



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

**Entered in
The National Register
of
Historic Places**

May 17, 2010

Notice to file:

This property has been automatically listed in the National Register of Historic Places. This is due to the fact that the publication of our Federal Register Notice: "National Register of Historic Places: Pending Nominations and Other Actions" was delayed beyond our control to the point where the mandated 15 day public comment period ended after our required 45 day time frame to act on the nomination. The nomination is technically adequate and meets the National Register criteria for evaluation, and thus, automatically listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

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National Register of Historic Places
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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 National Register Bulletin *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. 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 certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

1. Name of Property

historic name Walla Theater
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 909 Central Avenue not for publication
city or town Walhalla vicinity
state North Dakota code ND county Pembina code 067 zip code 58202

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 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 at the following level(s) of significance:
 national statewide local
Merlan E. Gaaverud Jr. 3-31-10
Signature of certifying official Date
State Historic Preservation Officer
Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.
Signature of commenting official Date
Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:
 entered in the National Register determined eligible for the National Register
 determined not eligible for the National Register removed from the National Register
 other (explain:)
Joe Edison H. Beall 5-17-10
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

**Entered in
The National Register
of
Historic Places**

Walla Theater
Name of Property

Pembina County ND
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
- building(s)
- Object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
		buildings
1		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)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Art Moderne

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: Poured concrete
walls: Clay tile
roof: Steel decking
other: Façade of cast stone

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

The Walla Theater is a one-story, rectangular building 40 feet wide by 120 feet long that faces southeast onto Central Avenue, the main business street of Walhalla. Atop a foundation of poured concrete, the exterior walls are built of structural clay tile, plastered on the inside. The flat roof is composition atop steel decking affixed to steel joists. The front façade of the building is decorative cast stone. The sloping interior floor of the theater is of poured concrete. The theater, built in the Moderne style, possesses modest external ornamentation about its façade. Above the front entrance is a lighted marquee, to the right is the ticket booth, and on either side are display windows. The cast-stone façade is pale pink-beige in color, except for a bottom row of light turquoise. Interior ornamentation is modest, largely confined to composition wall fixtures in a floral, Moderne motif along the side walls of the theater. The theater is fitted with 408 seats.

Narrative Description

The Walla Theater is a one-story, rectangular building 40 feet wide by 120 feet long that faces southeast onto Central Avenue, the main business street of Walhalla. The building sits on a foundation of poured concrete that remains in good condition. The exterior walls are built of structural clay tile, plastered on the inside. External walls are generally sound, but in need of remedial attention to stop deterioration. The flat roof is composition atop steel decking affixed to steel joists. Leakage from the roof has caused damage to interior plaster. The front façade of the building is decorative cast stone. The interior floor of the theater, which slopes about 6 inches from the lobby down to the screen, is of poured concrete. In the crawl space under the floor is a return air system used for heating and cooling.

The theater, built in the Moderne style, possesses modest external ornamentation about its façade. The front entrance is centered in the façade, with a lighted marquee above it. To the right of the front entrance is the ticket booth, which opened onto the street during fair weather, onto the lobby in winter. Below the external ticket window is fitted decorative curved, block glass. On either side of the front entrance is a display window, which was used to promote current and coming attractions. The cast-stone façade is pale pink-beige in color, except for a bottom row of light turquoise.

Interior ornamentation is modest, largely confined to composition wall fixtures in a floral, Moderne motif along the side walls of the theater.

Entering the lobby via the front entry, patrons found the ticket booth and concession counter on their right. Proceeding forward, patrons entered the foyer, with men's and women's restrooms accessible on the right and left. A notable feature also accessible from the foyer was the cry room, intended for the use of young parents with infants, which was wired for sound and has a window facing the screen through which occupants could view the movie. Two doors led from the foyer into the theater proper, which is fitted with 408 seats (in need of cleaning, but otherwise in remarkably good condition), intersected by two parallel aisles leading down to the front stage platform and screen. Heating and air conditioning equipment are housed in rooms behind the screen.

A stairway on the north wall of the foyer leads to the second story above the foyer and lobby. Inside the projection booth on this upper level are the twin projectors, in good state of preservation. Also on this level is an office for the manager.

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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Entertainment/Recreation

Social history

Period of Significance

1949-1982

Significant Dates

1949 construction

1950 grand opening

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Perry E. Crosier & Son (architects)

Swedberg Construction Company

Period of Significance (justification)

From date of construction to date of theater closing

Criteria Consideratons (explanation, if necessary)

N/A

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria)

The Walla Theater is significant under Criterion A of the National Register of Historic Places because of its importance to entertainment and recreation in the community and because of its integral and central place in the social and economic history of Walhalla and the surrounding region. The Walla Theater, during its active period of use, from its construction in 1949 to its closing in 1982, was the entertainment center for Walhalla and its trade area. As in country towns across the nation, the theater served as a social center where people interacted with neighbors, conducted business, amused themselves, partook of national entertainment culture, dated and courted. The Walla was even more central to the community in that it was the venue for distinctive annual events, such as the Santa Show (a community holiday celebration, heavily attended) and John Deere Day (a promotional event for farmers). Besides the many personal milestones for which the Walla was the venue, there also were certain memorable and singular events that are touchstones of remembered community life, such as the appearance of the cowboy singer Tex Ritter in 1951. The period of significance for the Walla Theater begins in 1949, and its significance was firmly established during the first decade of its existence, after which the theater remained vital to the continuing history of the community.

Narrative Statement of Significance (provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance)

Entertainment/Recreation: The Walla Theater, during its active period of use, from its construction in 1949 to its closing in 1982, was the entertainment center for Walhalla and its trade area. Not only did it offer current feature films, the most popular form of public entertainment in small towns of the era, but it also was the venue for distinctive annual events such as the Santa Show (community holiday celebration, heavily attended) and John Deere Day (a promotional event for farmers). The Walla, too, was the venue for special entertainment events, such as the appearance of cowboy singer Tex Ritter in 1951.

Social History: Besides offering entertainment, the Walla Theater was a linchpin of social and economic activity in the community. The Santa Show was the largest single community gathering that took place regularly in Walhalla. John Deere Day was a self-conscious attempt to tie the economic interests of the countryside to the town. The theater was the venue in which friendships and romances were forged and in which family ties were reinforced. The heyday of the Walla Theater corresponded to the post-World War II demographic peak of Walhalla and the other country towns of the northern plains. At no other time could the town have supported such an institution. Merchants and community organizers recognized the social and economic importance of the theater and so cooperated with theater management in order to boost the town.

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

See continuation sheet.

