divided by walls to create long, narrow retail spaces oriented east-west. Originally, the plan contained six adjacent retail spaces in a range of sizes; however, over time, some of the partition walls were removed to create larger floor areas. Currently, there are four retail spaces - a large shop space is present at both the north and south ends with two much narrower shop spaces at the center. Each of the four retail spaces has a main front entry at the west end, a rear exit, bathrooms, and a staircase to the basement located at the eastern end. Apart from a doorway connecting the two southernmost shops, the spaces are each independent from one another. Throughout, the

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SHEA'S SENECA BUILDING

Name of Property

Erie County, New York

County and State

retail spaces have mostly gypsum walls, acoustic ceilings, and modern flooring but with historic finishes still present beneath. The second floor is largely composed of an open floor area with some offices along the western wall and bathrooms in the northwest and southeast corners. The finishes are primarily modern at this floor and consist of gypsum walls, a mix of carpet and hardwood flooring, and dropped acoustic tile ceilings. Three staircases access the second floor and are located at the northeast, northwest, and southeast corners of the building.

The southern portion of the building contains an enfilade sequence of three rooms arranged on an east west-axis. At the east end, the entry doors on the primary façade open into the entry vestibule which leads into the grand, spacious, double-height lobby and gathering hall at the center. Beyond the hall at the west end is the auditorium lobby. Each of these spaces is highly intact with terrazzo flooring, detailed plaster walls and ceilings, scagliola, decorative plasterwork, and gilding. Less detailed and with mid-century plumbing updates, the Ladies' restrooms and waiting room are adjacent to the auditorium lobby to the north with the Men's restrooms beneath them at the basement level. At the northeast corner of the auditorium lobby, a discrete stair is present accessing both the basement and the second floor. Owing to the height of the main lobby, there is little second floor present in this portion of the building, but some office space may once have been located above the bathrooms and auditorium lobby.

Commercial Portion

In the commercial portion of the building, the retail spaces were historically of differing size and style, as evidenced by the original plans that show six individual shops. The partitions that divided the retail spaces remain in part, but some of the spaces have been expanded into the adjacent shop by removing the partition walls, resulting in the current configuration of two large two-bay retail spaces that bookend two single-bay spaces at the center.

The northernmost retail space, which currently contains a 10,000 square foot five-and-dime, has an open floor area. A large multi-pane aluminum window, recessed entry, and terrazzo flooring are present in the doorway at the northwest corner. Each of the walls has a combination of plaster and modern paneling with vinyl tile at the floor and adhered acoustic tile and exposed mechanical equipment at the ceiling. The original plastered columns punctuate the space throughout and have a simple molding at the base and the top.

The two retail spaces at the center are similar and have a tall, narrow volume with recessed storefronts at the west end that were remodeled in the mid-century. Both spaces have gypsum walls with the original columns expressed as shallow pilasters, adhered acoustic tile at the ceilings, and vinyl tile flooring. The northern space has an original mezzanine level at the rear accessed by a modest original wood stair. In the southern space, the ceiling at the west end is lower and is formed by a shallow, plastered barrel vault. The storefront at each of the

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SHEA'S SENECA BUILDING

Name of Property

Erie County, New York

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spaces dates to approximately the 1950s and consists of a deep entry flanked on either side by fully glazed display cases arranged on projecting sawtoothed angles.

The southernmost retail space has been the most modified from its original configuration. At the west end, it has a modern storefront system consisting of large windows over a solid base. The interior has been converted to offices and has a double-loaded corridor layout with gypsum walls, a dropped acoustic tile ceiling, and a carpeted floor. In the southeast corner, however, an original and highly detailed wood mezzanine level remains and is accessed by an elegant paneled wood staircase with a molded handrail, straight spindles, and square newel posts. The mezzanine level itself is enclosed with shoulder-height walls composed of glazing and millwork and is articulated on each side with paneled wood wainscoting.

The second floor of the commercial portion is almost entirely an open floor plate, a configuration that dates back to its original use as a bowling alley with office space on the northern and western perimeters. Some offices dating to the mid to late twentieth century are present along the western wall; all have gypsum walls with carpet at the floors and a dropped acoustic tile ceiling. The open space at the center of the second floor was most recently a bar and night-club and has hardwood floors, dropped acoustic tile ceilings, and a combination of gypsum and modern paneling at the walls. Three bowling lanes are also present at the center of the space, harkening back to its original use; the current lanes are mid twentieth century replacements of the original bowling alley lanes.

Theater Portion

In the theater portion of the building, the original entry sequence is composed of three adjoining rooms elaborately decorated in an Adamesque style and each is remarkably intact and in good repair. The first room in the sequence is the entry vestibule. It is roughly twenty feet in length with an eighteen-foot high ceiling. Each of the walls is covered in a black veined scagliola with black scagliola pilasters capped by golden Tower of the Winds capitals. The pilasters visually support a deep plaster frieze with a swag-and-anthemion motif and a plaster cornice with tongue-and-dart and reed-and-ribbon moldings, all bearing the original gold paint. The tray ceiling is also gold and features a delicate plaster Adamesque design incorporating foliate scrolls, urns, swags, and a large, oval, plaster medallion at the center.

Adjacent to the east is the double-height grand lobby and gathering hall where tickets were sold and customers waited and socialized before attending a picture. The grand lobby is approximately twenty feet wide by ninety feet long and thirty feet tall. The long room is divided into three bays, each with a groin vault at the center. In between each of the bays is a pair of cream-colored marble scagliola columns visually supporting a painted plaster barrel vault in between each of the groin vaults. The lower portion of the walls is clad in a cream-colored marble scagliola while the upper portions feature the original plaster walls. The end walls are painted green and

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SHEA'S SENECA BUILDING

Name of Property

Erie County, New York

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contain an elaborate Adamesque plaster wall relief incorporating sphinxes, caryatids, urns, swags and foliate scrolls. The upper portion of the side walls is covered in the original gold and crimson damask fabric. In each of the bays is a monumental mirror with a gilded surround, flanked by half-engaged columns, and crowned with a broken and scrolled Baroque pediment. The mirrors also incorporate plaster swags, urns, and abundant gilding. Both the barrel and the groin vaults feature elegant plaster decoration throughout, both painted and gilded. On the floor is the original diamond-patterned terrazzo tile.

The easternmost room in the sequence is a second smaller lobby that once led directly into the auditorium space. It is similar in size to the front entry vestibule and also has an eighteen-foot ceiling. This room has smooth plaster walls with deep, original millwork surrounding the doorways. An architrave and cornice with dentils and an anthemion motif wrap the room. Above is a tray ceiling with elegant plaster panels of arabesque detailing. The original Men's and Ladies' Rooms are accessed off of this lobby and each has tiled finishes and fixtures dating to the mid-twentieth century. In the Ladies' Room, an adjoining sitting room contains an intact Adamesque fireplace and wood mantel.

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Shea's Seneca Building

Name of Property

Erie County, New York

County and State

Statement of Significance:

The Shea's Seneca Building at 2174 Seneca Street in Buffalo, New York, is a locally significant example of a community theater development, a building type that featured a larger commercial building anchored by a movie theater. Shea's Seneca Building was built by Michael Shea, a local theater magnate who erected six movie palaces in Western New York in the early twentieth century. Shea's theaters accommodated between 1,500 and 4,000 people and screened movies up to three times a day. The combination of commerce and entertainment made each of Shea's buildings a major neighborhood anchor. The building embodies common features found in nearly all of Michael Shea's theater developments. They include a long façade of storefronts, repeated fenestration, and picturesque architecture in the theater lobby. Designed by William and Henry Spann in 1929, the building quickly became a neighborhood destination, housing many important social clubs, businesses, and community services in addition to the theater itself. Shea's Seneca Building is one of only three remaining examples of Michael Shea's developments in Buffalo, alongside Shea's North Park (1920) and Shea's Buffalo (1926 NR 1975).

Shea's Seneca Building is locally significant under Criterion C in the area of Architecture, as a significant example of Michael Shea's community theater development model. Shea's model involved building a long commercial building anchored by a theater in growing middle class neighborhoods in Buffalo. Middle class residents were drawn to the community theater to see movies and took advantage of the shopping opportunities located in the commercial building, creating an active, vibrant community hub. The building typology used in Shea's Seneca Building can be seen in Shea's other Buffalo area theaters, Shea's North Park (1920, extant), Shea's Bailey (1929, not extant) and Shea's Roosevelt Theaters (1927, not extant). The Spann brothers also employed a similar typology in the Genesee Theater and the Strand Theater, both of which have been demolished. The theater and commercial block portions of Michael Shea's theaters were designed separately and Shea's Seneca Building is no exception; however, unlike Shea's other theaters, the Seneca Building's façade is unified behind a common façade with no material or architectural distinction between the commercial and theater spaces. Though the theater auditorium was demolished in 1970, the extant commercial spaces and the lobby of the theater in the Shea's Seneca Building communicate the original configuration of the building and the typology of Michael Shea's community theater developments.

