United States Department of the Interior Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form



See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*Type all entries—complete applicable sections

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historic	l MPE	RIAL THE	ATRE		, /	
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7. Description

Condition excellent deteriorated good ruins _X fair unexposed	Check one unaitered _X_ altered	Check one X original site moved date NA
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Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Imperial Theatre is located at the end of Market Street, adjacent to commercial buildings of a similar age. Its appearance is that of A Long, NARROW, TWO-STORY, PLASTERED BUILDER PSEUDO NEO-CLASSIC STRUCTURE, WITH A SIMPLE BASIC EXTERIOR AND A MUCH MORE UNIQUE ORNAMENTED INTERIOR, PRIMARILY ACHIEVED BY THE USE OF PRESSED TIN DESIGN CEILINGS AND WALLPAPERED VERTICAL SURFACES. A VERY SIMPLIFIED STAGE IS LOCATED AT THE EAST END OF THE AUDITORIUM, AND A REASONABLY LARGE BALCONY IS OVER THE ENTRY LOBBY.

THE IMPERIAL THEATRE, OR GROVE THEATRE, AS IT IS NOW CALLED, IS A 30 x 100 wood frame and plaster structure using "carpenter" trusses to clear span the total space. The street facade has an open porch supported by two pseudo-classical, plastered columns. The porch ceiling contains the original pressed tin ceiling with a 7" tin crown mold defining the original shape. This front elevation has a parapet with plaster trim molding which follows the shape of the upper roof line. Five plaster molded arches form the main design theme above the porch columns and beam system. Three of these arches house relatively small wood bash casement windows with fully rounded arched heads. Three large, round vents with heavy wood lattice and two small double hung windows sit just above the porch beam.

ON THE SOUTH ELEVATION, THERE IS AN INDICATION THAT AN ADDED WOODEN EXTERIOR STAIRWAY ONCE LED FROM THE BALCONY TO THE GROUND LEVEL. THERE IS AN EXIT DOOR JUST IN FRONT OF THE STAGE AREA, AND A STAGE-LEVEL DOOR APPROXIMATELY MID-STAGE OPENS 4 ABOVE EXISTING EXTERIOR GRADE WITH NO PRESENT INDICATION OF EITHER STAIRS OR LANDING. THERE ARE THREE DOUBLE HUNG WOOD WINDOWS AND AN EXIT DOOR AT MID-SEATING AREA, ALL OF WHICH HAVE BEEN SEALED OVER ON THE INSIDE AND ONLY SHOW AS BOARDED UP OPENINGS ON THE EXTERIOR.

A WOOD FRAME AND STUCCO LEAN-TO AT THE REAR OF THE STAGE (EAST ELEVATION WAS ADDED TO HOUSE A LATER MECHANICAL SYSTEM.

THE NORTH WALL HAS ONLY ONE EXIT DOOR, LOCATED IN FRONT OF THE STAGE, AND A SMALL WINDOW FROM THE TOILET ROOM UNDER THE LOBBY STAIRS. TERRA COTTA PIPE FLUE FOR ORIGINAL WOOD BURNING STOVE STILL EXISTS ON THIS ELEVATION. FOR MANY YEARS, THE WOOD STOVE SAT ABOUT HALF WAY DOWN THE LEFT SIDE OF THE THEATRE, HEATING THE TWENTY-OR-SO SEATS IN THE IMMEDIATE AREA MORE THAN ADEQUATELY. THE HEAT SELDOM REACHING THE REST OF THE AUDITORIUM.

The original entry porch has been partially enclosed and a small box office added, centrally located between the pairs of double doors, and the added enclosure wall (c. 1940° s) includes a single pair of doors going to the outside. Evidence of the enclosure addition is that the pressed tin ceiling and crown mold befine the original porch area, continuing from the lobby to the exterior porch columns. The floor is concrete, sloping from the box office to a $4\frac{1}{2}$ m step at the sidewalk.