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: Gorge Arts & Heritage Council, Walhalla

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Motion pictures in Walhalla pre-dated the present Walla Theater by nearly a half-century. By 1908 the Opera House, a two-story building with the upstairs used by the Independent Order of Odd Fellows and the ground floor leased out for events, was hosting occasional appearances of an Edison Kinetoscope showing movies interspersed with group singing. Over the next few years traveling projectionists regularly brought their equipment and films to the house. By 1913 the Walhalla Commercial Club was organizing such entertainments in order to attract custom to the town. By 1917 there was a permanent installation of projection equipment in the house, with movies twice a week. Sometime in the mid-1920s the Odd Fellows sold the hall, and Peter Campbell acquired it. He continued showing movies and also managed other events there. In the late 1930s he updated the sound and projection systems, installed a slanted floor, added a lobby addition, built a more modern projection booth, and stuccoed the exterior of the wood-frame building. During this time of improvement Campbell ceased calling the building "The Opera House" and dubbed it "The Walla Theater." By 1940 the local paper declared the Walla Theater "one of the most up-to-date in this part of the state." That was fine for the depression decade, but by the late 1940s, post-World War II standards and prosperity demanded better—resulting in construction of a new Walla Theater.

The new Walla Theater, the one remaining today and treated in this nomination, is located on Lot 9 of Block 38 of the original Walhalla townsite. It was designed by Perry E. Crosier & Son, architects in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The general contractor for construction, retained by the Campbells, was Swedberg Construction Company. The new theater was constructed immediately adjacent to the old theater, that is, the old Opera House, adjoining the Opera House on the southwest, facing southeast onto the main business street, Central Avenue (which runs southwest-northeast). (The old Opera House-theater would become a popular bowling alley, would close in 1987, and be demolished a year or two later.) The new theater thus stood at the southwest end of the main business district of Walhalla.⁵ The theater would be operated throughout its historic period by Peter and Rose Campbell. Although Peter was the more public face of the business, Rose was an important partner in its operation, and when the theater opened, a note of thanks in the newspaper was signed by "The Campbells."

First notice of the construction in the local newspaper, the *Walhalla Mountaineer*, was on 3 November 1949, at which time the external walls were nearing completion, the contractor, Swedberg Construction Company, having taken advantage of extended fair autumn weather to advance the work. Just as it neared completion, however, near-disaster struck. Completion of the building was projected for the first week of March 1950. On Tuesday, 28 February, reported the newspaper, "fire, of unknown origin, broke out . . . and done considerable damage." Fortunately, "The blaze was confined to the wash room at the rear of the new theatre, but smoke damage spread through the heat louvers and will necessitate replacing most of the N-Wood ceiling, as well as the special tile decoration on the walls."

The repairs were made and construction forged ahead, so that the proud proprietor, Peter Campbell, was able to announce a grand opening for Thursday, 22 June 1950. The newspaper's front-page headline declared the intense public interest in this event: "New Walla Theatre to Hold Grand Opening June 22nd; Public to Get First Glimpse of New 446 Seat, \$100,000 Theatre Here."

The new Walla theatre will hold its grand opening Thursday, June 22, an announcement in this issue of the *Mountaineer* states. Workmen are putting the finishing touches to the new \$100,000 structure this week, and everything is expected to be in readiness for the opening night. Seats were installed the past week, and minor work is expected to take all of this week, with the moving of the new Century equipment from the old building Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of next week. No shows are scheduled for June 19, 20, and 21.

The new Walla is a structure 38x120 feet, with an art stone front. Its spacious lobby and foyer is in green, gray and red, with green and gray walls and doors, with a red oak leaf wall design. The auditorium has a dark green

⁵ Blueprints, 1949, in possession of Gorge Arts & Heritage Council, Walhalla; Map of Walhalla, 1952, Fire Underwriters Inspection Bureau, North Dakota Fire Insurance Maps, 1921-1965, Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, Fargo.

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bottom trim, with light green and gray walls, also with red trim and design. Leedom rugs, which will carpet the foyer and the aisles are in light red and tan.

The 446 seats in the auditorium and cry room are some of the finest Body-form chairs put out by the American Seating company, and are in red.

The lobby, foyer, projection room, rest rooms, cry room, manager's office and box office are heated by hot water boiler system, with the auditorium heated by hot air with United States air conditioning, air washer and cooling system.

The canopy has both flood and running lights with two big name signs on each side in neon.

Two outstanding pictures have been secured by Mr. Campbell, owner for the opening week end, with "The Reformer and the Redhead", starring June Allyson and Dick Powell, booked for the first three nights, June 22, 23, and 24, while "The Daughter of Rosie O'Grady", starring Jane Haver, and Gordon MacRae, are billed for Sunday, Monday and Tuesday June 25, 26 and 27. Both are releases less than a month old. Show times include a matinee Sunday at 2 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday evening shows and June 22, 23, and 24 shows at 7:15 and 9:15, with one showing other nights at 8:15.

The perceived importance of the theater to the overall business climate of the community was evidenced by a full-page ad bought by Walhalla merchants congratulating the management of the Walla on the occasion of its opening. Follow-up announcements partook of small-town boosterism, declaring the Walla "one of the finest theatres in the Northwest" and declaring, "Motion pictures are the very best entertainment that money can buy! Attend often!"

When the gala date arrived, the theater was finished just in time. Carpeting was laid the week before, drapes on Monday the week of the opening, the sound equipment moved over from the old theater the same week, and workmen completing interior details on Wednesday. Management opened the doors at 6:15pm Thursday and commenced the first show at 7:15. That was *The Reformer and the Redhead*, starring June Allyson and Dick Powell. There was a second showing at 9:15. After three nights of this first film, it was succeeded by *The Daughter of Rosie O'Grady*, starring Jane Haver and Gordon MacRae. Thus began the practice of showing current feature films with family appeal that characterized the theater during its period of significance.

The focused community attention on the opening of the theater illustrated both the vitality of Walhalla in the 1950s, a time when large families demanded family entertainment and established a youth culture in the small town, and the centrality of the theater to these social groups. Mayor Hector Johnstone cut the ribbon before the doors, allowing a child, Loretta Karel, to buy the first ticket. Peter Campbell welcomed the crowd personally before the show, and Johnstone officially declared the thanks and appreciation of the community. Fellow businessmen bedecked the hall with flowers. The newspaper published a suite of photographs depicting attendees lined up under the marquee and crowded into their seats.

The new theater quickly became a center for memorable community events, such as the annual Santa Show. By the time of its construction, Walhalla already had an established tradition of a community Christmas party. In 1950 this event moved into the Walla, the event organized by a well-known local man, Emil Gagnon, billed in the newspaper as "Santa's chief helper." Organizational sponsors were the Walhalla Civic Club, the local post of the American Legion, and of course, the Walla Theater. The first Santa Show comprised two kiddie features shown on Friday afternoon, 22 December 1950. Santa Claus (in the person of Steve Bisenius) appeared to pass out bags filled with candy and nuts to more than 800 children, an amazing turnout showing the vitality and youthful demographics of the community at the time.