Shea's Seneca Building is also locally significant under Criterion A in the areas of Commerce and Social History for its role as a hub for community services and social groups from the 1930s through 1965. The long, uniform façade of the building on one of the main commercial thoroughfares in South Buffalo, and its location near Cazenovia Park, made Shea's Seneca attractive to medical professionals and social clubs as well as eager movie-goers. From its construction in 1929 to the present, Shea's Seneca has been a vital anchor in the community of South Buffalo. Doctors, dentists, and fraternities operated from offices inside the commercial block and retailers occupied the storefronts.

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Shea's Seneca Building

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The period of significance for Shea's Seneca Building begins with the building's construction in 1929 and ends in 1965, when the Seneca Business Association purchased the building. This era correlates to the time during which the building was at its most prominent in the local community, serving as an important commercial center in South Buffalo. It also encompasses the initial construction and mid-century renovations that occurred during this time.

South Buffalo

Before Joseph Ellicott surveyed Buffalo in 1802, the area now known as South Buffalo was an important site for the Seneca Nation of the Iroquois Confederation. The Seneca Nation established Buffalo Creek Village in South Buffalo in 1780 and the village became the center of the Iroquois Confederacy.¹ When American settlers founded Buffalo, the new community was viewed as a threat to Buffalo Creek Village and the leader of the Seneca Nation, Red Jacket, worked with colonial leaders to attempt to preserve native land rights against colonial expansion. In 1797 Red Jacket signed the Treaty of Big Tree, relinquishing much of the Seneca Nation's territory but also preserving a large tract of land around Buffalo Creek, which was known as the Buffalo Creek Reservation. The Buffalo Creek Reservation survived until 1842, when the Second Treaty of Buffalo Creek was signed, forcing the Native Americans to surrender their land rights and move to reservations west of the Mississippi River.²

In 1854, the City of Buffalo annexed the former Buffalo Creek Reservation as part of a major boundary increase. As the city expanded, the former Buffalo Creek Reservation, which was renamed South Buffalo, attracted residential, commercial, and industrial development. Settlers moved from established neighborhoods in Buffalo, particularly the Old First Ward, and established farms on Seneca Street and Abbott Road.³

In 1887, the City of Buffalo hired Frederick Law Olmsted and his son, John C. Olmsted, to extend the Olmsted & Vaux Park and Parkway System into South Buffalo. City park commissioners rejected the firm's original plan for a large waterfront park and accepted a modified design that included Cazenovia Park (1896, 76 acres), South Park (1894, 155 acres), Woodside (now McClellan), South Side (now McKinley Circle), Red Jacket, and South Side (now McKinley) Parkways.⁴ In addition to providing recreational arenas for residents of South Buffalo, the park layout shaped patterns of residential and commercial development.

¹ Pat Curry, "History of South Buffalo," South Buffalo Home website, <http://www.southbuffalohome.com/history-of-south-buffalo>.

² Ibid.

³ Caitlin Moriarty and Derek King, "St. Thomas Aquinas Roman Catholic Church Complex," National Register of Historic Places Inventory/Nomination Form, Preservation Consultants, Buffalo, December 20, 2016, Section 8, Page 2.

⁴ Ibid; Clinton Brown Company, "Triangle Neighborhood: Intensive Level Historic Resource Survey," 3-6, https://www.city-buffalo.com/files/1_2_1/SPPlanning/PreservationBoard/Surveys/Triangle%20Report%20Sections/Sec%203-Historical_Narrative.pdf; Olmsted in Buffalo, "Buffalo's Olmsted Parks and Parkway System," <http://www.olmstedinbuffalo.com>.

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Shea's Seneca Building

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In 1897, the Seneca streetcar line opened, efficiently connecting South Buffalo to the rest of the city and promoting further residential development. The area became a true “streetcar suburb” as developers like William Fitzpatrick and William Connors began parceling out affordable single-family houses and two family flats, primarily selling the properties to Irish-Americans from the Old First Ward.⁵ These houses generally came from mail-order catalogs and followed similar forms, giving South Buffalo a uniform architectural appearance. These catalog houses were important for residents in South Buffalo, many of whom lacked the funds necessary to build more individualistic homes. Catalog houses allowed prospective homeowners to see all the costs associated with a house and understand how much the building would cost them.⁶

As South Buffalo developed into a vibrant residential neighborhood, commercial interests migrated into the area. Many businesses opened along South Park Avenue and Seneca Street, two of the major thoroughfares connecting South Buffalo to the rest of the city. Some of the most impressive commercial structures built in South Buffalo were theaters. In 1919, Henry Spann designed the South Park Theater at 1770 South Park Avenue, a vaudeville house that was later converted into an American Legion Post (extant).⁷ In 1929, Michael Shea built the Shea's Seneca Building on Seneca Street, adding to South Buffalo's growing commercial district.

Michael Shea and Shea's Theaters

Michael Shea was born in Buffalo's Old First Ward in 1859 and played an instrumental role in developing the city's theater and entertainment scene. Between 1882 and 1934, Michael Shea was one of the leading purveyors of middle class entertainment in Buffalo and operated a number of popular vaudeville halls and later movie theaters. Shea started his career in 1882 by opening Shea's Music Hall in downtown Buffalo.⁸ Shea modeled the vaudeville house after German beer halls and Shea's Music Hall operated successfully for ten years until it was destroyed in a fire.⁹ Following the fire, Shea moved into ‘the Garden,’ an ice rink that he remodeled into a vaudeville house. The aisles of the redecorated ice rink were lined with potted palms, creating an exotic feeling that characterized Shea's later movie theaters.¹⁰ Shea's early playhouses offered vaudeville and variety acts that catered to middle class audiences who yearned for live entertainment but were reticent to attend shows in less proper venues such as the saloons and backroom theaters where most vaudeville performances took place. Shea's vaudeville halls emphasized service, comfort, and class, and Shea even banned alcohol and smoking to

⁵ Sam Bass Warner, Jr. coined the term streetcar suburb; for other real estate developers, see Clinton Brown Company, “Triangle Neighborhood: Intensive Level Historic Resource Survey.”

⁶ Clinton Brown Company, “Triangle Neighborhood,” 13.

⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁸ “Michael Shea, Leader in Theatrical World, Dies,” *Buffalo Courier-Express*, May 17, 1934, 10.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

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ensure that his venues maintained a dignity befitting middle class patrons.¹¹ While vaudeville and variety acts formed the backbone of Michael Shea's early entertainment business, frequently nickelodeons were also part of the entertainment. These simple films ran at the end of the night while guests donned their coats and prepared to leave.¹²

In 1914 Michael Shea opened the first movie theater in downtown Buffalo, a 2,800-seat movie palace called Shea's Hippodrome.¹³ The Hippodrome cost Shea \$500,000, but it quickly proved profitable, running three shows a day and screening the latest films, primarily from Paramount Pictures.¹⁴ Like his vaudeville houses, Shea's Hippodrome catered to a middle class audience with quality service and elaborate and picturesque architecture. Shea also attached a large commercial block to the Hippodrome to generate additional income.¹⁵ The combination of commercial storefronts anchored by a movie theater proved successful and Shea utilized this model in all of his subsequent theater developments.

The success of Shea's Hippodrome encouraged Michael Shea to build more movie theaters in Buffalo. During the 1920s, Shea opened six theaters, which can be categorized into two distinct types, the first run theaters and the second run community theaters.¹⁶ Shea's Hippodrome and Shea's Buffalo were first run theaters and screened the latest movie releases. These theaters, located in downtown Buffalo, were the largest and most ornate theaters that Michael Shea operated.

Once a movie finished its run in Shea's Hippodrome or Shea's Buffalo, it screened at the second run community theaters, including Shea's Seneca, Shea's North Park, and Shea's Kensington. The community theaters were smaller than the first run theaters; for instance, Shea's Seneca seated roughly 2,500 people compared to the 4,000-person capacity of Shea's Buffalo. Nonetheless, these smaller theaters maintained the ornate architecture and exotic feeling that characterized Shea's larger venues, and they adjoined large commercial blocks that contributed to the local retailing scene and provided additional rental income.

Although Michael Shea's community theater development model proved to be a highly profitable business scheme, his entertainment empire began to crumble in the 1930s, as Buffalonians' expendable income was reduced significantly during the Great Depression. This challenge to entertainment industries generally was compounded by Shea's refusal to lay off employees. Soon after his death in 1934, Shea's wife and daughters sold off their shares in his entertainment empire. Though Shea's Entertainment Company purchased many struggling rival theaters during the 1930s and opened Shea's Niagara along Niagara Street in 1940, the

¹¹ Timothy Bohan, *Against the Grain* (Buffalo: Bohane Books, 2012), 137.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ "Shea's Hippodrome Opens," *The Billboard*, September 12, 1914, 54.

¹⁴ Bohan, *Against the Grain*, 138.

¹⁵ Sanborn Map Company, *Buffalo, Erie County, New York*, 1914, Sheet 10.

¹⁶ See Appendix 1 for a full list of Michael Shea's theaters in Western New York.

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company struggled without the guidance of Michael Shea and eventually closed. In subsequent decades, many of Shea's movie theaters and adjacent commercial buildings were demolished with the exception of Shea's North Park and Shea's Buffalo. The theater auditorium at Shea's Seneca was demolished in 1970, but the Shea's Seneca Building remains a good representation of the community theater typology in South Buffalo.

The Community Theater and Commercial Block Typology

In contrast to the downtown location of the larger first run theaters, Shea located his community theaters on commercial streets in growing neighborhoods around the city. Shea's Seneca Building and theater on Seneca Street, Shea's North Park on Hertel Avenue, and Shea's Kensington and Bailey on Bailey Avenue were all sited on vibrant local commercial streets surrounded by a growing middle class population. The practice mirrored national trends:

the movie palaces of the late 1910s and the 1920s were built on the shopping streets of middleclass neighborhoods, with services and décor suited to this class... [unlike nickelodeons] They instead offered the consumption of luxury, much as the late-nineteenth-century theaters had promoted fashion.¹⁷

Also in line with broader trends across the county, Shea combined movie and retail venues, erecting separately designed commercial blocks adjacent to the theater auditoriums. The pairing provided additional income for Shea's business and echoed the cultural pattern of making the shopping experience an entertaining venture in its own right. Speaking to the importance of local entertainment, Michael Shea's associate Vincent McFaul declared, "A properly conducted theater is of the same importance to a community as a school or church. Such a theater contributes to the general welfare of the community, because wholesome recreation is essential to its wellbeing."¹⁸

When Michael Shea announced plans to build Shea's Kensington, the complex's commercial component was advertised alongside the theater itself. Speaking to the *Buffalo Courier* about the project in 1925, Shea commented, "The plans submitted by the Bickford Realty Co...promise the last word in theater construction, and stores and an office building is part of the plan."¹⁹ When the building opened in 1926, the news report emphasized the theater as an asset to "one of the fastest growing and most progressive business and residential sections of the city."²⁰

¹⁷ Richard Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 161.

¹⁸ "Theaters Add to Welfare of Communities, *Buffalo Courier-Express*, January 12, 1930, 6.

¹⁹ Quoted in "Shea Will Open New Theater for Kensington Folk," *Buffalo Courier*, December 7, 1925, 5.

²⁰ "Shea Theater in Kensington Opens Tonight," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, December 25, 1926, 4.

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Advertisements and reports highlighted the commercial components of Shea's other developments as well. When Shea's Bailey opened in 1928, a newspaper report credited Henry L. Spann as the architect for the "Shea's Bailey Theatre and Store Building," which housed the Bailey Chocolate Shop and the Otto H. Burke Corporation's auto showroom.²¹ Shea's Hippodrome Building along Main Street housed a variety of tenants, including the Buffalo Optical Company, the Wippert & Son Hat Store, and Henrich's Sons Co. furniture company.²² Three months before its completion, Shea's North Park put an advertisement in the *Buffalo Courier*:

FOR RENT- Store and North Park Theatre building on Hertel Avenue between North Park and Norwalk Avenue; ideal location for confectionery, shoe store, 5 and 10 cent store, etc.: also large office, second floor; ideal for chiroprac-etc.²³

All of Shea's theaters built in the 1920s demonstrated the combined theater-commercial building typology. Beyond a strictly economic endeavor, the design of the building expressed the complementary functions. Speaking of the Marion Palace Theatre in Marion, Ohio, historian Scott L. Hoffman explains the motivation for the dual function and its impact on the design of the facilities:

Like other theatre buildings of the period, the Palace was designed to generate revenue from both ticket sales and rental income. Eberson [the architect] designed the theatre building to maximize street-front retail space... Except for the lobby doors, theatre exit areas and the state, almost every other available street-front space at the Palace could be leased.²⁴

Another advantage of the long commercial block was its opportunity to support a large sign. As Martin Treau notes of early twentieth century developments,

Half-block or block-long shopping centers... frequently included an anchor store of some type – usually a food market or movie theater – that provided an essential architectural flourish. The anchor also served as a visual landmark with the opportunity it afforded for distinctive sign features that might rise above the others on the strip.²⁵

Like the Marion Palace Theater, many of Shea's theaters had their auditoriums set back from the street, maximizing retail space. The movie theater anchors rose at least a story higher than the commercial blocks and displayed a large billboard or projecting sign.

²¹ "Advertisement," *Buffalo Courier Express*, September 29, 1928, 6; "Otto H. Burke Opens New Salesrooms," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, September 23, 1928, 10.

²² "Advertisement," *The Buffalo Courier*, April 24, 1920, 2; "Advertisement," *The Buffalo Courier*, August 27, 1914, 7; "Advertisement," *The Buffalo Courier*, February 28, 1915, 33.

²³ "Advertisement," *The Buffalo Courier*, August 1, 1920, 35.

²⁴ Scott L. Hoffman, *A Theatre History of Marion Ohio: John Eberson's Palace & Beyond* (Charleston: The History Press, 2015), 93.

²⁵ Martin Treu, *Signs, Streets, and Storefronts: A History of Architecture and Graphics along America's Commercial Corridor* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2012), 181.

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The Relationship between Theater and Commercial Functions in Michael Shea's Theaters

Shea's theater and commercial developments shared several common features. The theater entrance portion of each building was always the most prominent feature of the block; it was taller and more ornate, setting the theater apart from the adjoining commercial experience. The Neoclassical style was common to his developments, with some forays into Art Deco or Spanish Revival styles, likely because each of these was lively enough to reflect the glamour of the theater and simple enough to execute inexpensively.

While the theater entrance remained distinct in its massing, the differentiation between the theater and commercial functions through façade materials diminished over time. The following discussion of four of Shea's buildings illuminates the progression of the Spann brothers' designs from Shea's North Park, in which the commercial block stands apart from the theater, to Shea's Seneca, which incorporates them behind a unified terra cotta façade.

Shea's North Park (1920; extant. See: Figure 8)

The elevation of Shea's North Park is composed of a two-and-a-half story, three-bay theater façade located at the center of the block with a shorter, two-story, nine-bay commercial façade extending to the side. The theater is stone, and Neoclassical in style with crisp, geometric detailing and framing pilasters at the ends. There is a large, tripartite, rectangular window in the second story and two pairs of double entry doors on the ground floor. The commercial façade adjacent, though part of the same building, is quite different. It is built of simple brown brick with stone accents in the American Commercial style. There are regular storefronts on the ground floor and rectangular windows on the second story with a bracketed cornice and decorative tile roof above.

Shea's Buffalo (1926; extant. See: Figure 6)

Shea's Buffalo Theater also features the main theater façade at the center of the block with a commercial façade extending to the side. In this case, the four-story theater façade is composed of a single wide bay with two pairs of double-leaf entry doors at the ground floor and a single, multi-paned, two-story window above. Shea's Buffalo is one of the most ornate of the Shea's Theaters and its Beaux Arts elevation is clad in richly sculpted terra cotta. The six-bay commercial façade which extends to the side is only two-stories in height and executed in an American Commercial style. It has regular storefronts at the ground floor and large rectangular windows above. The elevation is clad in a plain terra cotta tile with pilasters in between the bays, banding around the windows, and two Dutch gables at the top.

Shea's Bailey Theatre (1929; demolished. See: Figure 5)

Shea's Bailey Theatre was a much larger development and encompassed almost the entire frontage of a block. The theater façade remained at the center and commercial facades extended on both sides. Both facades were built of stone in an Art Deco style, though the two-and-a-half story theater portion was both taller and much

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more ornate than the commercial wings. Unlike previous Shea's projects, the commercial facades here had storefronts at the ground floor with large, segmentally-arched, vousoired openings. In the second story, pilasters that framed the bays were capped with stylized Art Deco capitals and there were sculpted finials in each bay of the parapet.

With the Bailey, for the first time, the theater facade and commercial facade were becoming more integrated and began to appear to be one single building and enterprise. While this had always been the case with the Shea's theaters from a practical standpoint, the differentiation between the theater and commercial façades up to this point had aesthetically separated the two portions of the building. Given its size, unified design, and level of ornament, the Bailey no longer looked like a small theater with adjoining retail space; instead, it looked like a major commercial establishment. Shea's Bailey closed in 1977 and was demolished in 1986 following a fire.

Shea's Seneca Building (1929; auditorium demolished 1970)

Shea's Seneca Building took the concept of the unified theater and commercial elevations a step further. As described above, Shea's Bailey Theater had a unified elevation, but it was very clear from the transition of detail and framing elements where the theater elevation began and ended. At Shea's Seneca Building, the Neoclassical elevation is a seamless asymmetrical composition. At the center of the city block is the two-and-a-half story theater portion with the ten-bay commercial portion extending to the north. While the commercial building was designed separately from the theater portion, the entire facade is clad in a pale grey terra cotta tile and there are no framing pilasters or vertical transitions that separate a "theater façade" from a "commercial façade." The theater portion is in fact taller and the window and door openings required for its function necessarily set it apart from the commercial portion of the building; however, the treatment of the exterior materials and details blend both portions of the building into a single seamless composition. The commercial portion has rectangular storefronts at the ground floor and rectangular windows above with framing pilasters in between. A small cornice caps the ground floor and the second floor pilasters support a frieze with rosettes in each bay and cornice. Both cornices and the frieze carry across the theater, too. The theater portion has paired double leaf entry doors at the ground floor and three tall arched windows in the second floor, which interrupt the frieze and cornice. Above, the attic story features a third cornice and parapet with a wealth of swag and cartouche reliefs. Although the building houses separate functions and the various openings reflect this, at the same time it is very clear that the elevation is meant to reflect a single, unified building.

Shea's Seneca Building

Built in 1929, Shea's Seneca Building was part of the last commercial building and theater that Michael Shea built. It is the largest extant building in Shea's network of theaters and commercial buildings and represents a distinct shift in the design of Shea's theaters. The commercial block of Shea's Seneca Building was designed separately from the theater entrance and auditorium. The theater entrance was set apart, rising a half story above

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the commercial section; however, the terra cotta façade of Shea's Seneca unified the two elements into a single composition, unlike Shea's North Park and Shea's Buffalo, where different materials differentiated the theater from the adjacent commercial buildings.

The arrival of Shea's Seneca was viewed as another important piece in the expansion of South Buffalo. The commercial and office component constituted an important contribution to the neighborhood center, in addition to the theater. The Shea's Seneca auditorium had the largest seating capacity of any of Shea's community theaters and was equipped with every piece of modern equipment necessary to show 'talkies,' an early name for films with a soundtrack.²⁶ Upon completion, newspapers heralded the theater as, "the seventh link in the chain of Shea-Publix Theaters... a modern mammoth \$1,000,000 building housing in addition to the theatre, 15 offices and nine large stores."²⁷ The *Buffalo Courier Express* applauded the building's ability to "virtually open up a new center of business," and claimed, "the building will house some of the leading retail stores in the section as well as a number of offices."²⁸ Not long after opening, Shea's Seneca Building was filled with stores like the W.T. Grant Company Store, Endicott-Johnson Shoes, Eich's Bowling Alley and Danahy-Faxon Grocers.²⁹

Four years after opening, a fire broke out in Shea's Seneca Building, destroying one of the storefronts, the second floor bowling alley, and a large portion of the roof. It caused an estimated \$100,000 in damage.³⁰ The fire occurred just after the conclusion of a late night movie screening and 600 people were forced to evacuate the theater.³¹ The theater and theater lobby, composed of fireproof materials, were spared destruction and, despite the fire, the theater opened the next night. Four months after the fire, the damaged stores reopened with a parade through South Buffalo celebrating the occasion.³² The celebration centered on Shea's Seneca Building, which was lit up with spotlights and featured floats and marchers who passed a grandstand built in front of Shea's Seneca.³³ The festivities culminated with a bargain hunting carnival in the newly reopened stores.³⁴

The pomp and circumstance surrounding the reopening of the stores in Shea's Seneca Building demonstrates the importance of the building to commerce and social life in South Buffalo. While the theater anchored the building, Shea's Seneca Building housed a plethora of businesses, professionals such as doctors and dentists,

²⁶ "New Theater Shows Builder's Confidence in Growing Section," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, January 12, 1930, 1.

²⁷ "Here and Hereabout," *The Orleans Republican*, April 3 1929, 8.

²⁸ "Rushing Shea's Seneca," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, August 4, 1929, 2.

²⁹ "Fire Menaces South Buffalo Business Area," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, January 19, 1934, 1.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

³² "Groups Ready for Parade in South Buffalo," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, May 13, 1934, 5.

³³ "South Buffalo will Unite in Parade Tonight," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, June 8, 1934, 8.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

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and social clubs. The use of Shea's Seneca Building by a wide variety of organizations and individuals made the building a major community anchor in South Buffalo and a center of local commerce.

The first commercial tenants of the Shea's Seneca Building reflect the building's initial use as a recreational destination. In 1930, the tenants included a beauty shop, a barber, a restaurant, dancing and billiards hall, a physician, and, of course, the theater. By 1936, the building began a transition towards professional offices, housing doctors and dentists, while still maintaining its role as an entertainment center, with Eich's Bowling Alley occupying the upper floors.

By the 1940s, social clubs increasingly used space in Shea's Seneca Building. The building housed commercial tenants such as doctors, a restaurant, a "bowling academy," and a business school, but a number of prominent social groups rented space in Shea's Seneca Building as well. Many of the social groups used Shea's Seneca Building as a clubhouse or to host special parties. In 1934, the Lady Cameron Auxiliary of the Order of Scottish Clans held a masquerade dance in Shea's Seneca Building, and in 1941, the Jewel Lodge No. 335, Auxiliary to the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, held a sizable card party at Shea's Seneca Building, which was the organization's lodge hall.³⁵ The Jewel Lodge held annual parties at Shea's Seneca during the 1940s that coincided with holidays such as Christmas and St. Patrick's Day.³⁶

The Lady Cameron Auxiliary and Jewel Lodge No. 335 were not the only social organizations to use Shea's Seneca Building; during the 1940s the building was actively used by a number of fraternal railroad organizations. A number of these lodges were organized under the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen (BFL&E) such as the Leigh High Valley Lodge No. 472 BFL&E, the Lady Myna Auxiliary Lodge No. 249 BFL&E, Lake Erie Lodge No. 241 BFL&E, and the Lady Cameron Auxiliary BFL&E. Like the Lady Cameron Auxiliary and Jewel Lodge, these organizations used Shea's Seneca Building as a clubhouse.³⁷

Political organizations such as the Third Ward Republican Club and the Fourth Assembly District Democratic Club also made use of Shea's Seneca Building.³⁸ Like the fraternal lodges, the political groups used Shea's Seneca building for a mix of recreational activities and organizational business. The Fourth Assembly District Democratic Club even staged major rallies at Shea's Seneca Building and in 1935, Congressman James M. Mead spoke at one of these rallies.³⁹ The next year Mead spoke again, as did state senators David E. Doyle and Stephen J. Wotjkowiak.⁴⁰

³⁵ "Organizations," *The Buffalo Evening News*, October 29, 1934, 12; "Club News," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, January 22, 1941, 11.

³⁶ "Club News," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, March 12, 1942, 13.

³⁷ "Railway Organization Heads Back Baker's Council Race," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, October 27, 1933, 7.

³⁸ "Fourth Assembly District Democrats Planning Party," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, December 7, 1935, 11.

³⁹ "Fourth District Rally," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, October 22, 1935, 20.

⁴⁰ "Fourth District Rally," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, September 6, 1936, 3.

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The presence of so many different organizations, in addition to the movie theater, made Shea's Seneca Building one of the most important buildings in South Buffalo and the heart of activity in the community. In 1950, a "Shopping Areas of Buffalo" map highlighted the Seneca and Cazenovia intersection as one of the city's "Major Shopping Districts," the only such district south of William Street (See: Figure 9).⁴¹ Over the next ten years, however, the social clubs began to migrate elsewhere. By 1953 there were no social clubs meeting inside Shea's Seneca Building. Physicians and podiatrists still rented space in 1955, and a dancing studio and a storage company occupied parts of the building, but by 1962, the theater had closed and the building only contained one physician, a dance studio, and the bowling alley upstairs.

The loss of so many organizations and renters can be tied to the population loss Buffalo experienced in the 1960s as well as the contraction of the city's steel industry in the 1970s, which was particularly devastating to residents in South Buffalo.⁴² As residents left South Buffalo for the suburbs, it became increasingly difficult to fill the auditorium and businesses in Shea's Seneca Building suffered from the lack of foot traffic. In 1965, the South Buffalo Businessmen's Association bought Shea's Seneca Building and made modifications to the theater space, reducing the seating by half. In 1968, the South Buffalo Businessmen's Association converted the bowling alley to a restaurant and dance hall called the Sky Room, and in 1970, they demolished the auditorium.⁴³ Since the loss of the auditorium, a number of local businesses have operated from the commercial spaces in Shea's Seneca Building.

Architects William T. Spann (d.1978) Henry Spann (1879-1946)

William T. Spann and Henry Spann were two of Western New York's most prominent movie theater architects. Together they designed a number of Michael Shea's theaters, their most notable extant work being the Shea's North Park and Shea's Seneca Building.⁴⁴ However, in addition to Shea's North Park and Shea's Seneca, the brothers designed Shea's Roosevelt Theater (not extant), Shea's Genesee Theater and Commercial Building (not extant), and Shea's Baily Theater and Commercial Building (not extant).⁴⁵ The duo also designed the Cataract Theater (not extant) and the Strand Theater (not extant) in Niagara Falls. Michael Shea was not the only theater magnate to employ the Spann Brothers; in 1926 the brothers built a 2,200-seat theater for Bernhard Vohwinkel at the corner of Genesee and Nevada Streets (not extant).⁴⁶ The architecture of the Spann Brothers falls in line with the common typology of movie palace design throughout the country with a focus on extremely ornate interiors and imposing exteriors.

⁴¹ *Shopping Areas of Buffalo* [map], Buffalo: 1950. Located at the Grosvenor Room, Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.

⁴² Mark Goldman, *City on the Edge: Buffalo, New York* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2007), 289.

⁴³ "Final Plans made for Celebrations," *Hamburg Front Page*, May 6, 1971, 5.

⁴⁴ "Shea's Will Control Hertel Ave. Theater," *The Buffalo Evening News*, July 16, 1920, 24.

⁴⁵ "Chain's Latest Link to Be Largest Community House," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, August 12, 1928, 1.

⁴⁶ "Prepare to Construct \$500,000 Theater," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, November 7, 1926, 2.

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Henry Spann died in 1946 in Florida following a heart attack. William Spann continued working and completed projects such as the addition to School 39 in Buffalo and the Richman Brothers store at 333 Main Street in Buffalo.⁴⁷ Though the Spann brothers were not as successful or publicly visible following the 1930s, their mark on Buffalo is indelible. Together, they built some of the most ornate theaters in Buffalo and though many have been demolished, the remaining buildings highlight the design sensibilities of the Spann brothers and early twentieth century theater design principles.

The Metz Brothers

The Metz Brothers contracting and construction firm were responsible for building Shea's Seneca Building in 1929.⁴⁸ The firm was one of the most prosperous contracting firms in Buffalo with over twenty years of experience prior to their work at Shea's Seneca Building. In addition to the Seneca Building, the Metz Brothers built Buffalo's Chamber of Commerce skyscraper in 1905 (not extant), Masten Park High School in 1914 (extant, NR-listed), and the Michigan Avenue Y.M.C.A. in 1927 (not extant)⁴⁹ The firm was led by German born Theodore Metz, who acted as the general manager and treasurer of the organization until his death in 1927.⁵⁰ The firm continued after the death of Theodore Metz and completed a number of important projects throughout Buffalo, including Shea's Seneca Building. Outside of Buffalo, the firm worked on buildings such as the veterinary college at Ithaca, New York.⁵¹

Summary

Shea's Seneca Building is a locally significant example of Michael Shea's community theater development model and one of only three extant buildings he built in Buffalo. Constructed in 1929, the theater immediately became a major attraction in South Buffalo and businesses eagerly rented space in the commercial building, knowing a steady stream of movie-goers would pass their establishments multiple times each day. Businesses were not alone in recognizing the value of being located inside Shea's Seneca Building, and between 1930 and 1953 a number of prominent social and fraternal clubs rented space for special events and club activities. All told, the commercial and social activity of Shea's Seneca Building made it a major anchor in South Buffalo for over thirty years and the building is still in use, albeit on a much smaller scale.

⁴⁷ "School Bids to Be Opened on May 14," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, April 13, 1968, 7; "New Store of Richman Bros. to Open Today," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, October 10, 1936, 5.

⁴⁸ "Advertisement," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, January 12, 1930, 5.

⁴⁹ "New C. of C. Building Ready August 1, 1906," *The Buffalo Courier*, July 20, 1905, 6; "City to Borrow for School Fund," *The Buffalo Courier*, January 11, 1914, 58; "Real Estate," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, July 8, 1927, 20.

⁵⁰ "Pay Last Tribute to Theodore Metz," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, June 4, 1927, 5.

⁵¹ "General Contract Handled by the Metz Brothers Company," *The Illustrated Buffalo Express*, February 26, 1922.

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Architecturally, Shea's Seneca Building is a crucial piece to understanding the evolution of Michael Shea's community theater development model. Like all of Shea's theaters, the building featured a prominent commercial building that contributed to the surrounding commercial corridor, combined with a theater. However, Shea's Seneca Building differed from Michael Shea's earlier buildings by unifying the theater and commercial portions of the building beneath a single façade of pale grey terra-cotta. The result is that Shea's Seneca Building looks much larger and grander than Shea's earlier theaters, which featured distinct architectural and material differences that demarked the theater from the commercial block. Shea's Seneca Building dominates its stretch of Seneca Street and despite the loss of its auditorium, the building remains an excellent example of Shea's community theater design typology. The building's long commercial block and intact lobby communicate the feeling and association of Shea's design and the building retains design, materials, and craftsmanship typical of Shea's theater developments.

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Shea's Seneca Building

Name of Property

Erie County, New York

County and State

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Name of Property

Erie County, New York

County and State

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

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Continuation Sheet**

Section 10 Page 1

Shea's Seneca Building

Name of Property

Erie County, New York

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Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary is indicated with a heavy line on the attached maps with scale.

Boundary Justification

The boundary encompasses the current legal boundaries of the property, which includes the historic property boundary as well as some additional parking and access to the east and south of the building.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

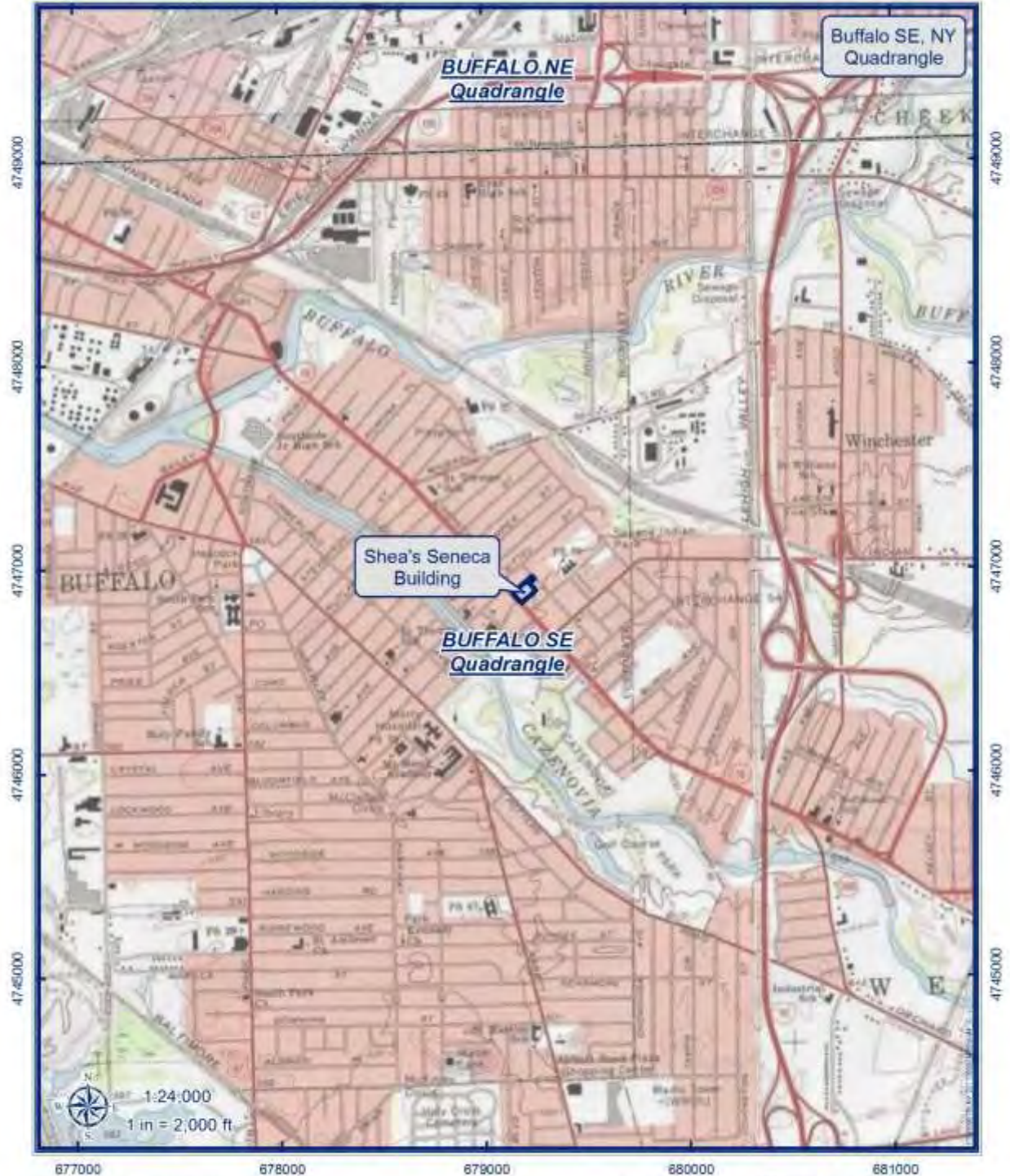
National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 10 Page 2

Shea's Seneca Building
Name of Property
Erie County, New York
County and State

Shea's Seneca Building
City of Buffalo, Erie Co., NY


2178 Seneca Street
Buffalo, NY 14210



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 17N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter



 Shea's
Seneca
Building

 NEW YORK
Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation
Division for Historic Preservation

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

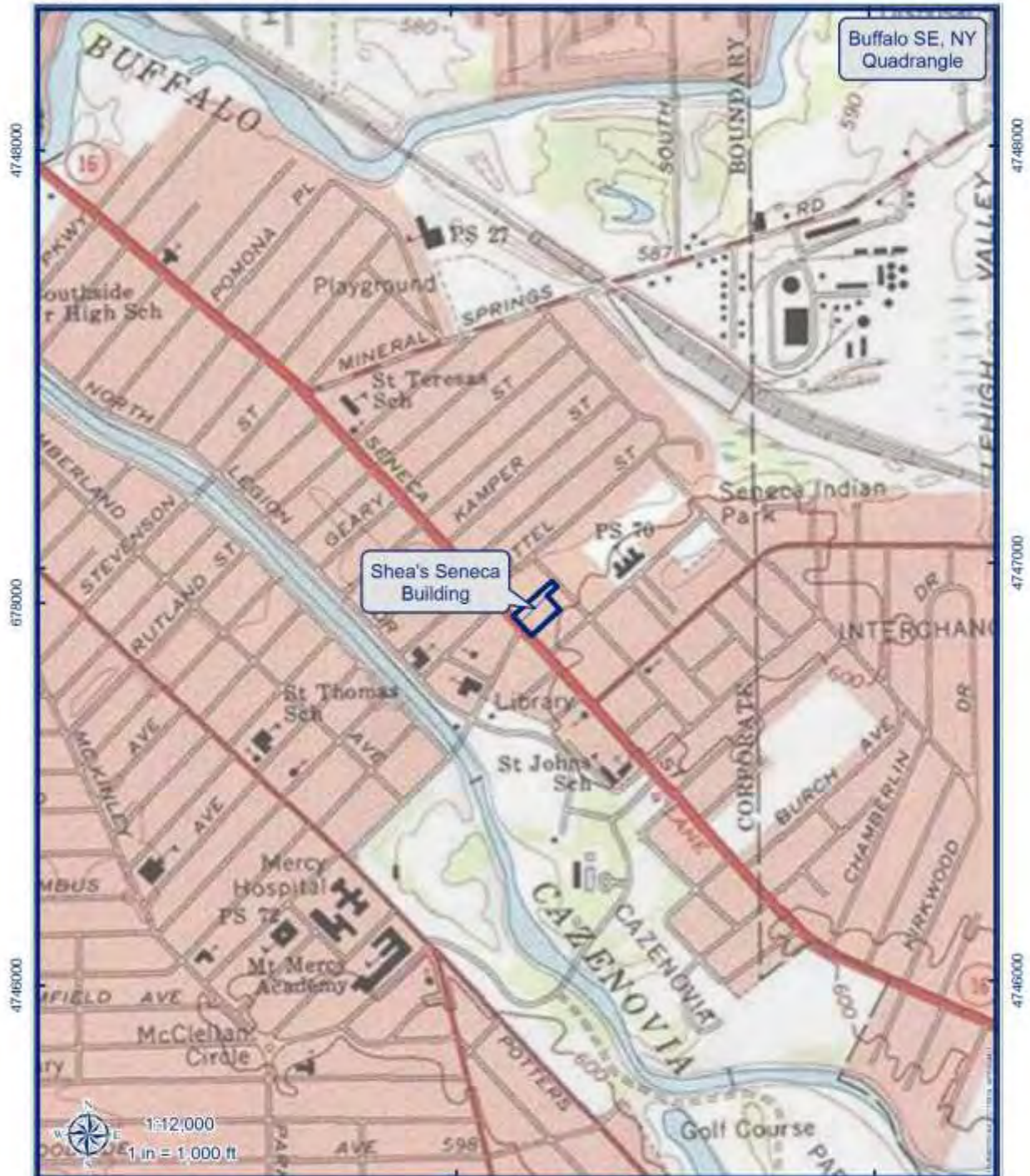
National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 10 Page 3

Shea's Seneca Building
Name of Property
Erie County, New York
County and State

Shea's Seneca Building
City of Buffalo, Erie Co., NY


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Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 17N
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 Shea's
Seneca
Building

 NEW YORK
Parks, Recreation
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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 10 Page 4

Shea's Seneca Building
Name of Property
Erie County, New York
County and State

Shea's Seneca Building
City of Buffalo, Erie Co., NY

2178 Seneca Street
Buffalo, NY 14210



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 17N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter



Shea's
Seneca
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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 10 Page 5

Shea's Seneca Building
Name of Property
Erie County, New York
County and State

Shea's Seneca Building
City of Buffalo, Erie Co., NY

2178 Seneca Street
Buffalo, NY 14210



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 17N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter



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

Shea's Seneca Building

Name of Property

Erie County, New York

County and State

Section 11 Page 1

Additional Information

Photo Log:

Name of Property:	Shea's Seneca Building
City or Vicinity:	Buffalo
County:	Erie County
State:	NY
Name of Photographer:	Michael Puma
Date of Photographs:	September 2017

NY_Erie County_Shea's Seneca Building_0001

Primary façade, camera facing northwest.

NY_Erie County_Shea's Seneca Building_0002

Primary façade, camera facing north.

NY_Erie County_Shea's Seneca Building_0003

Primary façade (right) side elevation (left), camera facing northeast.

NY_Erie County_Shea's Seneca Building_0004

Entry lobby, camera facing north.

NY_Erie County_Shea's Seneca Building_0005

Entry lobby ceiling, camera facing south.

NY_Erie County_Shea's Seneca Building_0006

Main lobby, camera facing northeast.

NY_Erie County_Shea's Seneca Building_0007

Main lobby ceiling, camera facing south.

NY_Erie County_Shea's Seneca Building_0008

Waiting hall, camera facing southeast.

NY_Erie County_Shea's Seneca Building_0009

Storefront space, camera facing north.

NY_Erie County_Shea's Seneca Building_0010

Storefront space, camera facing north.

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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 11 Page 2

Shea's Seneca Building

Name of Property

Erie County, New York

County and State

NY_Erie County_Shea's Seneca Building_0011
2nd floor office space, camera facing south.

NY_Erie County_Shea's Seneca Building_0012
2nd floor nightclub area, camera facing east.

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Continuation Sheet

Shea's Seneca Building

Name of Property

Erie County, New York

County and State

Section 11 Page 3

Appendix I

<u>Theater Name</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Year of Construction</u>	<u>State of Building</u>
Shea's Hippodrome	Downtown Buffalo	1914	Not extant
Shea's North Park	Hertel Avenue	1920	Extant
*Shea's Bellevue	Main Street	1921	Extant
Shea's Buffalo	Downtown Buffalo	1926	Extant
Shea's Kensington	Bailey Avenue	1926	Not extant
**Shea's Riviera	Webster Street	1926	Extant
Shea's Roosevelt	Broadway	1927	Not extant
Shea's Bailey	Bailey Avenue	1929	Not extant
Shea's Seneca	Seneca Street	1929	Extant

*Shea's Bellevue is located on Main Street in the city of Niagara Falls. Michael Shea did not build the theater but he purchased it in 1929.

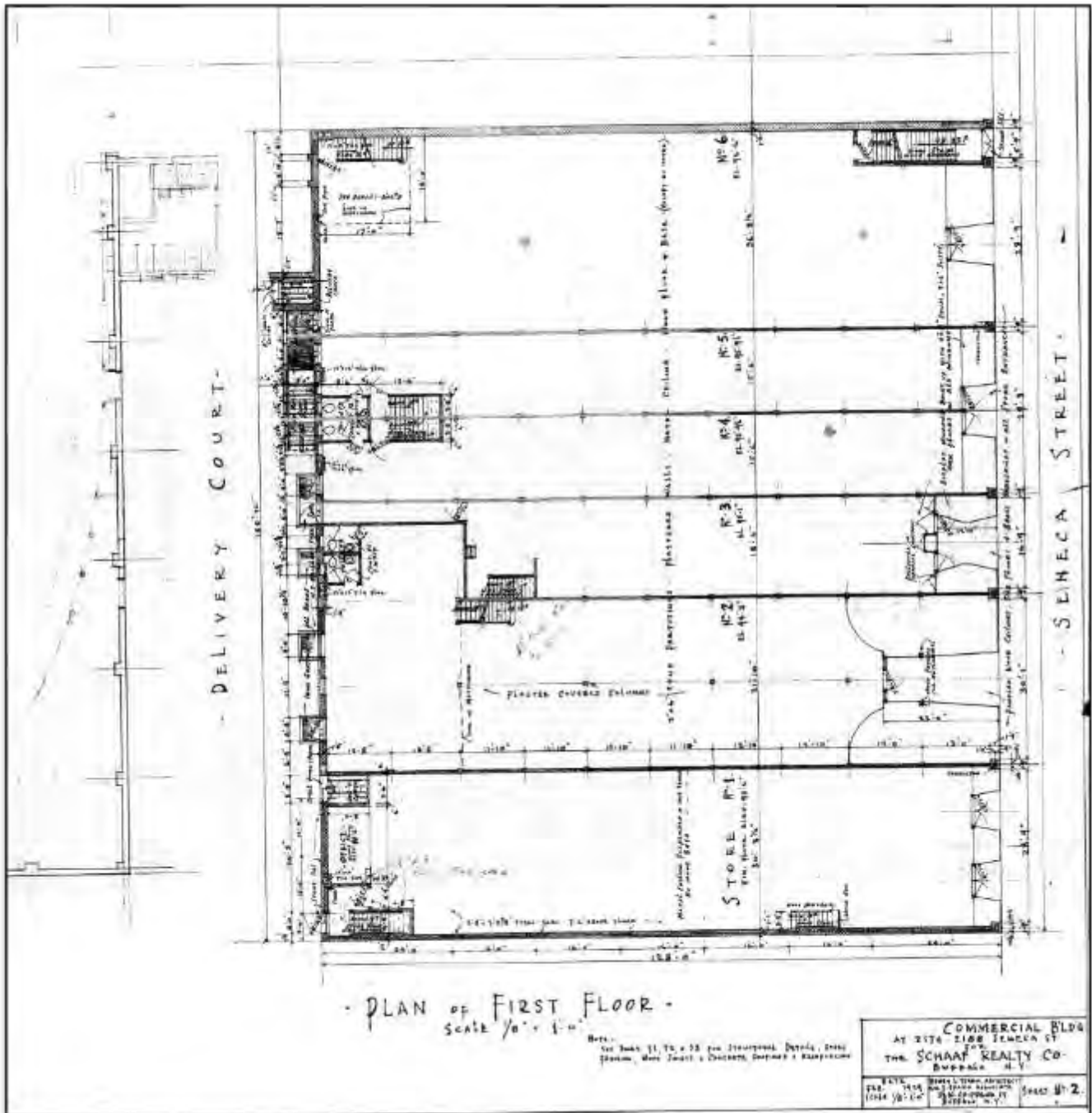
**Shea's Riviera is located in North Tonawanda. Michael Shea did not build the theater but he purchased it in 1928.