The Lobby is approximately $9^{\circ}x29^{\circ}$, with a pressed tin ceiling and a small tin grown mold, in a pattern different from that of the main auditorium ceiling. A stair leads from the lobby to the balcony on the north side, with a single toilet and Lav Located under the stair landing. A $5\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}x8^{\circ}$ room to the south side of the porch and forward of the lobby appears to be the original box office or combination box/manager's office. Both walls and ceiling in this room are $1^{\circ}x4^{\circ}$ siding, hung vertically, using partially a single wall construction.

The main auditorium has a center aisle, sloped floors with 14 rows of 7 folding, castiron-framed theater seats on each side. Walls are plaster over wood lath with 4! high 1"x4" double V grooved T&G Douglas Fir wainscot, set vertically with a simple 1"x4" cap. Ceiling is pressed tin throughout, with a continuous large tin crown mold around the entire area. The sloped flooring is 1"x4" T&G vertical grain Douglas Fir over a 1"x6" diagonal subfloor, running east and west, following the contour of the earth. An area in front of the stage is trapped for a congrete orchestra pit, approximately $4\frac{1}{2}$! wide x 16! Long x 18" deep. During the silent movie era, a pipe organ was used to accompany the films, until it was damaged by fire. At which time a player piano was installed.

"Sight-Line" floor slope of the main auditorium was created by sloping the Earth to the required angle and laying five rows of $3^n \times 12^n$ mud sills, running down the slope. $4^n \times 4^{n+1}$ s were laid on top of the mud sills to support the $2^n \times 6^n$ floor joists at 16^n o.c.

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IMPERIAL THEATRE

CONTINUATION SHEET WALNUT GROVE, CA ITEM NUMBER 7

PAGE 1

DESCRIPTION:

THE BALCONY IS APPROXIMATELY 21'x29', WITH STEP-DOWN ROWS OF SEATING, AND WOOD WAINSCOT OF THE SAME TYPE AS THE MAIN FLOOR. THE CENTER AISLE MAS SIX ROWS OF SEATING ON THE NORTH, SEVEN ON THE SOUTH. AN EXIT DOOR TO AN EXTERIOR STAIR (REMOVED) IS ON THE SOUTH SIDE. THE FLOOR IS VERTICAL GRAIN DOUGLAS FIR RUNNING THE LENGTH OF THE SEATING.

A TOILET AND LAV ARE OFF THE STAIR LANDING. A PROJECTION BOOTH APPROXIMATELY $7\frac{1}{2}$ 1×21¹ STILL CONTAINS PROJECTORS AND FILM STORAGE RACKS, AS WELL AS A HAND-REWIND TABLE. THERE IS AN ATTIC HATCH IN THE PROJECTION ROOM CEILING. A LOW HEIGHT STORAGE AREA IS UNDERNEATH THE PROJECTION ROOM FLOOR AND ABOVE THE CEILING FRAMING OF THE LOBBY AND PORCH. THE PROJECTION ROOM CEILING IS PARTIALLY PRESSED TIN AND PARTIALLY FLAT TIN SHEETS WITH LAPPED SEAMS.

THE STAGE IS APPROXIMATELY 132 LONG x 29 WIDE x 4 HIGH. STAGE WAS FRAMED FROM THE DIRT LEVEL UP USING 2" x 8" JOISTS AT 16" O.C., WITH TWO BEARING BEAMS AT THIRD POINTS. THE FLOOR IS LAMINATED OF 1x RANDOM WIDTH DOUGLAS FIR DIAGONAL SHEATHING SUBFLOOR, A 1"X6" T&G REDWOOD DECKING LAID IN AN EAST-WEST DIRECTION IN A 1"X4" VERTICAL GRAIN DOUGLAS FIR FINISH FLOOR. THERE WAS NEVER A "FLY GALLERY" OR A PROSCRIUM ARCH, ALTHOUGH A DRAPE VALANCE IS IN LINE WITH THE FACE OF THE STAGE BEHIND THE FOOTLIGHTS AND STAGE STAIRS AT EACH SIDE. THE FOOTLIGHT TROUGH IS CONTINUOUS ACROSS THE TOTAL WIDTH OF THE STAGE, MINUS THE STAIRWAYS. LIGHTING RECEPTACLES ARE APPROXIMATELY 12" O.C. THE ORIGINAL FRONT OF THE STAGE WAS BEHIND THE FOOTLIGHT TROUGH, APPROXIMATELY 20" TO THE REAR OF THE EXISTING WOOD PANELLED STORAGE DOORS. THERE IS AN EXIT DOOR WITH PANIC HARDWARE (BOTH SIDES) AT THE MAIN FLOOR LEVEL, IMMEDIATELY ADJACENT TO THE STAIR COMING OFF THE STAGE. ALL THREE WALLS SURROUNDING THE STAGE ARE WOOD FRAME WITH WOOD LATH AND PLASTER, AND INDICATIONS ARE THAT AT LEAST PARTIAL AREAS WERE ONCE WALLPAPERED. THE CEILING IS THE SAME TYPE OF PRESSED TIN AS THE MAIN AUDITORIUM.