Annually thereafter the Santa Show filled the theater, with the redoubtable Emil Gagnon as empressario for the first few years. In 1952 and 1953 he decided to tap the public fascination with aviation and have Santa arrive by airplane. The 1952 event was announced in the *Mountaineer* in the form of a mock-telephone conversation between Gagnon and

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Santa, wherein Gagnon confirmed arrangements for the visit (but also observed, "I'm making all the arrangements again this year – but, I am getting old – it seems like I've been your helper ever since you went up north"). On Friday, 19 December 1952, Santa was delivered by Oscar Ness and his Walhalla Flying Service, landing at the Walhalla Gun Club Grounds and taxiing to the theater. Gagnon pronounced the event "the most successful Christmas tree program in history," as more than 900 attended. Santa returned by plane on 18 December 1953, for which day Mayor Johnstone, recalling some difficulties with the taxiing route the previous years, requested that all citizens parallel-park (instead of angle-parking) on Main Street between the Great Northern Potato Company and the Walla Theater. Weather was fair on Santa Show day 1953, resulting in an attendance topping 1000.

The Santa Show thrived for a period of years, then fell into disarray for a while. The decline in attendance to 600 in 1955 was blamed on "extremely frigid weather," but this also was the first year that lacked the services of Emil Gagnon. There was bad weather the year following, too, and apparently the usual sponsorship arrangements fell through, as the newspaper noted expenses were "being borne by moneys from a reserve fund of the city," and the Walhalla Fire Department had stepped in to manage the event. The firemen evidently got things reorganized, as in 1957 the paper reported "one of the largest crowds in recent years" for the Santa Show, the firemen obtaining merchant subscriptions to cover expenses. Through 1969, then, attendance was strong, from 700 up to 900. Following the death of Peter Campbell and the temporary closing of the theater, the Santa Show resumed in 1972, and it continued a popular event until the last occurrence, on 15 December 1982, just before the final closing of the theater.

John Deere Day was another popular event that showed the close interaction of the Walla Theater with the business community of Walhalla and rural population of the area. This was a promotional day for John Deere implements held in late winter, before the tillage and planting season. John Lorenz, owner of Lorenz Implement Company, brought the event to the Walla for the first time on Wednesday, 4 April 1951.

The inaugural John Deere Day featured screenings of *One Happy Family* (evidently a John Deere company-produced feature) in morning and afternoon at the Walla, with free lunch at the implement dealership. Company shorts screened along with the feature film included *His Father's Choice*, *Oddities in Farming*, *What's New for 1951*, *Mike on the Move*, and *The All-American Team*. The content of the program, as well as its timing (daytime, on a weekday, during late winter), indicates that the event was promotional and was aimed at adults, mainly male adults, prospective implement purchasers.

The initial John Deere Day set the pattern for subsequent ones. The *Mountaineer* described the content of the 1953 program.

The feature picture, "Paradise for Buster", is a comedy and stars Buster Keaton, popular clown of stage and screen. Other films included on the program are "Tom Gordon Goes Modern", the story of the new John Deere models 50 and 60 tractors; "Costly Bargains", a picture showing how the quality of John Deere parts is maintained; "Oddities in Farming", consisting of scenes of rare farming practices; and "What's New for 1953", unveiling the complete line-up of John Deere equipment for the coming year, showing this equipment at work in the field, and demonstrating briefly all outstanding features.

Paradise for Buster was an independent commercial film, whereas the other films shown were John Deere productions. Clearly, Lorenz Implement and the Walla Theater were taking part in a coordinated, nationwide marketing campaign investing theaters across the country. Tickets for film showings were given away at the implement dealership. By the mid-1950s company films featured regular appearances by stock characters, such as "the Gordon Family," every year promoting John Deere machinery through warm-hearted stories. Walhalla attendees were interested and amused to see one of their neighbors, Martin Bjornstad, appearing in a John Deere short on 14 February 1957; a John Deere film crew had interviewed him at home the previous fall. Annual John Deere days at the Walla continued until 1970.

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The Walla was the center also for charitable events, beginning on Tuesday, 4 September 1951, when the Walhalla Gun Club and the Pembina County Wildlife Federation organized a benefit film night to raise funds for a new community and high school athletic field. The event comprised a feature film and two shorts, one a wildlife film and the other a report on the national trapshooting championships. Obviously, this was a men's night at the Walla, which netted \$165. The following year, on 31 January, the Walla held its first March of Dimes campaign, collecting \$167 in contributions from theater attendees. Proprietor Campbell encouraged generosity by enlisting two local girls, Myrna Tetrault and Vernice Lee, to take up the collections. March of Dimes campaigns in the theater continued at least until 1957. In 1959 the Walla took collections for the local Heart Hospital fund.

There were occasional live entertainments at the Walla, such as the minstrel show entitled "Sugar Foot" put on by the American Legion on Wednesday, 29 November 1961, featuring twenty-eight local performers. On Friday night, 24 February 1962, there was a talent show to raise money for the high school band. These are merely documented examples of the many live events that took place at the Walla.

The most-touted and best-remembered personal appearance in the history of the theater took place on Thursday, 6 September 1951, when country singer and film star Tex Ritter came to the Walla. According to witnesses present, he rode his horse down one aisle of the theater, across in front of the stage, and out the other aisle. The *Mountaineer* was effusive in its promotion of this appearance by "America's most beloved Cowboy," who visited Walhalla near the height of his recording career. Ritter, a Texan, had made a remarkable career on the New York stage, on the radio, in more than seventy B-movie westerns (wherein he preferred to sing real cowboy songs, not phony movie songs), and finally as a recording artist with Capitol Records. The following year Ritter would record the theme song for the Gary Cooper film, *High Noon* ("Do Not Forsake Me, O My Darlin'"), and sing it at the first televised Academy Awards ceremony. Thus Tex Ritter's appearance at the Walla gave the people of Walhalla a taste of true celebrity. Notably, too, Walhalla's merchants sought to capitalize on Ritter's personal appearance, offering retail specials and encouraging people to drive into town for the evening.⁶

Most importantly, of course, the Walla showed motion pictures for appreciative audiences. Routinely it served up what Hollywood offered, reasonably close to release. Printed bi-monthly schedules circulated in town to inform the public of scheduled showings.⁷ Attendees affectionately referred to the Walla as "the show hall." Sometimes there were major releases that received unusually heavy promotion, such as *Ben-Hur* in 1961; it merited a large display ad, ran for eleven days, and was the occasion for raising ticket prices (adults \$1.25 evenings and \$1.00 Saturday matinees, children 60 cents all shows).

