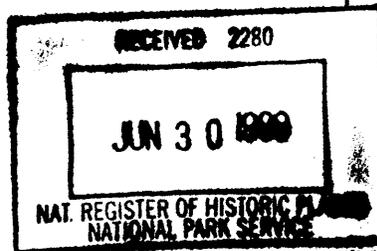


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# United States Department of the Interior National Park Service National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Nifty Theater  
other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Location

street & number 201 Locust \_\_\_\_\_ not for publication \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town Waterville \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity \_\_\_\_\_  
state Washington code WA county Douglas code 017 zip code 98858

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination \_\_\_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant \_\_\_\_\_ nationally  statewide \_\_\_\_\_ locally. (\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official *Allyson Brooks* Date 6/23/99  
Allyson Brooks, PhD. State Historic Preservation Officer  
State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

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

Signature of commenting or other official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.  
\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet
- \_\_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register. \_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet
- \_\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register.
- \_\_\_\_ removed from the National Register.
- \_\_\_\_ other, (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

*B. R. J...* Date 7/29/99

*B. R. J...* Signature of Keeper Date of Action

The Nifty Theatre  
Name of Property

Douglas/Washington  
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	
One		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
One		Total

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

Movie Theaters in Washington  
State from 1900 to 1948

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture: Theater  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Work in progress  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and 20th Century Revival:  
Mission/Spanish Revival  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete  
walls Wood: Weatherboard  
\_\_\_\_\_  
roof Metal: Sheets  
other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

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

The Nifty Theatre  
Name of Property

Douglas/Washington  
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 is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

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

Entertainment/Recreation

Architecture

**Period of Significance**

1919 - 1948

**Significant Dates**

1919

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

**Cultural Affiliation**

**Architect/Builder**

**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
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

North Central Washington Museum,  
Wenatchee, Washington

# National Register of Historic Places

## Continuation Sheet

The Nifty Theatre

Douglas/Washington

Section Number 7, Page 1

### Narrative Description

The Nifty Theatre is a classic example of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century small-town theater built in a period revival style. The building was constructed beginning in 1918 and completed in 1919. The site is located in the heart of rural Waterville, Washington. Waterville is located 2,837 feet above sea level making it the highest incorporated town in the State of Washington. Waterville is located on Highway 2 between Wenatchee and Spokane with a population of approximately 1,500. This very small rural farming community has very few businesses and many of the residents there commute to work in the larger cities of Wenatchee and East Wenatchee. The community is surrounded by fertile, gently rolling farmland that has long been a center for wheat and other grain cultivation along with some cattle and fruit production. Fairly remote, Waterville is 26 miles from Wenatchee to the southwest and 36 east from Coulee City.

Downtown Waterville includes a concentration of historic structures built between 1891 and 1915 that served as the business hub of the Douglas County seat through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This section of the town was designated a National Register District [NR 05/19/88] for both its unique heritage and architecture. The historic Waterville Hotel has been designated to the National Register [NR 10/18/84] as well as the Douglas County Courthouse [NR 09/05/75]. The history of the town is documented within these documents. The Nifty Theatre is located immediately next to the downtown National Register district and while not constructed of the same materials as most of the downtown area (predominately brick), it is of a style and character that is compatible with the district.

The building starts below grade with two entrances, one on the east and one on the west side of the structure. This area served as living quarters for the original owners. The composition of the foundation and walls of this area are cement block and brick. The partial basement includes a 2-bedroom apartment, living room, dining room, kitchen, utility area and bathroom. There are six multi-paned windows in this apartment on both the east and west sides. The interior of the apartment features built-in cabinets, fir flooring, a number of storage closets, five-panel doors throughout the apartment and picture railing molding in the bedrooms, living and dining rooms. Few alterations have been made to this space over the years. The remainder of the area below ground level was originally crawl space, but has been excavated to a depth of six feet to allow for structural reinforcement of the foundation and bracing of the floors at one end of the building. This area includes the electrical panels, a workshop area, storage space and a partial bathroom. During the original construction of the Nifty, a stove overheated and caught fire to the sub-floor, scorching the joists and floor. They were reblocked and braced at that time. Evidence of this fire is visible today.

