

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

AUG 07 1989

NATL

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Fox Theater

other names/site number Same

### 2. Location

street & number 18 E. First

not for publication

city, town Hutchinson

vicinity

state Kansas

code

KS

county Reno

code

155

zip code 67501

### 3. Classification

Ownership of Property

private

public-local

public-State

public-Federal

Category of Property

building(s)

district

site

structure

object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

Noncontributing

1

buildings

\_\_\_\_\_

sites

\_\_\_\_\_

structures

\_\_\_\_\_

objects

1

Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

### 4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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.  See continuation sheet.

Raymond Powers State Historic Preservation Officer

July 12, 1989

Signature of certifying official

Date

Kansas State Historical Society

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

### 5. 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:)

Beth Boland

9/7/89

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

## 6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
Recreation and Culture: Theater

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
Recreation and Culture: Auditorium

## 7. Description

Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

Modern Movement: Art Deco

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Brick

roof Asphalt

other Metal: aluminum; glass;

Terra Cotta

### Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Fox Theater (c. 1930-1931, 1946-1947) is located at 18 E. First Street in Hutchinson, Reno County, Kansas (pop. 40,284). The theater is a four story, Art Deco, reinforced concrete and steel building. Burnt sienna brick faces the building's facade elevation, a granite veneer delineates the building's foundation on this elevation. Aluminum colored, metallic glazed terra cotta, beige terra cotta and pressed aluminum trim decorate the facade elevation. These decorative treatments are reserved primarily for the facade elevation, with some extension onto the east elevation. Painted, buff colored, brick walls comprise the lesser elevations. The building stands in the center of Hutchinson's central business district. The building has a southern facade orientation and measures approximately seventy feet from east to west and one hundred and forty-seven feet from north to south.

Originally the Fox Theater was designed as an eight story building; a six story office tower fenestrated with ten double hung windows per story was to surmount the two story theater. This building was to abut and connect to the Rorabaugh-Wiley Building. The depression forced the curtailment of the original design, only the first two stories were constructed, with the most western bay connecting to the Rorabaugh-Wiley Building at the second level, spanning the alley below. Two additional stories were added to the Fox Theater in 1946 and 1947. The vertical fenestration treatment proposed in the original drawings was not incorporated into this design. The addition is highly compatible with the original building and but for its age contributes to the building. The brick used in this addition matches almost exactly and the integration of the upper two stories into the lower two is done well enough to fool the casual observer.

A double span of stepped, terra cotta arches with floral and vegetal motifs mark the top of the original four bay building. Stepped pilasters divide the building's facade into four distinct bays. Floral and vegetal motif terra cotta blocks delineate the original capital line of the two story building. The pilasters continue to rise an additional two stories, terminating in an undecorated terra cotta tile cornice. Short terra cotta courses delineate the capitals of the secondary pilasters that project from the larger units which terminate in the aforementioned cornice. The aluminum and glass lamps that originally crowned the pilasters of the two story theater now crown the tops of the extended pilasters. Translucent glass blocks fill the stepped window openings that fenestrate the upper story of the western three facade bays.

Pressed aluminum panels with geometric motifs add textural diversity to the facade, spanning the friezes above the building's first level openings and accenting the space above the marquee. Photographs taken of the theater in the early 1930s indicate that

See continuation sheet

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**Section number 7 Page 1

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windows originally filled the three arched spaces above the pressed aluminum friezes, these spaces were filled in with brick during the 1946- 1947 expansion. During this change a double band of terra cotta tile was added to the center of each former window space, connecting to the decorative terra cotta center panel of each stepped, terra cotta arch.

A stepped pilaster rises above the the center two terra cotta pilasters, creating a design solution which effectively ties the addition in with the original building. The first level storefronts have been slightly altered, the glass transoms have been boarded over but the doors, fenestration, and openings remain intact.

The facade's eastern bay contains the lobby entrance into the theater. The original four wood panel doors with etched glass have been replaced with glass doors in metal frames. The original red, yellow, blue and green Fox marquee and red Fox sign project from the building above the doors and the most eastern pilaster respectively. A large, pressed aluminum panel decorated with a leaf motif surmounts the marquee, accenting the recessed space between the bay's two projecting pilasters. A steel casement window lighting the manager's office pierces this panel. Aluminum colored, metallic glazed terra cotta surrounds the window. A double span of stepped, terra cotta arches with floral and vegetal motifs surmounts the pressed aluminum panel. Linear brick steps connect the terra cotta blocks that form the arches. A terra cotta panel with floral and vegetal motifs divides the center of the arches, and intersects with a pilaster of plain terra cotta tile that terminates in the bay's stepped, terra cotta cornice.

The theater's major secondary elevation, the eastern elevation, is comprised of a large expanse of buff colored, painted brick wall that houses the auditorium. The 1946-1947 two story burnt sienna, brick addition extends about a quarter of the way across the wall. A pseudo bay marked by projecting pilasters defines the southern half of the 1940s addition. A translucent glass block stepped, arched window pierces the base of this pseudo bay, a terra cotta tile pilaster rises from the center of the window's arch, terminating in the psuedo bay's stepped terra cotta cornice. The northern half of the addition is marked by two translucent glass block windows. The remaining expanse of the eastern elevation is undecorated, marked several times by small vents or windows.

A one story, brick building abuts the theater along the eastern elevation, extending about half the theater's length. A parking lot covers the remaining lots east of the theater. An alley runs directly north of the theater, connecting with the alley that runs to the west of the theater.

The northern and western elevations of the building front the aforementioned alleys. Buff colored, painted brick faces these elevations. A steel hinged, double door and several steel hinged, single and double doors pierce the street level of the northern and western elevations respectively, providing egress from the auditorium and office space.

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 2

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Four doors provide access into the theater's lobby. Originally a box office stood between each pair of doors, projecting north into the lobby and south into the theater's enclosed vestibule. The interior lobby projection contained display cases framed with ornamental plaster that advertised the coming attractions. Terrazzo covered the vestibule's floor. The enclosed vestibule, the ticket office and display cases have been removed and the terrazzo has been covered with indoor-outdoor carpet. The "Fox Friendly Theater" slogan is probably embedded in the terrazzo floor, marking each door's threshold. Other than these alterations the theater retains a very high degree of architectural integrity.

Trademark, prefabricated fixtures decorate the theater's interior. The use of ornamental plaster is prevalent throughout the building, seen in the ribbed plaster walls, the geometric coved ceilings, the door surrounds, the capital pilasters, the medallions, the cartouches, and the grilles. Light fixtures include two types of etched glass and metal chandeliers in the lobby, several sconce designs used in the lobby and auditorium alike, and a third type of almost flush, etched glass and metal fixture used in the auditorium in addition to the larger chandelier used in the lobby as well. The iron grill stair railing is also prefabricated, the same railing design was employed in the Salina Fox-Watson Theater (c. 1930-1931).

The theater's original color scheme was henna, French blue, and gold. Much of the gold detail work that accentuates the decorative ornamentation used throughout the theater reflects the period color scheme. The henna and French blue treatments have been displaced. For instance, the lobby's geometric coved ceiling was originally highlighted with various colors, now it is painted a harvest gold. Much of the original color treatments are probably underneath the top layer of paint. It appears that the theater retains its original Wilton carpet, a swirling design of gold, tan, and blue.

A large, leaded glass mirror originally hung on the lobby's west wall. This has been removed. A smaller mirror hangs on the lobby's east wall, retaining its ornamental plaster surround.

There are two approaches to the balcony, the grand staircase and the lesser staircase in the rear lobby. Both staircases offer the trademark iron grill railing.

The lavatories have been modernized. Originally the ladies room was appointed with lavender porcelin and tile. The prefabricated, period water fountain that stands outside the ladies room is retained.

The auditorium is ninety-one feet long and sixty-nine feet wide. Four doors lead from the lobby into the auditorium. There are nine hundred and ninety-six seats arranged on the gently sloping floor and four hundred and twenty on the overhanging balcony. Large pilasters, rising some forty feet divide the auditorium space.

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number   7   Page   3  

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Gold capitals surmount the pilasters, bearing a floral and vegetal design that echoes of the ancanthus leaf motif. Eight chandeliers hang from the auditorium's geometric coved plaster ceiling. A balcony curves across the auditorium, decorated with its original geometric frieze of red, black, white, gold, and green. Almost flush mounted etched glass and metal light fixtures hang from underneath the balcony. Tapered fixtures and sconces are mounted on the wall panels.

The proscenium arch is bordered with gold scroll work, this treatment is repeated on the stage front. The stage was designed for orchestra and vaudeville performances as well as cinema. A small orchestra pit is provided in front of the stage and five dressing rooms with lavatories were constructed in the basement.

The retail and office space in the building is relatively undecorated.

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 4

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The theater incorporated state of the art technology in its "Magna-Life" projection system and "Movie Town" and "Vitaphone" sound systems. The original screen measured twenty-six feet high by fifty feet wide. The stage was built to accommodate orchestras, vaudeville acts, and silent movies as well as motion pictures. The original screen was replaced sometime before 1953 with an eighteen feet high by twenty-four feet wide screen and then in 1953 with a wide angled, cinema scope screen that measured seventeen feet high by forty-three feet wide.

The Depression era construction period affected the Boller Brothers' original plans for the Fox Theater, the eight story building was cut back to two stories and much of the pressed aluminum exterior ornamentation was replaced with metallic glazed terra cotta. In 1947 Vernon Wiley added an additional two stories to the theater and a bridge attaching the building to the Wiley Building next door. The additional space was used by the Wiley Department Store. The addition is highly compatible with the original building, constructed of like material and designed by the A.R. Mann Company.

In the 1950s Hutchinson was known as the Little Hollywood. Two Fox movies were shot on location in Hutchinson and Reno County during this decade. "Wait 'Til the Sun Shines Nellie" starring Jean Peters and David Wayne was filmed in Hutchinson and Castleton in 1952 and had its world premiere showing at the Fox Theater on May 14, 1952. In 1954, "Picnic", starring Kim Novak, Rosalind Russell, Cliff Robertson, and William Holden was filmed in Hutchinson, Nickerson and Mount Hope. The cast party and Kansas premiere of the film were held at the Fox.

The Fox Theater operated profitably until the 1970s and closed in 1985 due to an unrenewed lease and competition from multi-cinemas. The building, which maintains a very high degree of interior and exterior architectural and structural integrity, may be threatened. It stands in the center of Hutchinson's central business district in a continuing commercial use zone; however, it has remained vacant since 1985, with the exception of some of the office space in the 1947 addition and the storefront space. The Fox Theater is an excellent example of an Art Deco movie theater that draws its architectural significance from its construction dates of 1930-1931. The 1947 addition is contributing but non-historic.

The Fox draws its distinction as an Art Deco building through its setbacks, stepped treatments, and projecting pilasters which emphasize the building's geometric form. The pressed aluminum and metallic glazed terra cotta floral, vegetal, and geometric reliefs, door mouldings, capitals and

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

# **National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet**

Section number   8   Page   5  

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bases, stair railings, light fixtures, cartouches, friezes, and other decorative features found in the building are all hallmarks of the Art Deco style. The Fox stands as a fairly typical midwestern interpretation of the Art Deco style, looking more toward applied ornament as a style defining feature rather than toward a stronger integration of style defining structural units.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally     statewide     locally

Applicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)  
Architecture

Period of Significance

1930-1931

Significant Dates

1930-1931

1946-1947

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Boller Brothers: Architects

Mann, A.R. and Co.: Supervising Architects

Clinker, Ed C.: Contractor

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Fox Theater (C. 1930-1931, 1946-1947) is being nominated to the National Register under criterion C for its architectural significance as an Art Deco movie theater. Built during the peak years of movie palace construction, the Fox is Hutchinson's only movie theater from this era. Its decorative Art Deco exterior and opulent interior treatments are hallmarks of the movie palaces that were built across America in the 1920s and 1930s. The buildings were designed to be showplaces, with sumptuous appointments, inviting the rich and poor alike to share the lavish surroundings and escape into celluloid fantasies.

The Fox Theater was designed by Boller Brothers, the prominent movie theater design firm responsible for many such palaces throughout the midwest and southwest. Some of the firm's Kansas National Register theaters include Salina's Fox-Watson, Emporia's Granada, and Independence's Booth. Boller Brothers is also credited with the designs for the Missouri Theater in St. Joseph, Missouri and the Plaza Theater in Kansas City, Missouri. The Hutchinson firm of A.R. Mann and Company served as the supervising architects for the theater project. Hutchinson based Ed C. Clinker served as the general contractor for the project. The Wichita based Claude Neon Federal Company of Kansas built the Fox Theater marquee. The plaster ornamentation and the lighting fixtures were supplied by the Kansas City, Missouri companies of W.H. Jennes and the National Theater Supply Company respectively. Hutchinson developer and merchant Vernon Wiley was the project's catalyst.

Community pride and excitement rose as Hutchinson celebrated the theater's June 8, 1931 opening with a parade, a street dance, and a week of festivities. The world premiere of "Always Goodbye", starring Elissa Landl and Lewis Stone, was the first film to be shown at the Fox. It is significant that the Fox West Coast Theaters would build and open a \$400,000 theater in Hutchinson during the Great Depression, especially in light of the fact that Fox operated the Midland, the Strand, and the Royal theaters, all within walking distance of the brand new flagship theater.

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Hutchinson News, 29 May 1931; 6 June 1931.

Hutchinson Record, 9 December 1932; 6 January 1933.

Laird, Linda. Fox Theater National Register nomination draft, 1988.

Wiley Improvement Company, Hutchinson Fox Theater Manifest.

See continuation sheet

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

Specify repository:  
Kansas State Historical Society

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property Less than 1 acre

UTM References

A 

|      |   |   |   |         |   |   |   |          |   |   |   |   |   |   |
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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description The nominated property is located on the west 20' of Lot 2 and 11" on the west side of Lot 2 from the alley, third and fourth story addition over alley, east 13' of Lot 2, all of Lot 4, and west 5' of Lot 6. The property is bounded to the south by E. First, to the west and north by an alley, and to the east by adjacent property lines.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire parcel that is historically associated with the property.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Martha Hagedorn-Krass, Architectural Historian

organization Kansas State Historical Society date July 12, 1989

street & number 120 W. 10th telephone 913-296-5264

city or town Topeka state Kansas zip code 66612