The *Mountaineer* was right in 1950 when it deemed motion pictures "the very best entertainment money can buy." The period of historic significance for the Walla Theater coincided with a time of relative prosperity and social vigor in Walhalla, as in other prairie towns, and movie-going was woven tight into the fabric of social activity, as it is into remembrance on the part of those who experienced it. Laurel Brusseau, for instance, who graduated high school in 1948, says, "I remember going to many, many movies. We went to movies all the time; that's what we did. They had three movies a week, and sometimes we'd hit all three." She and Frankie Carrier both remember, "It was a place to date, and a place to meet people you knew; if you weren't dating, you met people you knew as a group. Afterwards, you'd go down to Eddie Diemert's little spot, where you'd eat French fried potatoes and soft-serve ice cream." Diemert dispensed these treats over a fold-out counter facing the sidewalk from a business building.⁸

⁶ An authoritative sketch of the life of Tex Ritter is available in *The Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/RR/fri25.html>.

⁷ Printed bi-monthly schedules for showings at the Walla Theater in February-March 1978 and October-November 1980 are in possession of the Gorge Arts & Heritage Council.

⁸ Personal interview with Frankie Carrier, Lauren Brusseau, and Leona Schneider, 28 December 2006.

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Recollections of those times at the Walla commonly invoke the full range of senses. Brusseau recalls that commonly Mrs. Campbell sold tickets from the booth that was on your right as you approached the theater front. In summer the ticket booth opened onto the sidewalk, in winter it opened into the lobby. "The first thing when you came in," Brusseau says, "there was the smell of popcorn, and that was the enticement right there." Patrons respected the red velvet rope that divided those entering from those departing through the lobby and, when the time came, entered the theater proper. "It was a beautiful theater," Brusseau muses. "Plush, comfortable seats." She was always impatient with the credits, and eager for the feature, but enjoyed the cartoons and especially the newsreels. "One of the things I remember was it was always so fun for me to go in the summer time," Brusseau reminisces, "because when you came out, it was still daylight! It was so neat, because in the winter, it was dark when you went in." Such vivid and sensual recollections are strong evidence of the significance of the theater both to community life and also to individual development.⁹

Individuals also recall particular happenings, such as the night Tex Ritter came. "Tex Ritter came to town complete with his horse," Brusseau recounts. "He brought his horse right into the theater and came down one aisle and out the other side. I was absolutely astounded they would allow that horse in that beautiful theater, because what if he pooped on the floor? Well, it didn't happen. It was exciting enough, I could just put myself in that spot yet today."¹⁰

Carrier remembers clearly the night a hypnotist appeared and hypnotized Jill Brusseau, "a sweet young thing." Directed by the hypnotist to "go down in the audience and kiss the first bald head she saw," the girl provoked hilarity when she, as Carrier says, "went down and sat on my dad's lap!"¹¹

Spencer Clairmont, who grew up on a farm west of town, has good memories of the Santa Show and receiving his brown paper sack "with a caramel apple, a popcorn ball, peanuts, and maybe some bonbons, a few hard candies. Every kid really looked forward to the Santa Show." What kids did not look forward to was incurring the displeasure of the owner, Pete Campbell. "I remember Pete coming down the aisles with his big honkin' flashlight," Clairmont chuckles, to quiet noisy kids and stop them from throwing things. As for serious offenders, "He'd grab them by the nape of the neck and they'd be out on the street"—perhaps even banished from the theater for a period of weeks. It particularly annoyed him when teenagers sneaked into the crying room and used it as a hideout for necking (since few parents brought infants to the theater). After a movie high school kids would "drive the loop and then reverse the loop," cruising Highway 32 and then Central Avenue—taking them right past the Walla Theater.¹²

In her written recollections of the Walla, M. Denise Philipp agrees with Clairmont's assessment of the demeanor of Mr. Campbell: "Mr. Campbell was all business, ran a very tight shop, did not allow any shenanigans, patrolled the facility with a constant vigilance, and underneath it all was a very kindhearted gentleman." The theater was a place where good order prevailed. About halfway in there was a mark on the wall, indicating that children under a certain age were to sit in seats in front of this point, so as not to annoy their elders in the back. This sense of good order made a lasting impression. "I loved attending the Walla Theater," writes Philipp, "and can attribute the show hall experiences from my childhood and young adult years as some that have had a part in shaping me into who I am today."¹³

Local merchants realized that the social activities centered in the Walla were important to their business viability. By the mid-1960s the merchants were getting concerned about declining trade and decided to subsidize kiddie shows at the Walla in order to encourage adult shopping in town. The Walhalla Civic Club Merchant Committee decided in March

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Personal interview with Spencer Clairmont, 28 December 2006.

¹³ M. Denise Philipp, written memoir of the Walla Theater, 7 December 2007, copy courtesy of the author.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Walla Theater

Pembina County, North Dakota

Section number 8

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1965 to sponsor free shows for youngsters weekly commencing Friday, 9 April. Stores would remain open late on Friday nights.

The waning and closing of small-town institutions, such as the Walla Theater, commonly derived both from a decline in the economic and social status of the town and from the passing of influential individuals. On 3 September 1970, the *Mountaineer* reported sad news for the community. Following soon after the death of Peter Campbell, the Walla was closing.

With the showing of the "Reivers", the Walla Theatre in this city closed it's doors Sunday evening, Aug. 30, after operating in the building, pictured above, for the past 20 years. Announcement of the closing was made by the family of the late Peter Campbell,—including Mrs. Rose Campbell, Howard of St. John, Clarence of Walhalla, and Mrs. Frank Belinsky of Bismarck. The all-new theatre opened June 22, 1950, with the showing of the "Reformer and the Red Head".

The Campbell family has been in the theatre business, dating back to March 7, 1927, when they operated the old Opera House, which Mr. Campbell purchased from the Odd Fellows lodge in 1924, which now houses the Walla Lanes, operated by Mr. Campbell for a number of years until he disposed of the alleys to Fred Eastman. The Opera House was located just to the right of the present building.

The theater remained closed for more than a year, and then reopened on Friday, 14 January 1972. Mrs. Willie King had made an agreement with the Campbell family, and obtained a loan from the Small Business Administration, to purchase the theater. Following cleaning and repairs, the theater reopened showing *Song of Norway*, starring Florence Henderson, and announced there would be shows four nights a week. The Walhalla Merchant Club immediately voted to commence free Saturday matinees for children. Mrs. King continued to operate the theater through 1982. The final Santa Show was on 15 December 1982. On 22 December the final Walla ad in the *Mountaineer* thanked the public for its patronage over the years and wished all a merry Christmas.

