

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

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-Watson Theater Building

other names/site number Watson Theater Bgildin

2. Location

street & number 155 S. Santa Fe Avenue

not for publication

city, town Salina

vicinity

state Kansas

code KS

county Saline

code 169

zip code 67401

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

1

         objects

        

         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.

Signature of certifying official

Ramon Pawan

Date

June 27, 1988

Executive Director, 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:)

Ailores Byrum

Entered in the  
National Register 8-4-88

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and culture: Theater;  
movie theater  

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Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Other: vacant theater  
Commerce/Trade: business: office building  

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)Modern movement: Art Deco  

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Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete  
walls brick  

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roof asphalt  

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other \_\_\_\_\_  

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**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

The Fox-Watson Theater (c. 1930-1931) is located at 155 S. Santa Fe Avenue in Salina, Saline County, Kansas (pop. 41,843). The two-story, Art Deco, concrete and steel building is faced with beige brick and terra cotta trim. The building stands at the northeast corner of the S. Santa Fe and Walnut intersection in the heart of Salina's central downtown business district. The building has a western facade orientation, measuring approximately one hundred feet from north to south and one hundred and twenty feet from east to west. The theater's original offices front S. Santa Fe, measuring the north eighty feet of the facade, they are forty feet deep. The offices are now leased to various businesses. The box office and lobby measure the south twenty feet of the facade and are forty feet deep. The Fox-Watson was closed by Dickinson Theaters in August, 1987. The building maintains a high degree of architectural and structural integrity, standing as the only example of Art Deco movie theater architecture in Salina.

The seven-bay facade is comprised of three units, the five-bay storefront is flanked by a three-story box office tower on the south and a two-story office entry tower to the north. The theater's auditorium rises above this facade. Two pilasters with stepped terra cotta capitals delineate the outer bays of the center office unit, floral and vegetal motifs decorate the capitals. The interior bays of the upper story are delineated by two "broken" pilasters with terra cotta capitals and bases, floral and vegetal motifs decorate the capitals and bases. Floral terra cotta reliefs ornaments the center unit's first story entablature. A geometric terra cotta relief ornaments the unit's second story entablature. Three terra cotta panels cast with Watson-Theater-Building respectively surmount the three interior second floor windows of this unit. Five glass storefronts with recessed entrances comprise the first level fenestration of this unit. Marble panels stand along the base of each storefront. Mauve, gold, and black terrazzo floors cover the entry spaces to each store. The upper floor fenestration of the center unit is comprised of five pairs of 1/1, double hung windows. A cement sill underscores each pair.

The one-bay entry tower that flanks the center unit to the north rises slightly above this unit. An imposing floral and vegetal lintel with a corbelled vertical surround forms the terra cotta architrave for the tower's doorway. Terrazzo floors in mauve, gold, and black cover the entry space. A double wood and glass door with a brass kickplate leads into the tower. Marble wainscoting ornaments the recessed entryway. A 1/1, double hung window defines the second level of the tower. It is underscored with a corbelled, terra cotta panel. The tower concludes with a stepped terra cotta panel. Its south and east elevations are painted beige.

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The box office tower rises three stories and flanks the center unit to the south. Its original stepped tower with a neon light was removed in the 1950s. A serpentine inspired block with a terra cotta cap is the only vestige of the chunky spire. The tower's corners are delineated by stepped pilasters with floral and vegetal terra cotta capitals. Three sets of fixed metal windows fenestrate the second and third levels of the tower on the west and south elevations. Windows pierce only the third level of the north and east elevations, these elevations are painted beige. The second level windows are three panes across and four panes down. The third floor windows are three panes across and seven panes down. Floral and vegetal terra cotta panels separate the two window groupings. The third floor of the box office tower is an empty room that is accessed from the roof only.

The box office retains its mauve, gold, and black terrazzo floor. Three terrazzo inlays of "Fox Watson-Friendly Theater" stand below each of the three double doors leading into the theater. These doors are wooden with glass panels and brass kickplates. The box office picks up the stepped treatment and floral and vegetal designs used throughout the building. Its brown and white color scheme is not original, dating from 1981. It is believed that the original treatment included nickel bars and glass panels. The only change on the southern elevation of the box office tower has been the removal of the display case glass. The floral and vegetal and corbelled terra cotta surround remains intact. Marble panels stand around the base of the box office tower. The original marquee was replaced with the current marquee in 1954.

A two-story, brick and terra cotta unit housing the lobby attaches the box office tower to the theater auditorium. It shares its marble panel base with the box office tower. Its face is delineated by pilasters with stepped terra cotta capitals. Floral and vegetal reliefs span the unit's entablature and first level stringcourse. A window on the second level has been filled in with matching brick.

The large auditorium rises above the lobby on the southern elevation. Its roof line is broken by a center parapet. Pilasters with stepped terra cotta capitals and floral and vegetal capitals delineate the parapet on its outer edges and interior rise. Two metal casement windows pierce the upper wall centrally, marking the projection booth. This space is delineated by an additional rise in the parapet and two parenthetical pilasters with stepped terra cotta capitals and bases. Brick chevron moulding ornaments the space above the two windows. Two windows pierce the western and eastern sides of the auditorium's upper wall, the eastern opening is filled with matching brick. Three double doors centrally pierce the first level auditorium wall, steps lead from these doors to the sidewalk.

The rear of the auditorium and the section of the auditorium visible from the facade are painted beige, the painting probably occurred in 1981. Several doors and windows pierce the rear elevation of the auditorium, a fire escape projects from this wall.

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Three double doors provide access from the box office into the theater lobby. The lobby is a long and narrow space with curved staircases at both the east and west ends. These stairs lead to the second floor lounges, balcony, and offices. An ascending fan and triangle design decorates the stair's cast iron balustrade. Tall brown pilasters with white vegetal capitals articulate the lobby walls, originally the pilasters were green with gold highlights. Beamed ceilings span the western part of the lobby. The beams are now painted brown and the ceiling is painted white, original treatment for this ceiling called for a red and green overlay on a gold foundation. Two mirrors decorate the lobby's eastern ceiling. Acoustic plaster covers the walls in both the lobby and the auditorium. Geometric friezes stand above the auditorium doorways, cement geometric trusses span these doorways. Vegetal friezes stand above the three exit doors on the lobby's southern wall. Some of the original ceiling light fixture medallions remain, although the chandeliers have been replaced with modern cluster globes. Additionally, most of the sconce lighting in the lobby has been replaced. The lobby's brown and white color scheme dates from 1981, when the original green and gold treatment was covered over. The 1981 repainting also occurred on the first level of the theater auditorium.

The upper floor of the lobby is marked by geometric cement truss supports spanning the walkway and several stepped doorways. Several original ceiling light fixtures remain intact on this floor. Access to the second story offices is gained from this space. These offices do retain some original light fixtures and are marked by stepped or pyramidal doorways. These offices have been vacant since the 1960s. The first floor commercial space has been altered, with dropped ceilings and new light fixtures.

The theater's auditorium houses 1,500; 1,000 in the orchestra and 500 in the balcony. Its walls are articulated by forty foot pilasters with scallop shell capitals. The pilasters are painted brown and white on the first level and the original green and gold on the second level. A balcony curves across the auditorium, decorated with its original red, black, white, gold, and green geometric frieze. Stepped door surrounds highlighted with leafy motif lintels and keystones stand on the first and second levels, painted brown and white on the first level and green and gold on the second level. A large red, black, and yellow glass ceiling light creates an imposing starburst affect on the center of the auditorium's ceiling. Many of the original opaque glass and brass light sconces remain on the pilasters. The stage retains its green and gold valance. The theater's original screen, which could be pulled up to allow for other uses of the stage, was replaced with a stationary cinemascope screen in 1954. The carpet, curtain, and seats were also replaced in 1954.

Despite the 1981 brown and white repainting and the replacement of some of the light fixtures, the building retains a very high degree of integrity. The color scheme can be reclaimed and the lights can be replaced. The Fox-Watson Theater stands as an exciting testament to Art Deco movie theater design in Salina.

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The Fox-Watson draws its distinction as an Art Deco building through its setbacks, stepped treatments, and projecting pilasters which emphasize the building's geometric form. The terra cotta floral and vegetal reliefs, stringcourses door mouldings, a capitals and bases on the building's exterior and the geometric friezes, door surrounds, stair railings, and other decorative treatments found in the building's interior are all hallmarks of the Art Deco style. The Fox-Watson stands as a fairly typical mid-western interpretation of the Art Deco style, looking more toward applied ornament as style defining rather than toward a stronger integration of style defining structural units, although the stepped tower does reflect an aspect of style defining structural integration.

**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

Cultural Affiliation  
N/A

Significant Person  
N/A

Architect/Builder  
Boller Brothers - Architect  
Charles W. Shaver - Supervising Architect  
Busboom Brothers - Builder

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

The Fox-Watson Theater (c. 1930-1931) 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-Watson is Salina'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.

Salina's Fox-Watson 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 National Register theaters include the Granada Theater in Emporia, Kansas, the Missouri in St. Joseph, Missouri, and the Plaza Theater in Kansas City, Missouri. Local architect Charles Shaver served as supervising architect for the Fox-Watson and Busboom Brothers of Fairbury, Nebraska constructed the building.

Public support for a modern movie theater in Salina dates back to the 1920s, when local banker and businessman Winfield W. Watson (1848-1931) began the campaign which ultimately lead Fox West Coast Theaters to build the Fox-Watson. Watson donated the land for the theater and was active in raising some of the bond money necessary to construct the \$400,000 theater, accordingly the theater bears his name. Community pride and excitement rose as Salinans celebrated the theater's opening with a parade and a week of festivities in late February, 1931. "Not Exactly Gentlemen" starring Fay Wray was the first film to be shown in the Fox-Watson.

Dickinson Theaters closed the Fox-Watson in August, 1987 as competition from the Dickinson owned mall theaters rendered the downtown theater unprofitable. The building, which maintains a very high degree of interior and exterior architectural and structural integrity, may be threatened, particularly its fine interior. The Fox-Watson Theater is an excellent example of an Art Deco movie theater that draws its architectural significance from its construction dates of 1930-1931.

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Naylor, David American Picture Palaces - The Architecture of Fantasy. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1981.

Pildas, Ave. Movie Palaces. New York: Clarkan Potter, 1980.

Salina Journal, 20 February 1931; 21 February 1931; 23 February 1931; 24 February 1931; 4 December 1931.

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 # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

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 14 620680 4299560  
 Zone Easting Northing

C         

B           
 Zone Easting Northing

D         

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description The nominated property is located on the E 80'S Lot 133 and all of Lots 135 and 137 on Santa Fe Avenue in Salina, Kansas. It is bounded to the west by Santa Fe, to the south by Walnut, to the east by an alley, and to the north by adjacent property lines.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes all property historically associated with the theatre.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Martha Hagedorn-Krass, Architectural Historian

organization Kansas State Historical Society date April 22, 1988

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