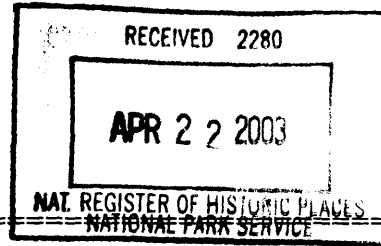


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM



513

1. Name of Property

historic name OKLA Theater

other names/site number none

2. Location

street & number 18 E Choctaw not for publication NA
city or town McAlester vicinity N/A
state Oklahoma code OK county Pittsburg code 121
zip code 74501

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets _____ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant _____ nationally _____ statewide X locally. (_____ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Bob Dehnbauer

4-18-03

Signature of certifying official

Date

Oklahoma Historical Society, SHPO

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): _____

Edna H. Beall *6/5/03*

Jan

Signature of Keeper

Date
of Action

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

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

=====

6. Function or Use

=====

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: RECREATION AND CULTURE Sub: Theater

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: WORK IN PROGRESS

=====

7. Description

=====

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT: Art Deco

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

roof ASPHALT (built-up)

walls BRICK

other _____

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 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.)

- 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 (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance 1931

=====
8. Statement of Significance (Continued)
=====

Significant Dates 1931
1948

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Dunne, W. Scott, architect
Cowen Construction Company

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more 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: McAlester Public Library

=====
10. Geographical Data
=====

Acreage of Property: less than 1 (one)

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

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	15	246160	3869750	3	_____	_____
2	n/a	_____	_____	4	_____	_____

n/a 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: Jo Meacham

organization: Jo Meacham and Associates date: December 15, 2002

street & number: 2300 N.W. 17th Street telephone: (405)524-7000

city or town: Oklahoma City state : OK zip code: 73107

=====
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 The Ardeneum of Oklahoma Charitable and Educational Foundation, Inc.

street & number 601 S. Second telephone _____

city or town McAlester state OK zip code 74501
=====

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OKLA Theater
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SUMMARY

The OKLA Theater, built in 1931, is a three-story concrete and steel Art Deco style theater with a brick façade and a barrel vault roof. Located in downtown McAlester, Oklahoma, the theater is similar in size to many of the surrounding buildings. The exterior is painted brick with a second generation marquee and a recessed lobby. The upper floors are divided into three bays with vertical architectural elements and features typical of the Art Deco style. The interior has a lobby, mezzanine, and a large auditorium. The overall design of the building and many of the original features remain intact. Due to the vacancy of the building, some of the exterior and interior finishes are deteriorating.

EXTERIOR DESCRIPTION

The OKLA Theater, built in 1931, is an excellent example of the Art Deco style of architecture. Located on lots 20 and 21, Block 359, the theater is on the edge of downtown McAlester, Oklahoma. McAlester, the most prominent city in the southeast portion of the state, has a large downtown area filled primarily with one-, two- and three-story buildings. At 11 stories, the Aldridge Hotel (NR 1995) located east of the OKLA Theater is the tallest building in the city. The OKLA Theater replaced an earlier, brick, two story theater building that burned in 1930. Designed in the height of architectural fashion for the day, the exterior and the interior of the OKLA Theater exemplify the Art Deco style.

The OKLA Theater is a three-story concrete and steel structure fifty feet and eleven inches wide and one hundred and ten feet and four inches in depth. The configuration of the OKLA differed from the Palace Theater that burned down in 1930. The construction of the OKLA included retaining the old party walls and adding new steel columns. This allowed a new first floor to be built over the basement. The building has a divided glass and mosaic tile storefront on the first floor (ca. 1965) and the second and third stories are divided into three bays. The exterior material is brick and has been painted several colors over the years.

The middle bay of the upper two floors is further divided into three bays. The outside pilasters are outlined with rows of horizontal brick that enclose five v-shaped flutes. The three smaller bays are divided with similar columns, with one row of rectangular brick outlining the pilaster. The pilasters on either side of the center bay have two v-shaped flutes. Between the pilasters there is a rectangular recessed area that culminates in a stair step pattern. All three bays are capped with a large, cast stone parapet with a zigurat design. The middle bay rises several feet above the flanking bays.

The second story, which serves as the mezzanine, originally had a series of four, double-hung, wood windows with divided lights and cast stone sills that allowed for ventilation into the building. Additionally, there were three similar windows on the third floor. One small window was originally located on the west bay

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between the second and third floors. This window and the third floor window in the east bay have been in-filled with brick.