Following closing of the movie theater, it stood unused and slowly fell into disrepair until 2007, when a local nonprofit, the Gorge Arts & Heritage Council, secured title to the property from heirs and resolved to restore the historic building. Restoration efforts are ongoing, with plans to restore the Walla as a center of community once again.

The heyday of the Walla Theater as the economic and social linchpin of Walhalla corresponds to its period of historic significance. The documentary evidence confirms the "significant contribution" of this property to history, and its importance to the community, during this time.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Walla Theater

Pembina County, North Dakota

Section number 9

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Bibliography for Walla Theater, Walhalla, Pembina County, North Dakota

Carrier, Frankie; Lauren Brusseau; and Leona Schneider. Personal interview, 28 December 2006. Walhalla, North Dakota.

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Crosier, Perry E., & Son. Walla Theater. Blueprints. In possession of Gorge Arts & Heritage Council. Walhalla, North Dakota.

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National Park Service. How to Complete the National Register Nomination Form. National Register of Historic Places Bulletin 16A. 1997. <http://www.nps.gov/history/hr/publications/bulletins/nrb16a/>

Northeastern North Dakota Heritage Association, Research and Exhibit Committee. *Walhalla-Leroy: The Legend and the Lore*. Cavalier, 1995.

Philipp, M.Denise. Memoir of the Walla Theater. 7 December 2007. Copy courtesy of the author.

Texas State Historical Association. *Handbook of Texas Online*. "Tex Ritter," <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/RR/fri25.html>.

Walhalla Mountaineer, 1903-1982. Paper files in offices of the *Walhalla Mountaineer*, Walhalla, North Dakota. Microfilm State Historical Society of North Dakota, Bismarck. Detailed information on the Walla Theater compiled from the newspaper and posted at the website of the Center for Heritage Renewal, North Dakota State University, <http://www.ndsu.edu/heritage/walla/mountaineer1.htm> and <http://www.ndsu.edu/heritage/walla/mountaineer2.htm>.

Walhalla Quasquicentennial Anniversary. 1973.

Walla Theater. Movie schedules, February-March 1978 and October 1980. In possession of Gorge Arts & Heritage Council. Walhalla, North Dakota.

Walla Theater
Name of Property

Pembina County ND
County and State

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property < 1
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	14	579403	5419388	3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2				4			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (describe the boundaries of the property)

Lot 9 Block 38, Walhalla Original Town

Boundary Justification (explain why the boundaries were selected)

Events described as significant in narrative were confined to this specific property location

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Tom Isern, Professor of History & Director, Center for Heritage Renewal
organization North Dakota State University date _____
street & number CJPP 12 telephone 701-799-2942
city or town Fargo state ND zip code 58108-6050
e-mail isern@plainsfolk.com

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **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. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Walla Theater
Name of Property

Pembina County ND
County and State

Property Owner

name Gorge Arts & Heritage Council
street & number 1100 Central Avenue telephone 701-549-2707
city or town Walhalla state ND zip code 58282

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive black and white photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Walla Theater

City or Vicinity: Walhalla

County: Pembina

State: ND

Photographer: Tom Isern

Date Photographed: 12/28/06

#	View of	From
1	General exterior	SE
2	General exterior	NE
3	General exterior	NW
4	General exterior	SW
5	Detail of tile in north wall	NW
6	Detail of tile in north wall	N
7	Detail of marquee	NE
8	Ticket booth (exterior)	NE
9	Glass blocks (below ticket window)	SE
10	Detail of stone façade	SE
11	Detail of foyer south wall	N
12	Ticket booth, from the foyer (interior)	SE
13	Concession stand	SE
14	Detail of interior south wall	N
15	Interior south wall	NE
16	Interior north wall	NW
17	Movie screen	E
18	Theater seats	SW
19	Seating and south wall from the stage	NW
20	Seating and north wall from the stage	SW
21	Inside the ticket booth, looking into the foyer	N
22	Projectors, in projection room	SE
23	Interior of crying room	E

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Walla Theater
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: NORTH DAKOTA, Pembina

DATE RECEIVED: 4/02/10 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 5/07/10
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 5/22/10 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 5/17/10
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 10000266

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT RETURN REJECT 5-17-10 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