The primary façade is where the only expressions of the Mission style occur. This includes a stucco finish, curvilinear parapet, corner pilasters, deeply recessed small windows as the second and attic story level, wood window surrounds, and other simple wood trim. These features are key to the style of the building. Above grade construction is wood-frame with tongue and groove cedar siding and a stucco finish on the main facade. The building is painted white with a faded "Nifty Theatre" painted on the north and west sides. The stucco facade includes two large, hinged, flat windows without a sash at mid-level of structure, perhaps used for poster displays. At this level on the east and west sides is another multi-paned window. At the second story level, a hinged, rectangular window with multi-panes is in the center between two elongated hinged, oval windows. A twelve-paned, hinged window is at the peak of the parapet opening from the attic level. A wood canopy suspended by chains and wood braces covers the steps to the building. On the east side of the building an attached shed roof covers the stairway to the apartment below and in years past provided a shelter for the fire hose that used to be located there.

# National Register of Historic Places

## Continuation Sheet

The Nifty Theatre

Douglas/Washington

Section Number 7, Page 2

### Narrative Description (continued)

The main portion of the building begins at sidewalk level with steps up to double entrance doors on the north end. Once through the double doors there are steps leading up to the ticket window. Past the ticket window are triple doors into the lobby. A back-lit glass marquee sign is above these doors and reads "Tonight Nifty Theatre 3 reels - Change of Program." Inside the auditorium there is a level area of approximately 15 feet before the floor begins to slope downward. Inside, the north wall (the entrance wall) features several windows. The windows for the crying room are in a bank of five (this room was utilized during the theater's "heyday" for mothers and their young children to avoid disruption to the general audience). There are projection windows staggered in the mid-section of the wall and one window from which the projectionist was able to view the film.

Upon entering the auditorium to the east is the office area, which includes stairs to the original projection room. The walls are lathe and plaster; the flooring is 4" wood planking. To the west inside the auditorium, are located the ladies powder room and restroom, and stairs leading up to the crying room. Within the confines of the auditorium is also a gentlemen's restroom. Located outside the powder room is an original drinking water dispenser. This is a porcelain bowl mounted directly on a pipe coming up from the floor. The water stays on continuously. The lobby area also features a concession stand. Two "flame" wall sconces, original to the building, accent partition walls. These are 8 inch high and of glass molded in the form of a fire flame. The glass is lightly painted inside a purple/brown/yellow color to accentuate the "flame" appearance when lit.

The theater itself is an area 65'x30' with a floor sloping down to the orchestra pit where the floor levels out. This slope drops 1 foot in 8 feet. There are double doors located at this level on the east and west sides. These are exit doors, which will be utilized as ADA accessible entrance/exit on the west side of the building. The stage is elevated approximately 3 feet and has 6-foot wings and a proscenium arch, which was re-constructed during the restoration process (the original wings had been removed at some point when motion pictures were introduced). The floors are of wood planking; the walls of the auditorium are lathe/plaster with a Celutex (sound control) covering that has been re-painted as part of the restoration. Originally, the theater held 300 wood flip-seats. There are now 158 in the theater and are spaced further apart than the original 300.

At approximately 18' feet high up on the walls a continuous molding encircles the room. This 6" wide molding is supported with simple wood brackets every 24-28". Above this shelf, on the east and west walls, are sections of wallpaper depicting different scenes of flowers, forests, Japanese pagodas, palaces, Grecian ruins, birds and water scenes, each about four feet tall. Above the stage is another wallpaper section 8 feet wide by 4 feet tall depicting a forest and floral scene. Minor repairs have been completed on the paper in the restoration process. Above the east/west scenes are Celutex walls that are painted blue to match the rest of the walls, but have a white "cloud" finish. Above the wallpaper sections, the walls begin to curve to create a cove ceiling with original pressed and painted tin at the flat top. The tin sections are highly ornamental square sections. As part of the restoration, new lighting has been added in the center of the building, including a ceiling fan with light and wall sconce lights. There are original lights on both ends of the ceiling. These are frosted white, oblong bulbs with metal caps.