The original entrance to the theater was recessed approximately fifteen to twenty feet beneath the twenty-five foot wide center bay. Historic photographs indicate a ticket stand was located in the center of the recessed area. Patrons purchased their tickets at the outside ticket booth and entered the theater through two sets of French doors with 12 lights and brass kick plates.

The original marquee was rectangular and suspended from the building with iron rods. It was placed over the middle bay, directly above the entrance to the theater. In addition to the marquee, there was also a vertical sign attached to the building, lit with lights and displaying the name OKLA. This marquee was replaced ca. 1948. The sign is no longer extant.

The existing marquee (ca. 1948-49) is larger than the original and spreads across the entire façade, including the small storefronts on either side of the theater entrance. Typical of many marquees, it is triangular in shape, with two sides displaying the current movie attraction. The name of the theater, OKLA, is displayed in single letters above both sides. The entire display is outlined with neon. The sheathing used for the marquee is maroon and cream porcelain coated metal outlined with linear neon bands. The name, OKLA, is also outlined with neon. Underneath the marquee canopy is an elaborate neon star burst.

Typical of many theater designs of its era, twelve and one-half foot storefronts were located on either side of the recessed entrance. These spaces were rented and often were filled with small candy stores or used as office space. The east side storefront remains; the west side storefront was removed and was converted to the managers' office. There is an interior entrance to this side. The original storefronts were wood with display windows, wooden kick plates and clerestory windows. The walls surrounding the storefronts and the kick plates were covered with mosaic tiles during the 1960s. At the same time, the doors and windows of the east storefront were replaced with glass and aluminum. The west storefront was removed ca. 1943 and the walls and door opening was replaced with mosaic tile and the display window was replaced with glass blocks.

INTERIOR DESCRIPTION

The existing entrance to the theater includes two sets of double glass and aluminum doors with a single glass and aluminum door on either side. There is a small glass clerestory above the doors. These doors enclose the originally recessed open area where the outside ticket booth was once located. The original recessed area and the original lobby is now combined and serves as the lobby and the concession area. A small ticket counter (ca. 1965) is located on the west wall of the existing lobby. On either side of the lobby, there are stairs leading to the mezzanine (second floor). The concrete floor of the lobby was originally covered with thick carpeting that continued up both side stairs that led to an

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open mezzanine and then on to the balcony (third floor). The lobby was originally elaborately decorated with stenciled designs and Art Deco light fixtures.

Originally, two sets of doors led to the auditorium. Both sets of doors were later removed and the openings were moved farther apart. Immediately inside the auditorium there was originally a half-wall with a curtain behind the last row of seats. The curtains were removed at an unknown date and a full wall was built creating a small vestibule. A set of doors at both sides of the auditorium replaced the original curtained openings.

The mezzanine overlooked the lobby and there was an open railing that has since been replaced with wood panels and railings. The columns between the railings were originally fluted with raised half rounds. These columns have been covered with wood paneling. The fluting has been removed. Restrooms and offices were located on the mezzanine level. Art Deco style lighting hung from the ceilings and ziggurat type designs were stenciled on the walls and ceilings. Carpet covered the floors. The carpet and lighting has since been removed. There are remnants of the original stencils and, in some cases, the designs were made of raised plaster and are still visible. Seating in the balcony was accessible at the mezzanine level and again, at the third floor.

The interior of the auditorium was originally designed to suggest a rooftop terrace overlooking a cityscape. Large, vertical plaster cast pilasters rise above a frieze that is approximately ten feet above the floor. These pilasters are grouped with four stair-stepped pilasters located on either side of a central pilaster - each with flutes from top to bottom. Cast plaster forms the frieze with a design of ziggurats and chevrons. The frieze encircles the auditorium. The ceiling of the auditorium is slightly curved with triangular plaster sconces providing lighting. Stars were painted or illuminated on a midnight blue ceiling and lit with the sidelights.

The area surrounding the stage includes large fluted ceiling-height columns that culminate with stepped plaster friezes decorated with the same ziggurat and chevron style designs used on the auditorium walls. In the front two corners of the theater are exits, which lead to the stage and rear entrances. Above both of these openings are large decorated areas where the original sound system was located.

The original curtain was heavily decorated with similar designs. There were four hundred and ninety-two air-filled opera style seats on the first floor and an additional two hundred and fifty-nine seats in the balcony. Behind the last row of first floor seats there was originally a wide-open space designated for standees, or standing room only patrons. Visible from the auditorium, the balcony railing is a solid rail with circular designs, fluted false pilasters and small chevrons. At the rear of the balcony is the projection room.

The overall interior of the building retains many of the original features and

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finishes.

ALTERATIONS

Since its completion in 1931, the OKLA Theater has undergone some minor modifications. Still, the overall appearance of the theater has remained unchanged and many of the original features are intact. The exterior of the theater has been slightly altered with two of the original windows bricked in and the marquee changed around 1948. The entrance retains its original footprint; however, the open area has been enclosed with glass and aluminum doors and windows. The storefront configurations are similar to the original, however, the exterior tile has been replaced with mosaic tile.

When the open recessed area was enclosed, the original French doors were removed. The lobby originally had two sets of doors that led to the auditorium. All of the doors have been removed, the openings were moved farther apart, and are larger. Other alterations to the lobby include painting over the original designs.

The general design of the mezzanine area remains intact. Alterations include removal of the original lighting, the removal of the original balusters, and painting over the original designs.

The rear of the auditorium has been altered. The half walls with curtains that served as a rear anteroom have been removed and replaced with full height walls. A small vestibule has been added in the middle of the original anteroom with two sets of doors leading to the middle aisle. The original paint scheme in the auditorium has also been replaced.

From a standpoint of architectural design, the strong Art Deco elements that define the façade of the building remain intact, although somewhat obscured by layers of paint. The acquisition of the building by a sympathetic owner bodes well for this McAlester landmark and efforts to return the interior and exterior décor are in future plans. Overall, the OKLA Theater retains a high degree of integrity and remains not only a good example of an atmospheric theater, but the best extant Art Deco building in McAlester.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

SUMMARY

The OKLA Theater is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C for its architectural significance as an excellent example of the atmospheric theater and as a good example of the Art Deco style in McAlester, Oklahoma. The theater was built in 1931 in McAlester, Oklahoma, designed by architect W. Scott Dunne and built by Cowen Construction of Shawnee on the site of the former Palace Theater. The Palace Theater was built in 1910 and purchased by Wallace Wilkinson in 1910. It was destroyed by fire on December 28, 1930. Wilkinson built a new theater on the same site named the OKLA and it opened on July 10, 1931. Through the years such notable entertainment industry figures such as Howard Hughes, Harold B. Franklin, and Robb and Rowley Theater Company operated the theater.

The OKLA Theater is Art Deco in design and a rare surviving Oklahoma example of the atmospheric theater. It is eligible under Criterion C as an excellent example of the Art Deco style as applied to a movie theater in McAlester, Oklahoma.

OVERVIEW

J.J. McAlester founded McAlester in the old Choctaw Nation in Indian Territory after the Civil War. McAlester was a white trader married to a Chickasaw citizen. By the late 1880's, McAlester controlled several hundred thousand acres in the mountains of present southeastern Oklahoma. He conducted lucrative commercial mining and agricultural enterprises based on the valuable bituminous coal seams in the area. In 1888, the Choctaw Coal and Railway Company laid a rail line through the area, which led to the relocation of the majority of residents. Within a decade, the population of the new City of South McAlester stood at 5,000. South McAlester gradually absorbed its older rival North McAlester and the new city became known as McAlester. By the early statehood period, McAlester became the seat of Pittsburg County, the location of the Oklahoma State Penitentiary, and the predominant city in southeastern Oklahoma.

Oklahoma's Scottish Rites Masons convened in McAlester. The influx of such a large group of visitors to the city several times each year necessitated more hotel rooms. As a result, the eleven-story Aldridge Hotel (NR 1995) was built in 1929-1930. Throughout the 1920's and thereafter, McAlester retained its position as the economic and political center of the area.

HISTORY OF THE OKLA THEATER

The OKLA Theater, built in 1931¹, was the largest and grandest Theater constructed

¹ The McAlester News-Capital; July 9, 1931. "McAlester's Newest Theater to Open Friday."

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in McAlester. Prior to the construction of the OKLA, there were several other smaller theaters located in the downtown area. These included the Rex and the Palace (formerly the Majestic). The Star, the Chief, the New, and the V, were theaters developed between 1940 and 1950 in buildings originally intended for other commercial uses. The OKLA was the last theater built downtown.

The OKLA Theater replaced an earlier theater which burned in 1930. The Majestic Theater (later, the Palace Theater) was built in 1910 and owned by Sam Small, a local resident, who sold the building and business to Wallace Wilkinson in 1910.² The Majestic originally presented vaudeville and moving pictures. Wilkinson owned the facility but it was very common for large theater chains to enter into long term operating leases and pay for improvements to the theater. One of the largest operators of theaters in this part of the country was the Robb and Rowley Theater Company based in Texas.

The Robb and Rowley Theater Company brought the first talking pictures seen in McAlester to the Majestic Theater. The Majestic was renamed the Palace between 1920 and 1923 and was completely remodeled by Robb and Rowley in 1928. Two years later, on December 28, 1930, the theater was completely destroyed by fire. Within days, Wallace Wilkinson announced plans to build a new theater on the same site and he quickly fulfilled that promise by opening the OKLA Theater on July 10, 1931 to much fanfare and praise from the local community.

Robb and Rowley (aka R and R Theaters Inc.) paid \$25,000 of the \$50,000 required to build the new theater.³ However, Howard Hughes and Harold Franklin (Hughes Franklin Midwest Theatres Corporation Limited) purchased the lessee rights from Robb and Rowley before the construction was completed and inherited the fifteen-year lease.⁴

Howard Hughes was in his late twenties when he and Franklin took over the operation of the OKLA Theater. Hughes had inherited the Hughes Tools Company upon the death of his father. The revenue from this company allowed Hughes to produce motion pictures, most notable was the movie, "Hells Angels." Hughes later went on to own Hughes Aircraft Corporation and TransWorld Airlines among many other business endeavors⁵. Harold Franklin, a long-time film industry entrepreneur, built up the Paramount Theater chain and the Fox West Coast circuits before starting Hughes-Franklin.

Hughes-Franklin Theatres owned and operated theaters in several states including Texas and Oklahoma. They maintained operation of the OKLA Theater only until 1932

² Warranty Deed. Pittsburg County Courthouse, McAlester, Oklahoma. 6-11-1910

³ Agreement. Pittsburg County Courthouse, McAlester, Oklahoma. 1-29-1931.

⁴ Mortgage. Pittsburg County Courthouse, McAlester, Oklahoma. 4-23-1931.

⁵ Hack, Richard. Hughes: The Private Diaries, Memos and Letters. Beverly Hills, California. New Millennium Press, 2001. Pages 86, 91-93.

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when R & R became the operator/lessee once again. R & R once again assumed operations of the theater in 1932 and operated it until July 1946. They renewed their lease for a period of twenty years beginning on July 10, 1946 until July 9, 1966.⁶ The Wilkinson heirs sold the building to United Artists Communications, Inc. on December 28, 1983⁷. UA operated the theater until the building closed on September 4, 1989. A local performing Theater group, Kiamichi Actors Studio Theater Inc. (KAST), bought the theater from UA on December 28, 1990⁸. KAST later deeded the property back to the bank⁹ and in 2000 the Ardeneum of Oklahoma Charitable and Educational Foundation bought the building.¹⁰

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The OKLA Theater, constructed in 1931 at a cost of \$50,000, was designed by well-known Texas theater architect W. Scott Dunne.¹¹ and is an excellent example of an Art Deco style 'atmospheric' theater.¹² Austrian born architect John Eberson, who is credited with the development of the atmospheric theater, influenced Dunne.¹³ This theater type diverged from the traditional opera house style by creating a theme, or 'atmosphere' and resembled the garish and gaudy movie sets of the 1920s and 1930s. Cast plaster, complicated color schemes, lighting, and sound were used to create a fantasy backdrop that further enhanced the moviegoer's experience.¹⁴

The OKLA, the most advanced theater in southeast Oklahoma when it was constructed, is an atmospheric theater, a genre designed to enhance the fantasy and exoticism of the movies.

The OKLA was part of a tradition in movie house design that was begun in the early 1920's. The atmospheric theater combined a wide variety of architectural characteristics to create fantasy themes. These themes included Spanish, Mediterranean, Egyptian, and in the case of the OKLA Theater, a roof-top terrace that used Art Deco features. These movie palaces were elaborately finished, inside and outside, using raised plaster designs, and a wide variety of lighting techniques for floors, ceilings and walls. Complicated color schemes also played

⁶ Lease. Pittsburg County Courthouse, McAlester, Oklahoma. 4-19-1947.

⁷ Warranty Deed. Pittsburg County Courthouse, McAlester, Oklahoma. 12-28-1983.

⁸ Warranty Deed. Pittsburg County Courthouse, McAlester, Oklahoma. 12-28-1990.

⁹ Warranty Deed. Pittsburg County Courthouse, McAlester, Oklahoma. 6-22-1999.

¹⁰ Warranty Deed. Pittsburg County Courthouse, McAlester, Oklahoma. 10-18-2000.

¹¹ Dallas Times Herald, October 20, 1937.

¹² Dallas Morning News, October 20, 1937.

¹³ Atwell, David. Cathedrals of the Movies. London: The Architectural Press, 1981. Pages 62 - 65, pages 75-77, pages 118-119.

¹⁴ Hall, Ben M. The Golden Age of the Movie Palace: The Best Remaining Seats. New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1961. Pages 12-13, 16-17, 24-25.