**Entered in
The National Register
of
Historic Places**

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



Walla Theater
Pembina County ND
Tom Isern
tif

General exterior fr SE
#1



Walla Theater
Pembina County ND

Tom Isera
t:f

General exterior fr NE
#2



Walla Theater
Pembina County ND

Tom Isern

t:f

General exterior fr NW

#3



Walla Theater
Pembina County ND

Tom Isern

t: f

General exterior fr SW

4



Walla Theater
Pembina County ND
Tom Isern
tiff

Detail of tile in N wall
fr NW

5



Walla Theater
Pembina County ND

Tom Isern

tif

Detail of tile in N
wall for N

#6



Waller Theater
Pembina County ND

Tom Isern

tif

Detail of marquee
fr NE

#7



Walla Theater
Pembina County ND
Tom Isern

tif

Ticket booth (exterior)
fr NE

4



Walla Theater
Pembina County ND
Tom Isera
tif

Glass blocks (below
ticket window) fr SK

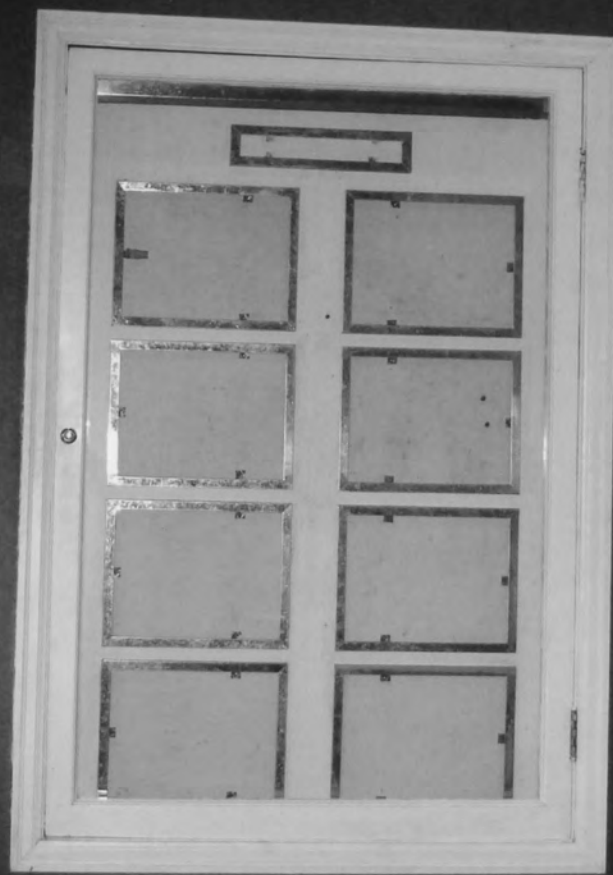
#9



Walla Theater
Pembina County ND
Tom Isern
t:f

Detail of stone facade
fr SE

#10



Walls Theater
Pembina County ND

Tom Isern

tif

Detail of foyer S
wall to N

11



Walla Theater
Pembina County ND

Tom Isern
f:f

Ticket booth, from the
foyer (interior), Fr SE

12



Fresh Hot

POP CORN

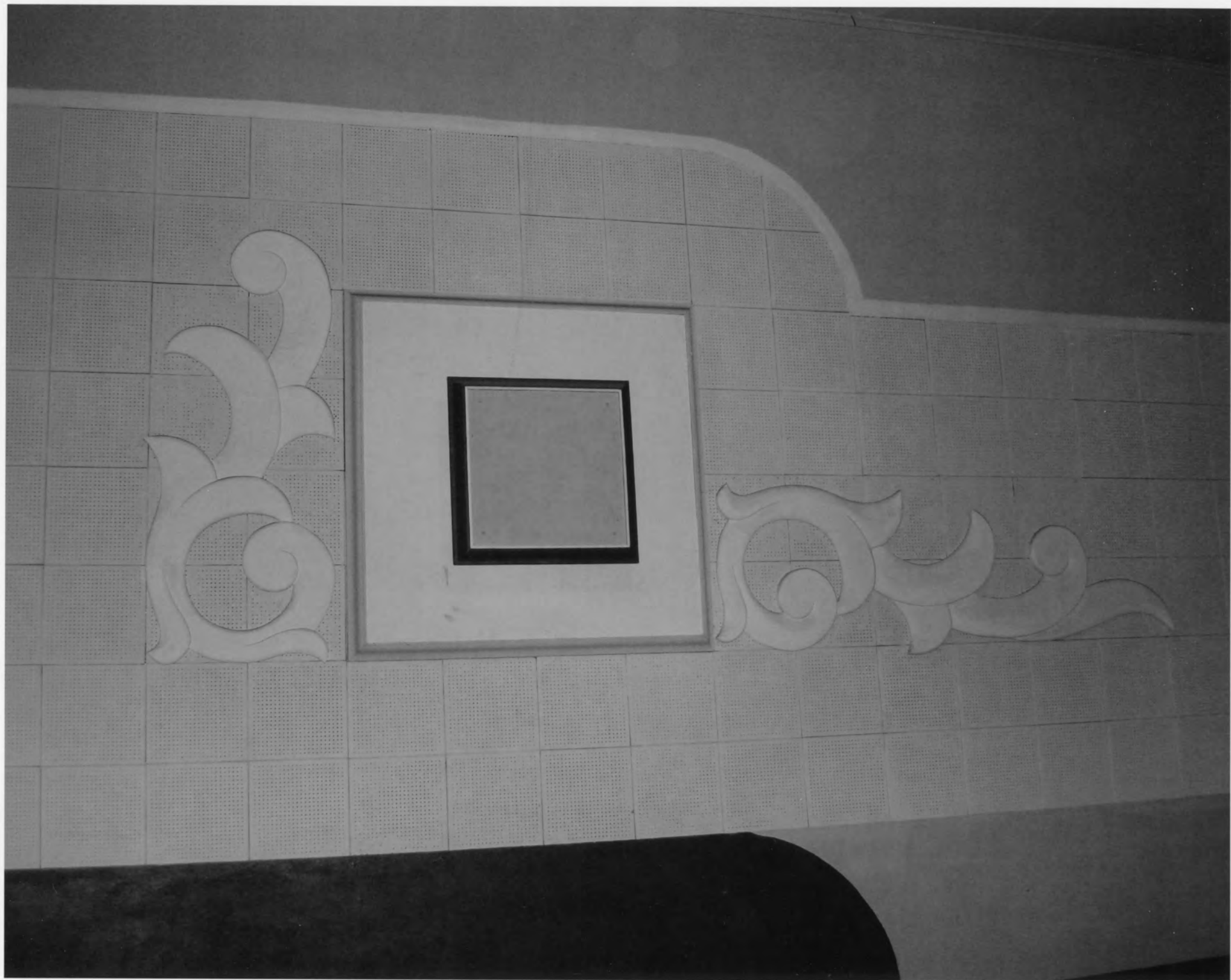
NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR ACCIDENTS