The stage area with proscenium measures 17'x30'. There are two side entrances to stage to the east and west. There are two doors from the stage to the south (rear) of the building which lead to dressing rooms (this area was originally a small dressing room and later utilized as a garage for the Brown's 1909 Hupmobile). In front of the stage a short wood wall with low posts separates the orchestra pit from the first row of seating. Footlights accent the front edge of the stage.

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

**The Nifty Theatre**

**Douglas/Washington**

**Section Number 7, Page 3**

**Narrative Description (continued)**

The original suspended backdrop screen is lowered to the stage from a wood slated roller with ropes and pulleys. This backdrop is painted with oils on canvas and depicts a stair landing with concrete railings, flowers in urns, potted plants, and a background scene of trees and a lake. Dominating the background design is decorative red drapery with cords and tassels. This screen has suffered minor water damage and exposure to dirt but remains intact today.

The current appearance of the structure, with the minor changes as listed above, is virtually the same as when the doors opened in 1919. The wood floors are original and have been sanded and re-stained. The walls have been repaired and painted in the auditorium. The Nifty's architectural design is unique. Except for the Douglas County Courthouse, few buildings in the Waterville area resemble it with a Mission/Spanish Revival complexion and Roaring 20's decorum. This property meets the National Register Criteria as it was built in the boom of our nation's development. The Nifty Theatre is unique in architecture and for its history of culture, arts, entertainment and commerce to a rural northwestern town. It is important to the locality as a long-standing structure of the community and comes with a wealth of information derived from older residents of the community that remember those "days gone by." Comparing the real estate listing information to the building description today, it is found that little has changed. The basic structure is intact and many of the decorative and historic elements are in place. The current owner plans on restoring the theater and subsequently reopening the building as a performing arts theater and community hall, thus offering a further revitalization and enhancement of the community.

# National Register of Historic Places

## Continuation Sheet

The Nifty Theatre

Douglas/Washington

Section Number 8, Page 1

### Narrative Statement of Significance

The Nifty Theater meets the National Register Criteria A as it has been maintained in its original use as a theater. The property also meets Criteria C due to the retention of the structure's exterior and interior integrity with only minor alterations over the years. It embodies distinctive characteristics of the type of theater built in rural communities at that time and would be considered a Combination House by the year it was built with characteristics of a Nickelodeon style of theater, serviceable to both vaudeville and movies (MPD, National Register). A Combination House often featured characteristics of old world styles for embellishment and known as vaudeville theaters, movie theaters and movie-vaudeville theaters. Other elements of a Combination House include projecting marquee above a recessed entry and exterior embellishment. The interior space was divided into a lobby, projection booth and auditorium. Nickelodeons, recognized as the first movie theaters, encompassed the storefront conversions, second floor walk-ups and built expressly for early film exhibition with functional, flat-floor, singular spaces with a fixed screen at one end and a projection booth above the entryway at the opposite. Sometimes there was a shallow stage under the screen. Although the Nifty was built a few years later (1918) than most Nickelodeons (1905-1910) and Combination House theaters (1905-1915), it was built in an earlier style probably due to the economics of rural Waterville instead of the Palace-era style theaters of 1915-1936. The owner, though, may have been influenced by the palatial elements in early theaters by the appearance of the elaborate wall coverings that were installed high on the interior walls. The Wenatchee Theater, a similar style structure was built in Wenatchee in 1905 and was first designed with a flat floor for vaudeville acts and public dancing. This 300-seat theater was completely equipped with stage and scenery and could accommodate even prize fighting events. The theater was remodeled in 1908 with a sloping floor for film entertainment. The 300 seat-Nifty Theater, designed very much like the Wenatchee Theater, utilizes the stage area but accommodates patrons with a sloped floor for easier viewing of both live acts and later, motion pictures.