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an important role in achieving the desired effect.

Architect John Ebersson developed the atmospheric style of theater. Ebersson's designs were quite a departure from the European or 'hard top' style theaters built in America since the 1850s. The hard top style imitated the European opera houses that used classic architectural styles and separated the upper class patrons from the general masses. The atmospheric style created an ambience for the movie goers and did not differentiate between the rich and the poor who attended. The price of a ticket was the passport to another world.

During the 1920s and 1930s the movie palaces were gathering spots and the centers of downtown nightlife in America. The newsreels gave moviegoers front row seats for the important events of the day. A ticket to a show was a passport to lives and cultures otherwise beyond reach. No form of entertainment had ever been as accessible or popular. During their peak years, the movie palaces drew full houses three or four times a day with an extra show on weekends.

The public indirectly dictated the change in style of the movie palace. Even in the early 1920s there was a growing boredom with old world styles. The country was changing quickly. The post war boom, the jazz age, flappers, prohibition and its taste changed just as fast. Americans wanted to live glamour lives and the movies began to reflect their desires. The atmospheric theaters provided a fantasy world for moviegoers. As stated by Lowe, owner of the largest chain of theater at the time, "We don't sell tickets to movies, we sell tickets to movie theaters."

The OKLA was one of two theaters designed by Scott Dunne in Oklahoma and the only one still in existence. The Delman Theater, built in 1938 in Tulsa, was demolished during the 1980s. Dunne was born in St. Louis and attended Washington University where he received his architecture degree. He came to Texas in 1917 as an instructor at Texas A & M. Later he joined A. C. Finn in Houston and later became a partner. In 1924, Dunne opened his own firm. Dunne served as an architect for the Robb and Rowley Theaters during the 1920s and 1930s. Theaters designed by Dunne include the Melba and Arcadia in Dallas, the Plaza in El Paso (NR), the Ritz in Corpus Christi, the Texas in Seguin, the Texas in Palestine, the Paramount in Amarillo and theaters in Beaumont, Sherman, McAlester, Coleman, Big Spring, Del Rio and San Angelo. He also designed the Dal-Sec Theaters, four film exchange buildings and the Fair Park Amphitheater in Dallas (NL contributing property). Dunne died on October 19, 1937 at the age of 50.¹⁵

ART DECO STYLE OF ARCHITECTURE

The Art Deco style resulted from the influence of European modernism and its popularity began during the late 1920s and the early 1930s. This design avoids

¹⁵ Dallas Morning News, October 20, 1937; Dallas times herald, October 20, 1937.

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the use of historical references, although it is still true to many of the composition elements of previous academic styles. It is characterized by a "sculptural use of rectilinear geometric forms, dramatizing more than actually reflecting the structure beneath."¹⁶ This is particularly accurate of the OKLA Theater where cast plaster applied upon walls and ceilings is used to suggest a dramatic cityscape within the confines of a small town theater.

The verticality that is important to the Art Deco style is also used to define the theme of the OKLA Theater. Abstract relief ornament, suggesting cityscapes, adorn the façade and the interior of the auditorium.

The design of the OKLA Theater, built in 1931, is an excellent example of the Art Deco style. Built at the beginning of the stylistic period, it is one of the few examples of this type of architecture built in McAlester, Oklahoma. Other examples are more indicative of the Art Moderne style and were generally constructed after 1930.

There is one other building in downtown McAlester that could be classified as Art Deco in style. The old Woolworth Department Store located at 110-112 East Choctaw is a yellow brick, two story building with restrained details. The stylistic character is created by the vertical bands corbelled into the main façade and the clean, unadorned look of the storefront. This building was constructed in 1939.

The Art Moderne style is represented by the Order of Rainbow for Girls building at 313 East Carl Albert Parkway. It is an outstanding example, albeit late in design, of the style. It was constructed in 1951 and features the hallmark streamlined look of the Moderne style. Another Moderne building, a former Mobile station, was located at the intersection of Carl Albert and 5th. Listed in the National Register as the McAlester DX, it was demolished in the 1990s.

The OKLA Theater remains the best, extant Art Deco style building in McAlester and one of the few atmospheric theaters left in Oklahoma. For these reasons, it is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C.

¹⁶ Longstreth, Richard. The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture. National Trust for Historic Preservation. 1987.

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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OKLA Theater
name of property
Pittsburg County, Oklahoma
county and State

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lot 20 and 21, Block 359, City of McAlester (formerly South McAlester)
Pittsburg County, State of Oklahoma

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary includes the property historically associated with the OKLA Theater.