GOLDEN POP-CORN

COMING SOON

Walla Theater
Pembina County ND
Tom Isera
tif

Concession stand fr SE
13



Walla Theater

Pembina County ND

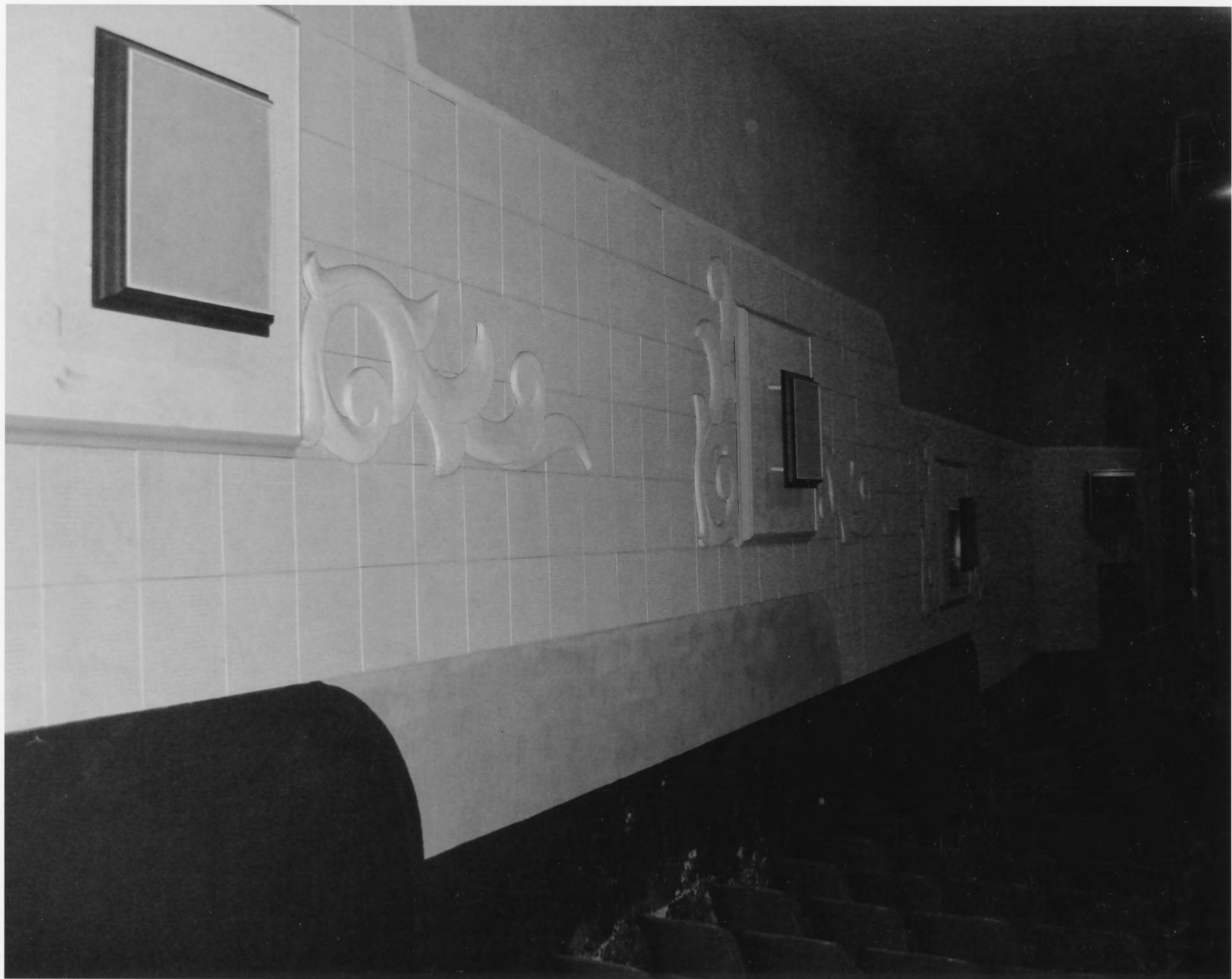
Tom Isern

t.f

Detail of interior S wall

fr N

14



Walla Theater
Pembina County ND

Tom Isern

tif

Interior S wall fr NE

15



Walla Theater
Pembina County ND

Tom Isern

t: f

Interior N wall fr SW

16



Walla Theater
Pembina County ND

Tom Iserra

tif

Movie screen fr

17



Walla Theater
Pembina County ND
Tom Isern
tif

Theater seats fr SW
18



Walla Theater
Pembina County ND
Tom Isern
tif

Seating and S wall from
stage (fr NW)

19



Walla Theater

Pembina County ND

Tan Isera

tif

Seating + N wall fr stage (frsw)