It is distinguishable from the neighboring buildings in the town of Waterville, Washington, (National Register Historic District 05/19/88, Waterville Hotel NR 10/18/84 and the Smith Hospital and Douglas County Press Building NR 05/11/89). These were constructed predominantly of local brick and concrete and date from 1891 to 1915. The city's commercial district, located at the intersection of Locust and Chelan Streets has the character of a city center and by 1911 the area was referred to informally as a public square, reflecting the district's role as a focal point for commercial activity. The 1903 wheat boom had a major impact on the city's built environment and "nowhere were the fortunes of the city more clearly reflected than in the growth of the downtown commercial center." The styles of the 17 contributing structures in the commercial district are predominately two-story structures with storefront bays. The integrity of the district remains well preserved although integrity of individual buildings varies. In the National Register Historic District for Waterville, Washington it is noted that "several properties of historical interest in the commercial development of the city exist outside the boundaries. The Waterville Hotel (National Register, 1984) is located one-half block to the west, the Nifty Theatre is located one-half block to the east...." "Collectively, the buildings of the Downtown Waterville Historic District form the finest example of turn of the century commercial architecture in (Douglas) county and are an outstanding reflection of a small city on the agricultural frontier."

The Nifty was constructed entirely of wood with the Mission style parapet at the roofline and a large box-shape design. The Multiple Property Documentation also notes that Combination houses used old-world styles of embellishment and the Nifty certainly follows this with a simplified Mission styling and minimal decoration. There were several structures in the Mission style built in the nearest city of Wenatchee, Washington, 27 miles away. The Nifty Theatre qualifies for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places due to its retention of its original integrity. The structure exists in the original location, there have been no additions placed on the original lot. The site is located one block away from the Downtown Waterville Historic District, on the same street. The building retains the original exterior cladding and trim, marquee, and façade. There have been few

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

The Nifty Theatre

Douglas/Washington

Section Number 8, Page 2

### Narrative Statement of Significance (continued)

alterations. Interior integrity also adds to the strength of this nomination in that the original floor plan remains intact, the flooring, wall materials and seating are original and limited alterations to the lighting have not distracted from the original appearance of the interior space. The lobby, auditorium and projection booth remains in near original condition except for the removal of the original film equipment in the projection room. Plans are underway to replace the film equipment with vintage equipment. The limited alterations to the auditorium have been the replacement of curtains to wood walls to separate the concession counter and the bathrooms from the main seating area. This feature does not distract from the interior space use today.

The rural community of Waterville drew its citizens and rural neighbors to a bustling downtown in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and featured several stores, active businesses and several banks. It was a natural occurrence for a theater to be built as one of the only entertainment features in the community, besides saloons. It was built as a large structure near the major downtown activities of Waterville. While feature films were the main core of the entertainment provided there, it actually served the needs of the community in many other ways such as providing space for high school plays, meeting space and live acts (vaudeville). The National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form for "Movie Theaters in Washington State from 1900 to 1948," discusses how early theatrical productions of traveling troupes, vaudeville and musicals set the stage for the public to respond favorably to the technology of moving pictures. This documentation further elaborates on the significant social aspect of community life not only across the nation, but also in the rural isolated populations of early Washington State. "When technology birthed the mechanism for projecting images in motion, a ready market existed to sample its wares."

Often theaters were located near or in the downtown area of a community and most often was a visually prominent structure that served for different cultural events, a gathering place for nightlife and social centers for the entire community. W. P. Brown built the Nifty Theatre in 1918 and opened for business in 1919. It is remarkable he was able to build such a structure due to the United States having just entered into World War I and the resulting hardship this war caused in our nation. It became even more important to have a theater for this rural area to bring in entertainment as well as news events during a national crisis. "Geography and climate complicated communication among Washington communities which film entertainment helped remedy with its valued newsreel service." A budding film industry also mixed well with the frontier nature of most Washingtonians."

Mr. Brown lived in the basement apartment with his wife and operated the theater from 1919-1959. An attempt to sell the theater in 1946 (for \$20,000) was unsuccessful. The current property owner discovered a copy of the original "Theatre Exchange Company Listing #105" describing the Nifty property. This real estate sale listing is important documentation that has served as a valuable resource for the building's history. In this document, written by Mr. Brown, it is stated, "Family theater in County seat with no competition. Excellent living quarters on premises. Present owner has had the show business in this town for 30 years. The income from this situation has permitted the owner to enjoy his hobby of racehorses and to acquire some 1200 acres of land in addition to his theater property. The owner is a college man (Washington State) and chose show business because his knee failed to stop a lugar bullet and left him slightly incapacitated for strenuous work or long hours. That his choice is a wise one is attested by his 30 years in the town and his worldly acquisitions." The document then describes the building as such: **BUILDING:** On a corner, 1 block from main business intersection. Plain V roof frame structure. Substantially built with alternate 2" x 8" and 3" x 8" side studding. Dimensions 31.4' x 108' plus 9.6' shed type extension in back. Approximately 30' maximum height. Built in 1919. Painted white. Paint on north and west sides fair, on south and east sides needs repainting. Shed type extension on back used as a garage and part was used as dressing room for stage players. There are two dressing room spaces, one down a flight of stairs and the other on the garage level. The composition roof is in good condition except the northwest corner. A

# National Register of Historic Places

## Continuation Sheet

The Nifty Theatre

Douglas/Washington

Section Number 8, Page 3

### Narrative Statement of Significance (continued)

piece approximately 4' x 4' was blown off in storm and has not been replaced. Stands alone on a 75' x 119' lot, 4' in from the street on the east side and joins the street line in front. The approximately 40' x 119' vacant property on the east side is used as a yard. It has some shrubs and trees and a clothesline. The back is used to store wood for one of the furnaces. There are four ventilators on the peak of the roof. The front is stuccoed and appears to be in good condition. The name of the theater is painted on the side towards the business district and also on the front. A small canopy overhangs the street but serves no advertising purpose. There are 4 steps up from the street to the enclosed ramp which is the outer lobby. The entrance is approximately 9'. The balance of the lower part of the front of the building is taken up with display space in 4 glass enclosed frames." Today, the building appears on the exterior as it was described in 1948. The remainder of this document is equally entertaining with detailed descriptions of the interior spaces on both floors, auditorium, the lobby, restrooms and office areas (and all the furnishings) as well as the projection equipment all being listed. Of note are Mr. Brown's notations about the COMPETITION ("Only theatre in the County. Nearest theatres are 27 miles one way and 42 miles in the other direction"), the POPULATION ("Approximately 1100 in town. Nearly 10,000 in County. Mostly old settlers and their descendants. Many of German descent."), the INDUSTRIES ("Typical rural community in which wheat farming, beef cattle and turkey raising account for most of the income. On main highway. Transients are accommodated by a good brick hotel and 2 tourist courts. Railroad is five miles distant. (Served by truck lines.) CLIMATE & MISCELLANEOUS: Typical eastern Washington seasonable weather. Hot summer is tempered somewhat by the elevation which is approximately 2650 feet above sea level. There are dam projects, either completed or proposed, in all directions. This will eventually effect the climate somewhat, due to the increase in the general amount of moisture retained. Excellent fishing and hunting territory. Large Union High School. Good Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Four Square and Federated (Methodist, Christian, Baptist and Presbyterian Churches). 3 automobile agencies. County seat. Weekly newspaper. Bank. Substantial business district. Community is prosperous. Active Commercial Club.)"

The Nifty Theatre meets the National Register criteria for the Entertainment/Recreation category not only by its years of entertainment operation but also by the fact that for years it provided a wide range of cultural and entertainment experiences for the small rural community of Waterville. Community and high school plays held performances there, traveling vaudeville acts traveled by train from Wenatchee to Waterville, then by wagon or later, automobiles to perform on its stage and later when movies were shown there, the latest feature films were shown to an appreciative, isolated community. The Nifty Theatre was able to provide information about the armed services in movie news for the patriots left at home through two world wars. Often this information was more timely than the weekly newspaper or other communications. Besides entertainment, the theater provided a gathering spot for the social life of the local citizenry; a place where people of all ages could go and not be directly associated with the saloons or other adult nightlife. During the dark times of the Depression years, Mr. Brown sponsored drawings for bags of groceries and cash rewards, providing some levity. The theater was also a commerce-generating proposition as local people were hired to operate the theater thus enhancing the economy of Waterville.

It should also be noted that Mr. Brown was a colorful character of Waterville during this time. He kept meticulous records of his horse racing interests and dairies of his business holdings, his receipts and stars that performed at the theater. His ledger of performances at the Nifty records the dates, income, taxes, name of attraction, film distributor, and fees he paid for billboard advertising, music and wages to staff. From the lesser-known films to the more notable, Mr. Brown's records list such movies as "Flashing Fangs" (1927) and listing his costs of \$48 in two evenings showings, "Flaming Flapper" and "Below the Line" (costing \$65 for two showings). One notation remarks that "Hooked at Alter" and "American Venus" failed to arrive on time from Paramount. He had to call Paramount, then drive to Wenatchee to pick up the films that were sent to him by train. In August of 1926, a

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

The Nifty Theatre

Douglas/Washington

Section Number 8, Page 4

### Narrative Statement of Significance (continued)

three-day performance was held for Deen Paul, otherwise known as "The Human Radio," an apparent psychic, but not an "ordinary so-called "mind reader or Crystal Gazer" (Brown's notes indicate that receipts for the performance were split "50-50" with Paul). Throughout the ledger are hand bills advertising the upcoming films ("Hearts and Fists," a western with logging scenes from Tacoma, Washington; "Funnymooners," a comedy with Ralph Graves and special added attractions of traveling musicians offering singing, dancing and ensemble entertainment from high opera to Hawaiian radio stars ("MINGLE and FROLIC in the Sunkissed atmosphere of Faraway Hawaii"- all from 1926). Thursday, February 4, 1926 was an exciting night when the Nifty presented San Francisco Vaudeville Shows with Jessie Frawley. Mr. Brown notes on the handbill indicate that he felt Jessie Frawley was a "good dancer only" and her co-stars were "very ordinary or poor" entertainers. His notes on the ledger sheet further comments on this entertainment with "Jessie Frawley + Dad + 2 hicks on guitar." In July of 1924, the De Bells's Minstrels played to 745 people and were noted as "an extra good company." Notations about the film industry also reflect his keeping abreast of important events in Hollywood such as film actress "Barbara La Marr (originally from Yakima) died at her home in Altadena, Calif." (January 30, 1926). On Tuesday, September 8, 1925, "Lora Carol and Company," (Lora Carol, "the Galli Curci of Broadway" with her partner, Mr. Ring, a tenor, violinist and comedian") from New York's Broadway offered "singing, violin specialties, comedy and a special feature "presenting Mr. Ring's latest song for the first time 'The World Can Never Understand' written at Banff last week." Even the "Arizona Wranglers" of KNX Hollywood played the Nifty on December 2, 1925. They were advertised as the "most imitated cowboy entertainers of all time!"

The Associated Students of Waterville High School musical and comedy performances were also held yearly at the Nifty. Several of the movies shown were made from well-known books of the period such as "Thelma," "Beverly of Gaustauck" and "Girl of the Golden West" (1924). Earnings for an evening film or live entertainment might average \$40 for an evening when tickets cost 35 cents for adults and 25 cents for children. Even into the 50's the variety of entertainment was exceptional. A flyer from November 8, 1951 announced the "Big Stage Show" featuring an "international hit parade" of stars. "Harold Hardin, Ace Juggler, Comedian and Impressionist (who also acted as Master of Ceremonies) was on-stage with Red Watson, Canada's Wizard of the Banjo, Dale Hall, a Lovely Black Light Novelty Dancer and The Royal Whirlwinds, a Sensational Roller Skating Team." Mr. Brown's comment on the entertainment was "a good show and a full house of adults - standing room only!" These are examples of the diverse types of entertainment offered to the public by Mr. Brown at the Nifty Theatre. The ledger also shows evidence that the theater business in 1923 was fairly profitable with a year-end reporting of \$2,458.24 in receipts, although towards the end of Mr. Brown's life, it appears that his estate had dwindled significantly.