THERE IS EVIDENCE OF BOTH KNOB AND TUBE AND CONTINUOUS WIRING. SPECIAL STAGE LIGHTING IS BET UP ON EACH SIDE WALL FORWARD OF THE STAGE.

THE PROPERTY BESCRIPTION AS GIVEN IN SECTION 10 OF THIS APPLICATION IS THE ORIGINAL LOT SIZE WITH THE BUILDING PLACED IN THE NORTHWEST QUARTER OF A LOT APPROXIMATELY ONE-HALF ACRE IN SIZE. THE PROPERTY IS BASICALLY RECTANGULAR IN SHAPE, APPROXIMATELY 90 WIDE X 220 DEEP. THIS EXTRA LAND WILL BE USED FOR LANDSCAPE AND REQUIRED PARKING. THERE IS NO RECORD OR EVIDENCE OF ANY OTHER STRUCTURE EXISTING ON THE SITE.

8. Significance

Period prehistoric 1400–1499 1500–1599 1600–1699 1700–1799 1800–1899 _X 1900–	Areas of Significance—C — archeology-prehistoric — archeology-historic — agriculture — architecture — art — commerce — communications	community planning conservation economics education engineering exploration/settlement	Iandscape architecture Iaw Iiterature Iiterature Imusic Indicatory	e religion science sculpture _X sociai/ humanitarian _X theater transportation other (specify)
Specific dates	CIRCA 1919-1920	Builder/Architect Yo	NEKI CHI TAKEDA	

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

THE IMPERIAL THEATRE WAS FOR MANY YEARS THE MAJOR SOURCE OF ENTERTAINMENT, NOT ONLY FOR RESIDENTS OF WALNUT GROVE, BUT FOR ALL WHO LIVED IN THE SURROUNDING TOWNS OR ON THE MANY ISLANDS OF THE SACRAMENTO RIVER DELTA NEAR WALNUT GROVE. IT WAS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT DURING BOTH THE DEPRESSION AND WORLD WAR II WHICH FOLLOWED, BECAUSE EMPTY POCKETS AND GASOLINE SHORTAGES SEVERELY HAMPERED LONG DISTANCE TRAVEL AND EXPENSIVE ENTERTAINMENT.

THE IMPERIAL THEATRE WAS BUILT CIRCA 1919-1920, BY LOCAL BUSINESSMAN YONEKICHI TAKEDA, BUILDER OF AN EARLIER THEATER IN WALNUT GROVE (NO LONGER EXISTING), ON LAND LEASED FOR 99 YEARS FROM ALEXANDER BROWN, AN EARLY RESIDENT OF WALNUT GROVE. AMONG OTHER VENTURES, ALEXANDER BROWN OWNED THE GENERAL MERCHANDISE STORE, HOTEL, PACKING HOUSE, AND WATER SYSTEMS (ONE CAUCASIAN, ONE CHINESE/JAPANESE), IN ADDITION TO MUCH OF THE LAND IN AND AROUND WALNUT GROVE. THE THEATRE WAS BUILT FOR THE COMMUNITY AT THE REQUEST OF MRS. BROWN. BECAUSE OF VARIOUS