20



Walla Theater

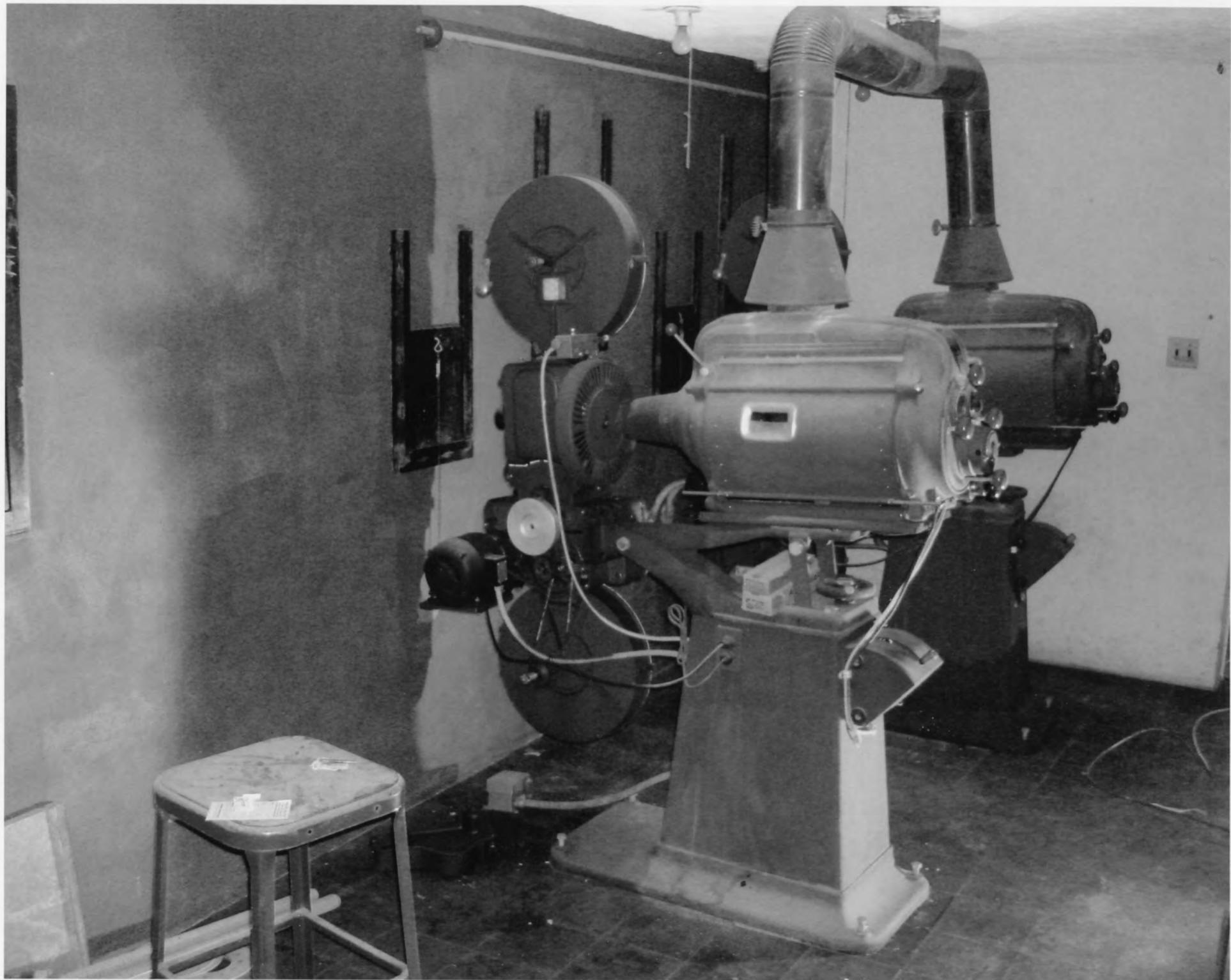
Pembina County ND

Tom Isern

tif

Inside ticket booth,
looking into Foyer,
fr N

21

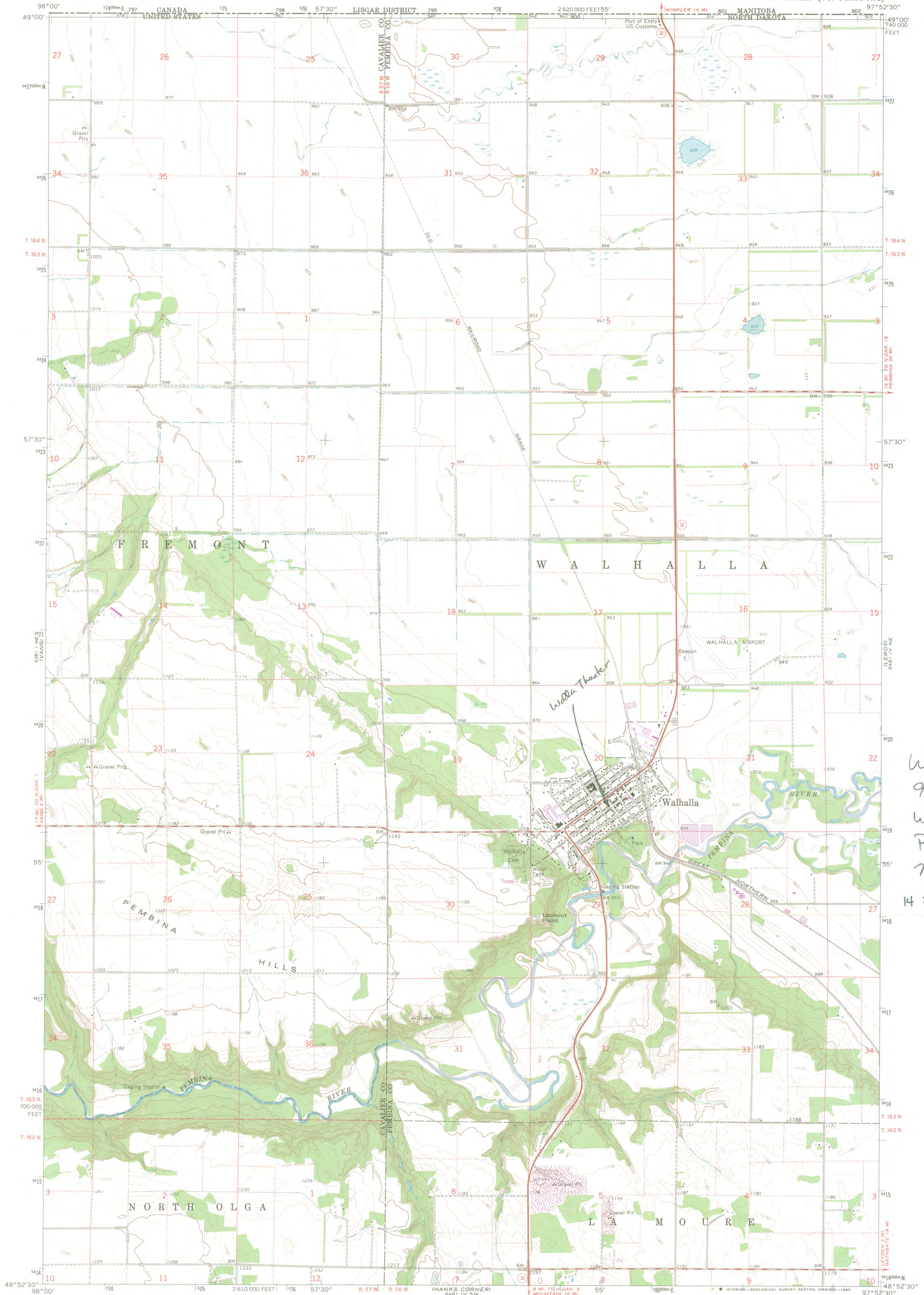


Walla Theater
Pembina County ND
Tom Isern
t:f

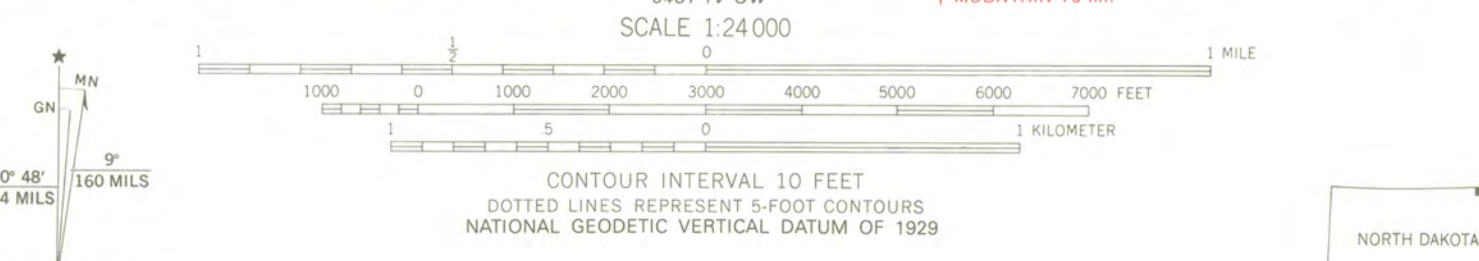
Projectors, in projection
room, fr SE
22



Walla Theater
Pembina County ND
Tom Isera
trf
Interior of crying room fr E
23



Maped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey as part of the Department of the Interior program for the development of the Missouri River Basin Control by USGS, USC&GS, and International Boundary Commission. Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1963 and planimetric surveys 1964. Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum 10,000-foot grid based on North Dakota coordinate system, north zone 1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 14, shown in blue. To place on the predicted North American Datum 1983 move the projection lines 3 meters north and 26 meters east as shown by dashed corner ticks.



THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092 AND STATE WATER COMMISSION, BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA 58501. A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST. Revisions shown in purple compiled from aerial photographs taken 1978. Map edited 1979. This information not field checked. WALHALLA, N. DAK. N4852.5—W9752.5/7.5 1964 PHOTOREVISED 1979 DMA 6481 IV NW—SERIES V871



To: Keeper, National Register of Historic Places
From: Merlan E. Paaverud, Jr./ Lorna Meidinger
Date: 1 April 2010
Subject: National Register Nomination

The following materials are submitted on this 1st day of April 2010, for the nomination of the Walla Theater to the National Register of Historic Places.

- 1 National Register of Historic Places nomination form on archival paper
- Multiple Property Nomination form on archival paper
- 23 Photographs
- 1 Original USGS map(s)
- Sketch map(s)/figure(s)/exhibit(s)
- Pieces of correspondence
- 1 Other: Photo cd

COMMENTS:

- Please insure that this nomination is reviewed
- This property has been certified under 36 CFR 67
- The enclosed owner objections ___ do ___ do not constitute a majority of property owners.
- Other: