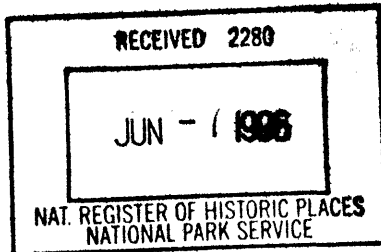


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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



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).

1. Name of Property

historic name Chevy Chase Theater
other names/site number Avalon Theater

2. Location

street & number 5612 Connecticut Avenue, N.W. not for publication N/A
city or town Washington vicinity X
state District of Columbia code DC zip code 20015 county N/A code N/A

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] 6/7/96
Signature of certifying official Date

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:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	entered in the National Register (See continuation sheet).	<u>Patrick Andrews</u>	<u>7/18/96</u>
<input type="checkbox"/>	determined eligible for National Register (See continuation sheet).		
<input type="checkbox"/>	determined not eligible for the National Register		
<input type="checkbox"/>	removed from the National Register		
<input type="checkbox"/>	other (explain):		

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

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> sites
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> structures
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

Cat: Recreation and Culture Sub: movie theater
Commerce/Trade Sub: specialty store

Current Functions

Cat: Recreation and Culture Sub: movie theater
Commerce/Trade Sub: specialty store

7. Description

Architectural Classification

TWENTIETH CENTURY REVIVAL:
Classical Revival

Materials

foundation _____
roof _____
walls Brick
other Stone; Limestone

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

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 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.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

ARCHITECTURE
ENTERTAINMENT / RECREATION

Period of Significance 1922

Significant Dates 1922

Significant Person _____

Cultural Affiliation _____

Architect/Builder Architects: Frank Upman and Percy Adams

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(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: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

1 18 320100 4314800 3 _____

2 _____ 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 Eve Lydia Barsoum / Architectural Historian
organization D.C. Historic Preservation Division date June 1996
street & number 614 H Street, NW, Room 305 telephone (202) 727-7360
city or town Washington state D.C. zip code 20001

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 the SHPO or FPO.)

name James and Theodore Pedas
street & number 1101 23rd Street, N.W. telephone _____
city or town Washington state DC zip code 20037

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 the 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 Project (1024 -0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Section 7 Page 1 Chevy Chase Theater
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The Chevy Chase Theater reflects a "high-style" example of the neighborhood movie house type in Washington. It is a good example of the Classical Revival style of architecture as interpreted for an important neighborhood commercial building. The main auditorium features a stage, organ screens, and proscenium characteristic of movie theaters built during the "silent" era. The Chevy Chase Theater is the oldest intact neighborhood movie theater in Washington and although it has been altered and damaged, it conveys its original design and purpose with clarity and is in good condition.

The Chevy Chase Theater is located within the Connecticut Avenue "commercial island" in Chevy Chase neighborhood of Washington, D.C. Constructed in 1922, it is an attached, two-story, brick and limestone, symmetrical, Classical Revival style building with a modified rectangular plan, flat roof, metal parapet, and large marquee. Its central entrance was flanked by two show windows for the one-story commercial spaces on either side. The second story features a tripartite window at the center flanked by large single windows; the former is framed by limestone Corinthian pilasters and decorative panels while the latter are framed by stylized pilasters and an ornate limestone arches. A full metal entablature crowns the building; its frieze incorporates stylized flowers separated by vertical grooves which suggest triglyphs. The metal parapet has paneled sections some of which incorporate festoons and escutcheons, originally urns stood on top of the parapet. As the theater pre-dates "talkies," the auditorium has a shallow stage, which would have been used by an impresario, and organ screens, which projected the musical accompaniment. Typical of 1920's architecture, the facade is flat and the ornament is eclectic, abstract, and restrained. Classical- and Adamesque-inspired ornament was used in accordance with the national trend in theater design. In keeping with Washington architecture in general, the design is conservative.

At present, the limestone ground floor has been covered by metal panels and the southern retail space serves as access to the second floor theater which was added in 1970. The central box, which projected from the main entrance doors, has been removed. The ornamental edges of the metal marquee have been cut and the frame is now encased by a plastic and metal box. The second story windows and doors are boarded. A vertical sign projects from the right corner of the building and displays the theater's name since 1932: Avalon. The eight urns that stood on top of the parapet have been removed. Even though the Chevy Chase Theater has been altered, it still conveys its original design and purpose with clarity.