EXCLUSIONARY LAWS EXISTING AT THE TIME, LAND WAS OWNED BY CAUCASIANS AND THE THEATRE BUILDING ITSELF WAS OWNED AND OPERATED BY MR. TAKEDA, A JAPANESE. MR. TAKEDA OPERATED THE THEATRE FOR MANY YEARS, AND FOLLOWING HIS MANAGEMENT, IT WAS OWNED AND OPERATED BY BEN HARVEY UNTIL HIS DEATH IN THE LATE 1930'S. THE HARVEY FAMILY RAN SEVERAL THEATERS IN CALIFORNIA AT THIS TIME. MRS. HARVEY ATTEMPTED TO RUN THE THEATRE ALONE, BUT EVENTUALLY SOLD IT TO BEN'S BROTHER, RAY, AND MR. AND MRS. RAY GILGERT, WHO OPERATED IT FROM 1941-1956 AS GILGERT AND HARVEY'S GROVE THEATRE.

IN THE LATE 1930'S, EARLY 40'S, THE THEATRE WAS THE SCENE OF LOCAL "AMATEUR NIGHTS", PATTERNED AFTER THOSE PRODUCED BY MAJOR BOWES FOR RADIO AND EARLY TV. PARTICIPATION WAS EXCELLENT, AND THE TALENT SHOWS WERE A WELCOME PART OF THE AREA'S SOCIAL LIFE. THE 1930'S ALSO SAW THE STAGE OF THE THEATRE USED FOR SEVERAL ROAD SNGWS THAT CAME FOR ONE NIGHT ONLY. IN THE 1940'S, 50'S, & 60'S, THE THEATRE OPERATORS WERE CO-HOSTS FOR AN ANNUAL CHRISTMAS SHOW THAT WAS A VERY IMPORTANT PART OF THE ENTERTAINMENT PROVIDED FOR THE CHILDREN OF THE DELTA. IT WAS PRODUCED IN COOPERATION WITH THE SACRAMENTO BEE NEWSPAPER, AND CONSISTED OF MOVIES, CARTOONS, LIVE ENTERTAINMENT, AND TREATS FOR THE CHILDREN. SEVERAL HUNDRED CHILDREN ATTENDED THESE PERFORMANCES EACH YEAR.

IN MAY OF 1954, A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE GOVERNMENT OF NATIONALIST CHINA WAS MET BY WIRTUALLY THE WHOLE DELTA CHINESE COMMUNITY, IN WALNUT GROVE IN A FUND RAISING EFFORT. IN THE GROVE THEATRE, LI POOK SANG, FROM TAIWAN, FORMOSA, SPOKE TO THE CIVIC LEADERS OF THE GROUP, AND SHOWED A NATIONALIST GOVERNMENT FILM DENOUNCING COMMUNISM IN MAINLAND CHINA.

A MUCH SMALLER THEATER IN THE NEARBY TOWN OF LOCKE SHOWED EXCLUSIVELY ASIAN LANGUAGE FILMS. MOST OF THE FILMS SHOWN AT THE IMPERIAL THEATRE LARGELY SERVED THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING POPULACE, ALTHOUGH FILMS WERE SHOWN OCCASIONALLY IN THE SPANISH, JAPANESE, CHINESE, AND FILIPINO LANGUAGES, SOME ON A REGULAR BASIS, SOME AS FUND RAISING BENEFITS.

TELEVISION AND INCREASING MOBILITY EVENTUALLY TOOK THEIR TOLLS ON THE IMPERIAL THEATRE ATTENDANCE AND IT WAS CLOSED IN 1970. THIS BUILDING OWES MUCH OF ITS SIGNIFICANCE TO ITS ROLL AS A LONGSTANDING PART OF THE AREA'S CULTURAL AND SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT. THE UNLIKELY CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF SUCH A STRUCTURE THREATENS THE INDIVIDUAL AND HUMAN SCALE OF SUCH SMALL ENTERPRISES.