In 1959 with the introduction of television, the theater became unprofitable to Mr. Brown and he closed the Nifty's doors. At this time the projection equipment, chairs, and screen were sold to other theaters in larger cities. The North Central Washington Museum in Wenatchee utilized a large section of seating for many years and was recently returned for reinstallation in the renovated theater. After Mr. Brown's death in 1960, Mrs. Brown sold the building to Claude Case of Waterville for \$1.00. She lived in the basement apartment until her death in 1970. Mr. Case utilized the building for storage of equipment and supplies for his Construction Company and collections, owning the property from 1970-1997. He made no alterations to the site. In 1997 Jim Dixon, also of Waterville, purchased the structure and began restoration. The building remained intact in its original condition during this time period. It is a unique situation that the Nifty was "frozen in time" while other theaters across the nation were being lost. In the evolution of entertainment offerings and venues, theaters were often remodeled into multi-plexes and their unique characteristics lost in modernization.

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

**The Nifty Theatre**

**Douglas/Washington**

**Section Number 9, Page 1**

**Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

Identifying American Architecture, John J. G. Blumenson, 1977, pgs. 2-5.

What Style is it? A Guide to American Architecture, John C. Polleiers, S, Allen Chambers, Jr., Nancy B. Schwartz, Preservation Press, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1983.

Douglas County Museum, microfiche records of Wenatchee World and Douglas County Press articles and advertisements, 1918 – 1925.

National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Listing: "Movie Theaters in Washington State from 1900 to 1948, Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, August 20, 1991.

Nifty Theatre daily log ledger of W. P. Brown, 1920-1927.

W. P. Brown, personal year dairies, 1927-45 (not complete).

Personal papers of W. P. Brown relating to property (original mortgage, deeds of trust and loan papers).

Personal interviews with Waterville residents (familiar with the history of the theater): Virginia Nelson, Phil and Dorothy Wainscott, Bob Borders, Edna Slusser-George, Bobbie Ann Willms, Carl Thomsen, Mrs. Ed Grande, Dale Loeb sack, Jeannie Brown, Barbara Firoved, Sam Garrett, Kathy Kendrick, Elsie Tittle, Mable Knowles, Joann Whitehall.

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

**The Nifty Theatre**

**Douglas/Washington**

**Section Number 10, Page 1**

**Geographical data**

**Verbal Boundary Description**

Lots 1, 2 and 3, Block 12, Kincade's First Addition to the town of Waterville. The property is bounded to the north by Locust Street, to the west by Rainier Street, and to the south by an alley.

**Boundary Justification**

This legal parcel has been associated with the property throughout the historic period.

The Nifty Theatre  
Name of Property

Douglas/Washington  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property Less than one

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 11 0 7 20 0 53 5 28 1 2 1 8  
Zone Easting Northing  
2                                    

3                                      
Zone Easting Northing  
4                                    

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

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

**Boundary Justification**

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

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Jenna Dixon/ Kris Young  
North Central Washington Museum (509) 664-3343  
organization Wenatchee, WA 98801 date December 17, 1998  
street & number 391 L N.W., P.O. Box 696 telephone (509) 745-8127  
city or town Waterville state WA zip code 98858

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

**Additional items**

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

**Property Owner**

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

name James Dixon  
street & number 391 L N.W., P.O. Box 696 telephone (509) 745-8127  
city or town Waterville state WA zip code 98858

**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, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.