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Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 4

Shea's Seneca Building
Name of Property
Erie County, New York
County and State



Shea's Seneca Building, 1929 Plan
Original first floor plan showing six store spaces
Henry and William Spann

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 5

Shea's Seneca Building

Name of Property

Erie County, New York

County and State



Figure 1

Historic Image of Shea's Seneca Building

*Henry L. Spann, The Architectural Achievements and Architectural Perspective
Renderings of Henry L. Spann and William T. Spann, Registered Architects, (Buffalo:
Circa 1950). Grosvenor Research Room, Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.*

Showing historic window configuration, marquee, and context.

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Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 6

Shea's Seneca Building
Name of Property
Erie County, New York
County and State

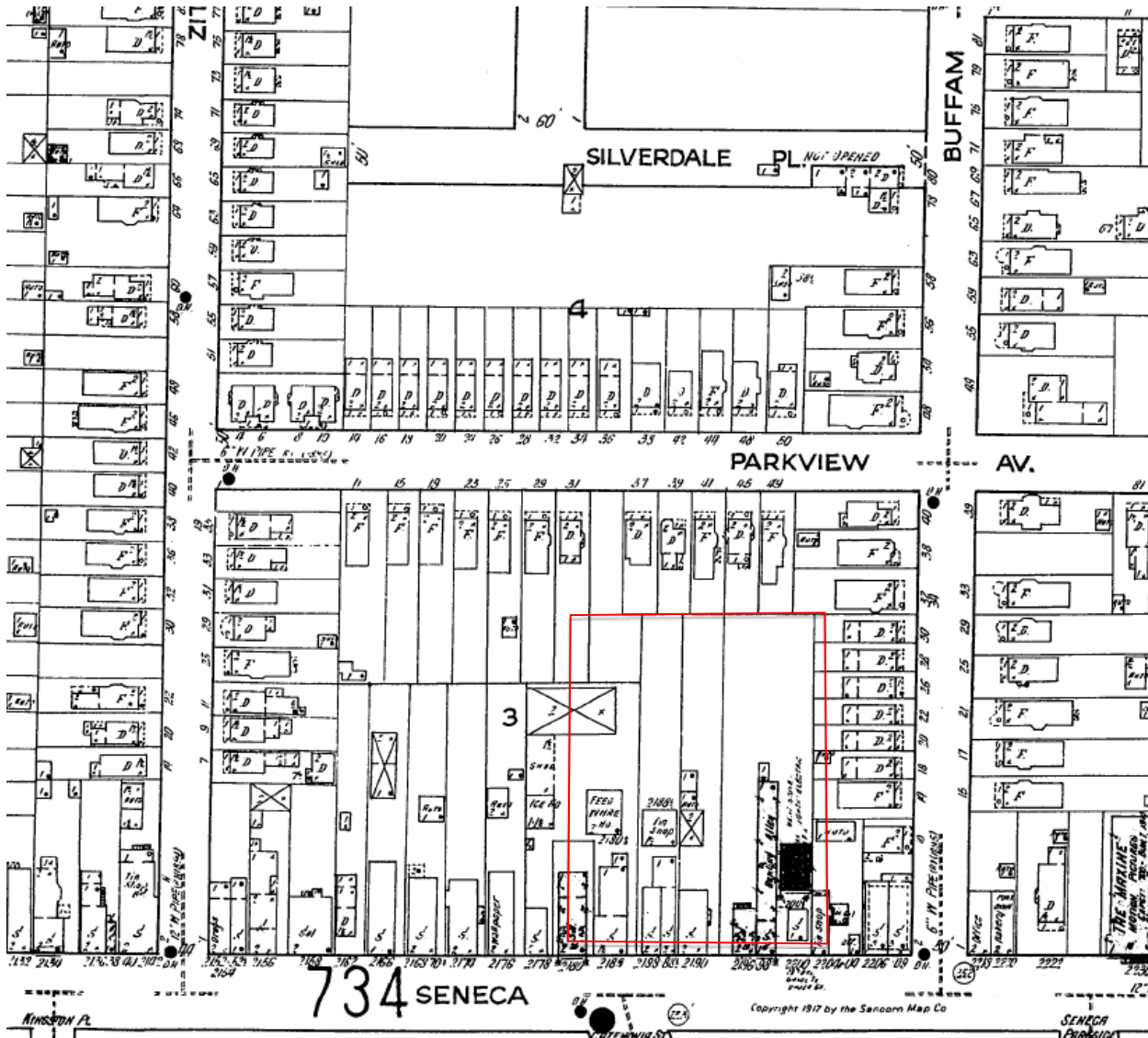


Figure 2
Sanborn Fire Insurance Map (1917)
Showing block prior to the construction of the theatre

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Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 7

Shea's Seneca Building
Name of Property
Erie County, New York
County and State

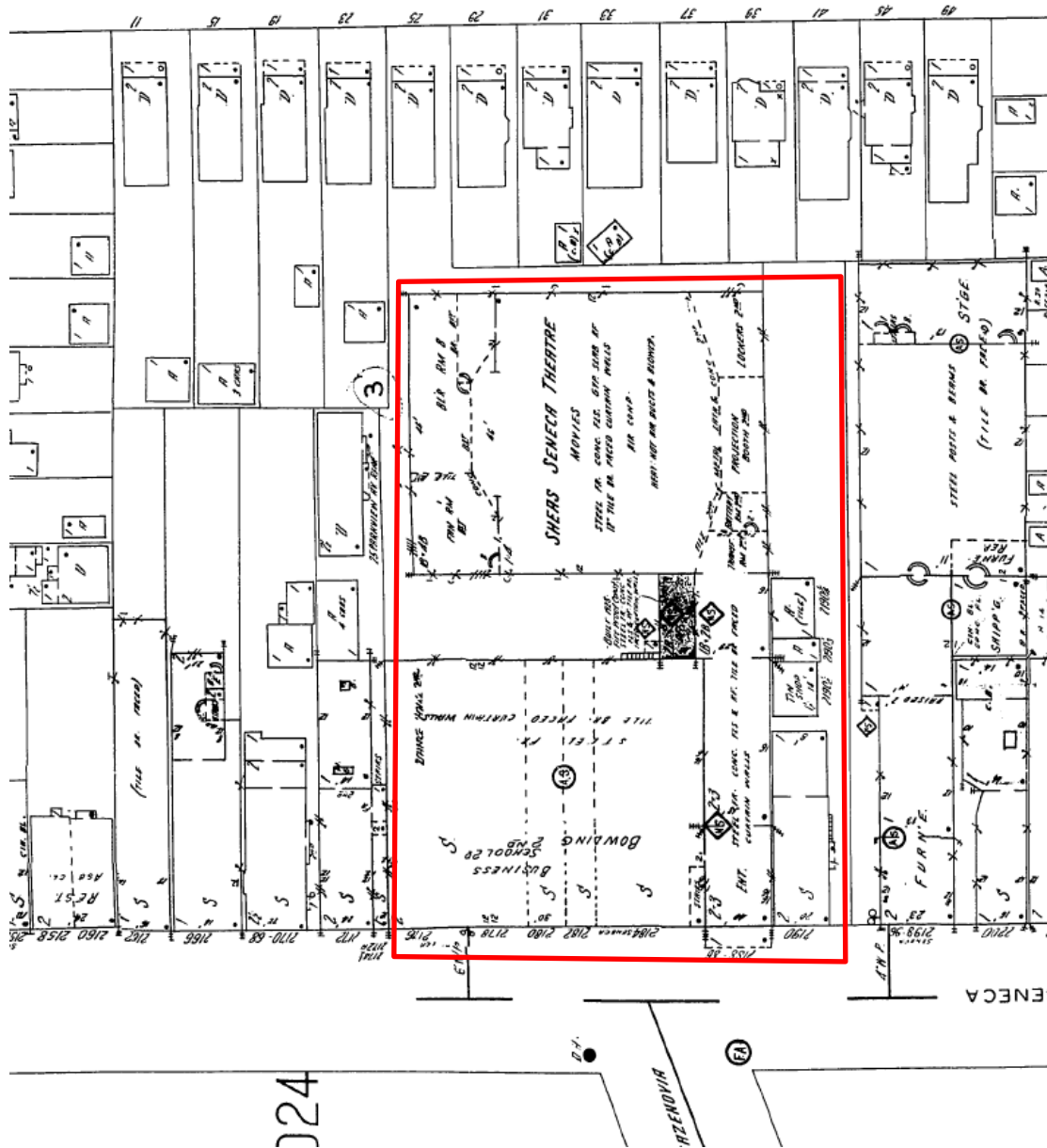


Figure 3
Sanborn Fire Insurance Map (1950)
Showing full configuration of theatre and commercial building.

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National Park Service

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Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 8

Shea's Seneca Building

Name of Property

Erie County, New York

County and State



Figure 4

Henry L. Spann, The Architectural Achievements and Architectural Perspective Renderings of Henry L. Spann and William T. Spann, Registered Architects, (Buffalo: Circa 1950). Grosvenor Research Room, Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.
One of the theaters that Michael Shea purchased, with a similar typological development.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 9

Shea's Seneca Building

Name of Property

Erie County, New York

County and State



Shea's Bailey Theatre and Commercial Building, Buffalo, N. Y.

Figure 5

*Henry L. Spann, The Architectural Achievements and Architectural Perspective
Renderings of Henry L. Spann and William T. Spann, Registered Architects, (Buffalo:
Circa 1950). Grosvenor Research Room, Buffalo and Erie County Public Library.*

Another one of Shea's built theater projects, with similar massing and materials as Shea's Seneca.

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Shea's Seneca Building
Name of Property
Erie County, New York
County and State

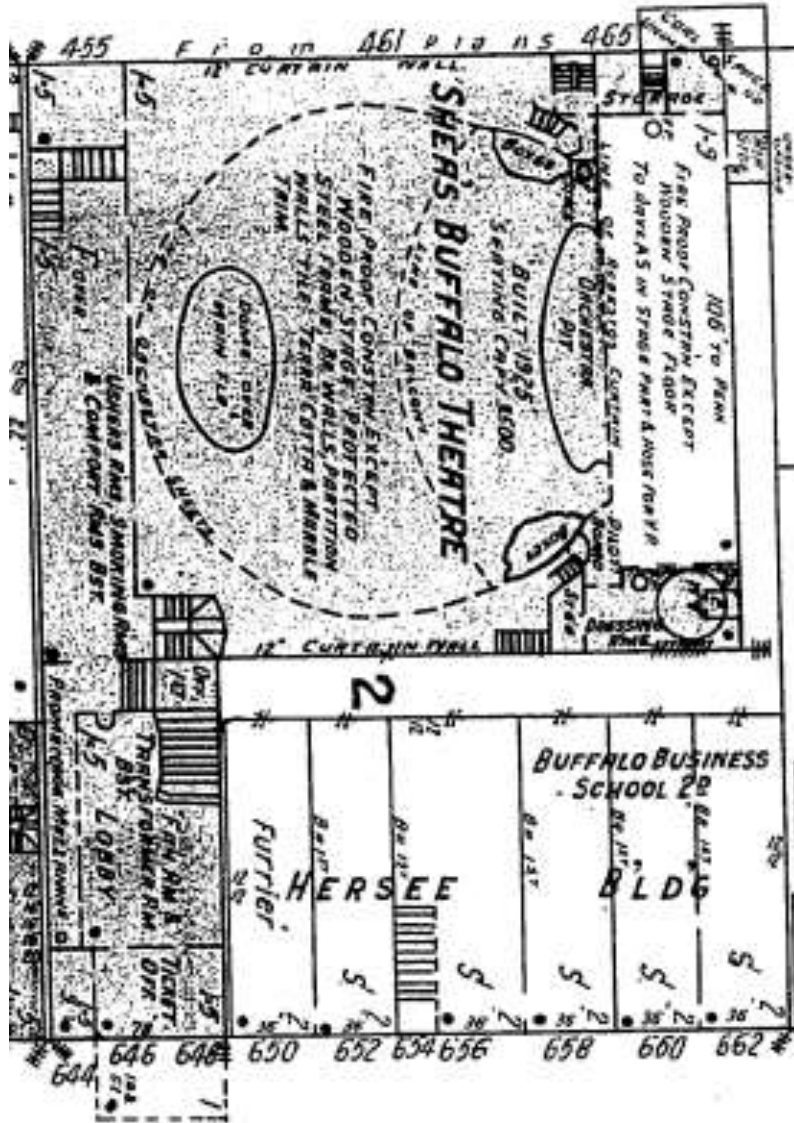


Figure 6
Shea's Buffalo
Sanborn Fire Insurance Map (1925)
Showing a mirror image of Shea's Seneca.

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Shea's Seneca Building
Name of Property
Erie County, New York
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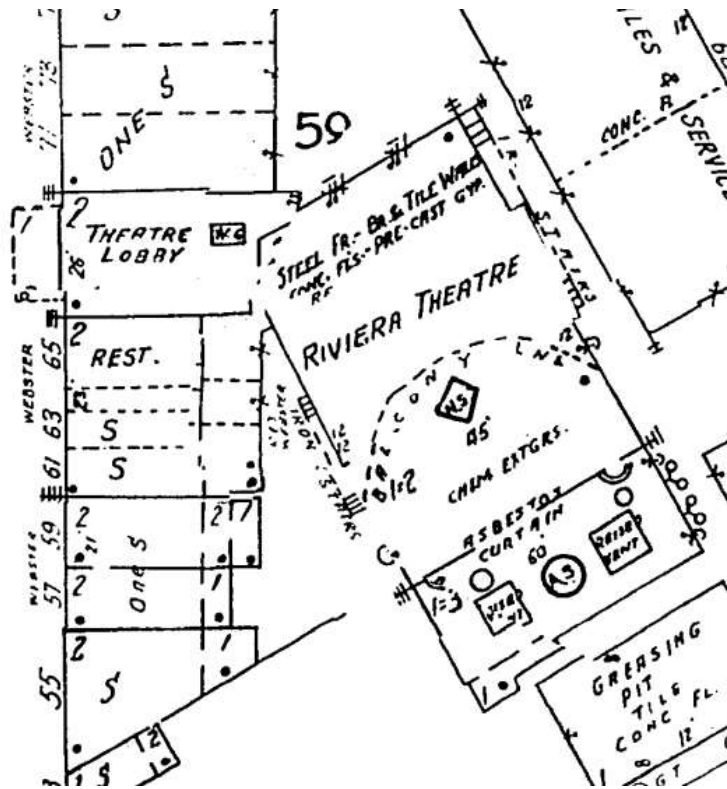


Figure 8

The Riviera Theater

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps (1951)

The Riviera (which was bought by Shea's Entertainment after Michael Shea's death in 1934) in North Tonawanda utilizes a 45 degree angle to tuck the theater behind the surrounding commercial block.

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Continuation Sheet

Section 11 Page 13

Shea's Seneca Building

Name of Property

Erie County, New York

County and State



“Shopping Areas of Buffalo and Immediate Suburbs,” (Buffalo: 1950).
Accessed via the Map File in the Grosvenor Rare Book Room at the
Buffalo and Erie County Public Library

Showing the prominence of the commercial corner around Shea's Seneca.

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action:

Property Name:

Multiple Name:

State & County:

Date Received: 10/27/2017 Date of Pending List: 11/14/2017 Date of 16th Day: 11/29/2017 Date of 45th Day: 12/11/2017 Date of Weekly List: 12/14/2017

Reference number:

Nominator:

Reason For Review:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appeal | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PDIL | <input type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape | <input type="checkbox"/> Photo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waiver | <input type="checkbox"/> National | <input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission | <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource | <input type="checkbox"/> Period |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | <input type="checkbox"/> TCP | <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> CLG | |

Accept Return Reject 12/8/2017 Date

Abstract/Summary
Comments:

Recommendation/
Criteria

Reviewer Alexis Abernathy Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2236 Date _____

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.



**Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation**

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

ROSE HARVEY
Commissioner

20 October 2017

Alexis Abernathy
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places

Mail Stop 7228

1849 C Street NW
Washington DC 20240

Re: National Register Nominations

Dear Ms. Abernathy:

I am pleased to submit the following four nominations, all on disc, to be considered for listing by the Keeper of the National Register:

Shea's Seneca Building, Buffalo, Erie County
Kreiner Malt House and Grain Elevator, Buffalo, Erie County
Fairport Public Library, Fairport, Monroe County
Talcottville Cemetery, Talcottville, Lewis County

Please feel free to call me at 518.268.2165 if you have any questions.

Sincerely:

Kathleen LaFrank
National Register Coordinator
New York State Historic Preservation Office