9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

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I MPERI AL THEATRE

CONTINUATION SHEET WALNUT GROVE, CA ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 1

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES:

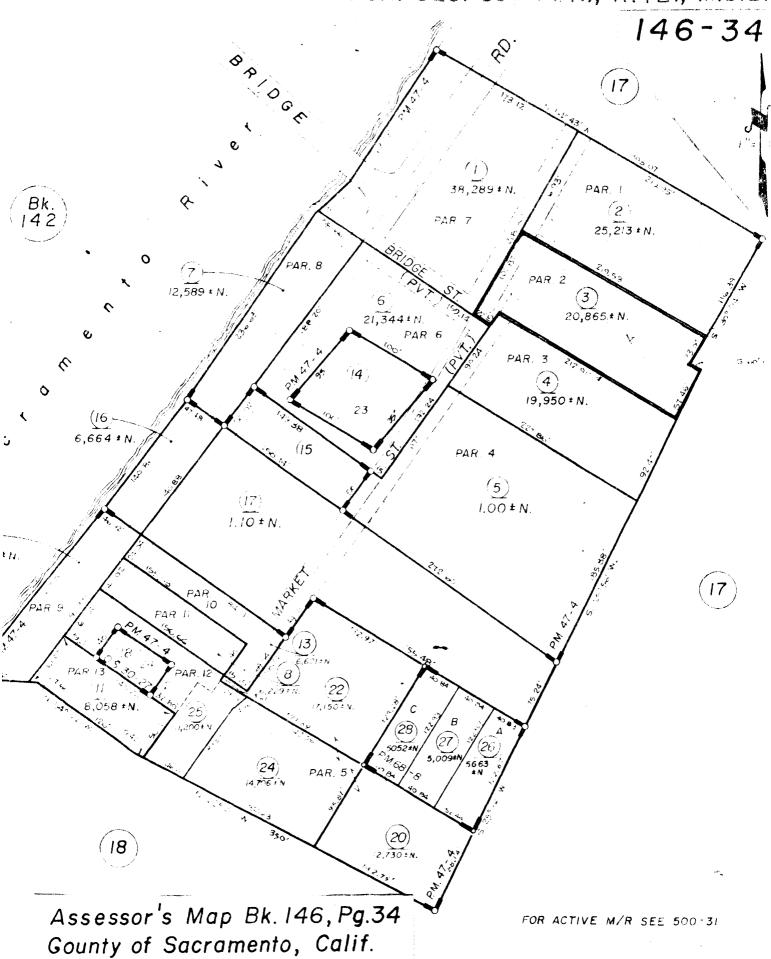
TAPED CONVERSATIONS ON JANUARY 5, 20, 25; FEBRUARY 8, 1982 WITH:

- 1. MR. AND MRS. RAY GILGERT, WALNUT GROVE, CA
- 2. LEE HANSEN. WALNUT GROVE. CA
- 3. MR. AND MRS. DICK PHIPPS, WALNUT GROVE, CA
- 4. TOSHIO SAKAI, WALNUT GROVE, CA
- 5. MRS. HELEN WILSON, WALNUT GROVE, CA
- 6. PING LEE, WALNUT GROVE, CA
- 7. MRS. DOROTHY AUGUSTA, WALNUT GROVE, CA
- S. ED SALISBURY, WALNUT GROVE, CA
- 9. TIM WILSON, WALNUT GROVE, CA
- 10. BILL SHELDON, WALNUT GROVE, CA

TELEPHONE CONVERSATIONS WITH:

- 1. ARTHUR BROWN, WALNUT GROVE, CA
- 2. MANUEL ROGERS, WALNUT GROVE, CA
- 3. MRS. LOUISE TAKEDA NOMURA, MINNEAPOLIS, MN
- 4. MRS. DOROTHY AUGUSTA, WALNUT GROVE, CA

SACRAMENTO BEE NEWSPAPER. MAY 4, 1954; DECEMBER 1965; DECEMBER 1967.



Record of Survey, O.S. Bk. 30, Pg.27
Assessor's Unrecorded Map Reclamation District 554