The rectangular shaped original lobby is completely concealed by modern finishes. Preliminary investigations by staff indicate that original features remain, most notably an Adamesque frieze with

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Section 7 Page 2 **Chevy Chase Theater**
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palmettes and a vaulted ceiling punctuated by ribs, accentuated with acanthus leaves, and Classically-inspired medallions. The auditorium is a large rectangular volume. It has a raked floor and seating which probably dates from the 1940s. Its highlights include a ceiling with a Greek-key border and a shallow dome with a medallion. The most significant elements surround the original stage. These include: a sequence of solid and perforated panels separated by rosettes; canted side walls which incorporate tri-partite organ screens framed by Corinthian pilasters and entablatures; and, a shallow stage defined by a proscenium which features a series of surrounds comprised of Classical and Adamesque ornament in repetitive patterns. Some of the ornament in the main theater has been damaged and much has been obscured behind the current movie screen. The entire ornamental program is discernable as the patterns employ repetitive motifs. Moreover, there is ample documentation of the building in historic photographs. Additional historic details may survive.

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Section 8 Page 1 **Chevy Chase Theater**
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The Chevy Chase Theater has been a focal point in Chevy Chase since the neighborhood began its rapid expansion in the 1920's. It remains an important building in an historically intact and significant commercial corridor. The theater exemplifies the evolution of the motion picture theater type in Washington and represents a significant aspect of the city's entertainment history. The Chevy Chase Theater is a rare example of an early neighborhood movie house and is the only movie theater designed by Upman and Adams. Both Upman and Adams were notable local architects whose successful designs contributed to the development of Washington, D.C.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHEVY CHASE

The development of Chevy Chase is representative of streetcar suburbs that emerged in the late 19th century. The District Commissioners and Congress passed laws to guide suburban growth in Washington and to create continuity between the old city and new development. For example, laws were passed which required new streets to conform with the L'Enfant Plan, zoning was established, and the Park Commission was founded.

The driving force behind Chevy Chase was Francis Newlands, a lawyer who later became a Senator representing Nevada. Newlands's vision was the creation of an extended Connecticut Avenue for access to limitless suburbanization in Maryland. Newlands wanted to shape the form and quality of life for a community. As a personal friend of Frederick Law Olmstead, Newlands shared the landscape designer's views on the importance of pursuing only "well-considered, pre-established" plans.

Using several front men, Newlands amassed all of the farmland along the projected Avenue north of Cleveland Park and deeded it to the Chevy Chase Land Company which he founded in 1890. He simultaneously established the Rock Creek Railway Company. The railway company built two bridges over Rock Creek and graded a 150'-wide Avenue. The first section of the railway began operating in 1892. The completion of the infrastructure allowed Newlands to concentrate on his primary interest: a new kind of suburb for the nation's capital. He created a 250-acre subdivision just outside of the District so its residents could vote. The comprehensive plan for Chevy Chase Village included social, academic and religious institutions, but commercial establishments were prohibited. All commercial activity was to occur in the District.

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Section 8 Page 2 **Chevy Chase Theater**
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Chevy Chase Village opened in Maryland in 1893. The first four houses, built by the Company, set a standard for quality. Only sixteen homes were built in 1894 and eight more were constructed in the following year. At the end of the century not quite fifty families resided in the community. The neighborhood grew slowly in part due to the 1893 depression, the Spanish-American War, the panic of 1907, and World War I. The first residence was built in Chevy Chase, D.C. in 1910. During the 1920s, the neighborhood grew considerably and was predominantly comprised of middle and upper middle class homeowners.

The extensive growth of Chevy Chase coincided with the introduction of zoning in 1920 and the contemporaneous attempt to control development along Connecticut Avenue, the premier apartment house corridor--which extended as far north as the Taft Bridge--by World War I. Initially the undeveloped portion of the Avenue, from Cleveland Park to Chevy Chase Circle, was proposed as a commercial zone. Consequently, the Chevy Chase Citizens Association successfully lobbied the D.C. Zoning Commission for the creation of four "commercial islands" along the Avenue separated by residential zones. The four blocks between Livingston Street and the Circle became the fourth "island." It developed with a significant collection of attached one- and two-story commercial structures in a variety of architectural styles and remains almost entirely intact. Its dominant buildings include three Classical Revival buildings: Chevy Chase Theater (1922), Chevy Chase Arcade (1925, D.C. Landmark) and Riggs National Bank (1926, determined eligible in the Banks and Financial Institutions Survey).

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE MOTION PICTURE THEATER

Legitimate theaters and motion picture theaters represent two distinct building types, as defined by use. As with any building type, there are variations within the motion picture theater type.

The earliest motion picture theaters, established at the turn of the century, were usually not purpose-built. Initially, motion pictures were shown in conjunction with other forms of popular entertainment, such as the penny arcade and vaudeville theater. The first motion pictures, "shorts," lasted only a few minutes. Feature-length films emerged in the 1910s. As both types were silent, the movies were often accompanied by impresarios, live entertainment, an organist, or orchestra to create a more theatrical experience. As film technology advanced and their popularity increased, purpose-built theaters were constructed which included stages and orchestra pits. The interiors were integral to the overall

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architectural and entertainment program. In 1927, "talkies" became commercial successes which led to the removal of the stage and movie theater designs continued to evolve based on function and technological innovation.

As a weekly experience encountered by millions, going to the movies was inseparable from experiencing the architecture itself. Theaters were designed to glorify the monumentality of the film experience. The architecture established a mood and entertained the patron. Moreover, in principle, movie theaters became a symbol of egalitarianism and democracy because of their one-price, no-reserved seating policies. In turn, the movies promoted mass culture and gave rise to one of the nation's largest industries.

In the beginning, motion pictures were accepted more willingly under the guise of established cultural institutions and Classical architecture. Entrepreneurs employed architects to cloak the new popular form of entertainment in the trappings of highbrow architecture which referenced legitimate theater. The exteriors of movie theaters were designed to attract attention through size, shape, projecting marquees, lights, and ornament. The early large motion picture theaters employed Classical designs which often incorporated Adamesque ornament; the latter style employed elegant linear patterns arranged in rhythmic compositions adapted from ancient Roman sources and has always been associated with whimsical architecture. The Adamesque style was abandoned by the mid-1920s as architects chose to exploit much more opulent sources such as French Renaissance, Italian Baroque, and Egyptian.

The 1920s were the golden era of the downtown movie palace. The opulent movie palace was designed to accommodate both vaudeville and movies. In general, the smaller and restrained neighborhood movie house did not emerge until the late 1930s and after World War II. After the War, drive-in theaters and television lured patrons away from both downtown movie palaces and neighborhood movie houses. In the recent past, the construction of multiplex theaters, as part of multi-function complexes, has been favored instead of single theaters.

The growth of theater chains and impact of the Depression directly contributed to the decline of neighborhood movie theaters. Only a handful of small movie houses survived the Depression, which gave rise to mergers and take overs. By this time, attending the movies was socially acceptable and no longer needed to rely upon prestigious associations established by the architecture and the ideology of "taste." After 1930 theaters reflected streamline moderne or Modern designs, their suburban locations, as well as

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the influence of automobiles. By the 1950s, new construction commissioned by the theater chains was typically utilitarian in nature and fit the corporate image.

OVERVIEW OF MOTION PICTURE THEATERS IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

In 1906, a store located at the corner of 10th and D Streets, N.W. was renovated and became the first establishment in Washington to present "shorts." By the end of the decade, there was a concentration of nickelodeons and vaudeville houses around 9th and D Streets, N.W. Larger movie theaters began to appear in the following decade as the theater district spread westward along F Street. A theater district around U Street, N.W. simultaneously emerged for the African American community. In Washington, variations of the motion picture theater type were based on scale, patronage, and location among other things.

The end of the 1910s began the heyday of movie palace construction and an overall increase in prosperity in Washington. The large, extravagant movie palaces included: the *Rialto* (713 9th Street, 2100 seats, Blanke & Zink, 1918, demolished 1940); the *Metropolitan* (932 F Street, 1484 seats, Reginald Geare, 1918, demolished 1968); the *Palace* (1306 F Street, 2423 seats, Lamb 1918, demolished 1980s); the *Earle* (505 13th Street, 2240 seats, Crane & Franzheim, 1924, renamed the Warner in 1947); and the *Fox* (1328 F Street, 3433 seats, Rapp & Rapp, 1927, renamed the Capitol in 1937, converted to offices in 1962). Smaller neighborhood theaters were also established at this time. These included: the *Home* (1228 C Street, N.W., 643 seats, 1917, converted to a church); the *York* (3635 Georgia Avenue, 935 seats, 1919, converted to a church), the *Chevy Chase* (5612 Connecticut Avenue, 794 seats, 1922, renamed the Avalon in 1932); the *Park* (4618 14th Street, 1923, deteriorated and vacant), and; the *Takoma* (4th and Butternut Streets, N.E., 724 seats, 1924).

The Chevy Chase Theater possesses several details of the typical Washington theater, as defined by Andrew Morrison author of the 1972 "Theater Guide of Washington, D.C." He found that the typical Washington movie theater is "a two story building of tawny tapestry brick with a recessed central entryway. It has a flat roof but at least its central portion is crowned by projecting eaves of red Spanish tile. It did not originally have a marquee but when that feature was added it was...slim, planar..." and unlit or simply lit. From the earliest days, the use of chasing or flashing lights and other extravaganzas, typical of theater districts, was prohibited by the Commission of Fine Arts and the District's building code.

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Morrison cited eighty-six theaters operating in Washington during all or part of the 1920's. Approximately one-third of these were neighborhood movie houses. Only five legitimate theaters or movie palaces (Howard, National, Warner, Tivoli, and Lincoln) and six neighborhood theaters (Dunbar, Chevy Chase, Takoma, Park, Colony, and Stanton) remain from this era. Four of the neighborhood theaters are either heavily altered, deteriorated, and/or vacant. The Chevy Chase (1922) and Takoma (1923) are the last intact operating neighborhood theaters in Washington from the period; however, the former remains a movie theater while the latter has been converted to a legitimate theater.

UPMAN AND ADAMS

In 1922, the Chevy Chase Amusement Company commissioned the local firm of Upman and Adams to design the Chevy Chase Theater. Throughout their careers, Frank Upman (1872-1948) and Percy Adams (1869-1953) made significant architectural contributions to Washington, D.C.

Frank Upman arrived from Chicago in 1897 and started work at the local office of renowned Chicago architect Henry Ives Cobb. Percy Adams also moved to Washington 1897 and went to work in the Office of the Supervising Architect of the Treasury.

Upman established a firm with Clarence Harding in 1904. They designed *Meader's* theater at 535 8th Street, S.E. in 1909. Other known Harding and Upman designs include: the *Y.M.C.A. Building*, 1736 G Street, N.W., demolished.; the *Woodward Building*, 1426 H Street, N.W.; the *Woodward Apartments*, 2311 Connecticut Avenue; parts of the *Woodward and Lothrop Store*; several Colonial Revival residences in Mount Pleasant including *3305-07 18th Street*, *1725 Lamont Street*, and *1827 Park Road*; the Neoclassical *Mount Pleasant M.E. Church* at 15th Street and Columbia Road; and, 3414 Lowell Street in Cleveland Park. Adams and Frank Averill established a firm in 1909. Averill and Adams's work included: the *Marine Corps Dispensary Officers School and Barracks*, Quantico, VA, the *National Training School*, and the *Lucretia Mott School*. In 1923, Upman founded a partnership with Adams which lasted until Upman's death in 1948. Their known work includes *2424 Massachusetts Avenue* and *1244-50 9th Street* in northwest, post offices, and hospitals.

In 1919, Upman and Adams became members of the Washington, D.C. chapter of the A.I.A. In 1925, they established the Allied Architects of Washington, along with Nathan Wyeth and Gilbert Rodier,

which submitted designs for government architectural projects. In 1929, their design was selected for the Longworth House Office Building.

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Dowling, Tom. "Charlie: A Name that Stood Alone." *The Washington Star*, January 18, 1928.

The Evening Star, June 21, 1923.

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Land Records for the District of Columbia.

"Matinees Produce Toy Deluge for Capital's Poor Children." *The Washington Star*, December 14, 1935.

McIntyre, Mike. "Restoring the Magic of Moviegoing." *The Washington Post*, July 10, 1985.

Morrison, Andrew C. "Theater Guide of Washington, D.C." The Theater Historical Society July 1972.

National Archives, Record Group 351. District of Columbia Building Permits.

Naylor, David. *American Picture Palaces: The Architecture of Fantasy*. New York: Prentice Hall Editions, 1981.

Naylor, David. *Great American Movie Theaters*. Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1987.

Stanley-Warner Theater Company, Washington District Weekly Reports, 1939-1940.

Valentine, Maggie. *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theater, Starring S. Charles Lee*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994.

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Section 10 Page 1 **Chevy Chase Theater**
Name of property
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Verbal Boundary Description:

Square 1860, Lots 15 and 800 situated in the northwest quadrant of Washington, D.C.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary includes the original lots on which the movie theater has historically stood and maintains historic integrity.