

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

SEP 13 1988

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 Booth Theater
other names/site number

2. Location

street & number 119 West Myrtle Street not for publication
city, town Independence vicinity
state Kansas code KS county Montgomery code 125 zip code 67301

3. Classification

Ownership of Property		Category of Property		Number of Resources within Property	
				Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	_____	_____	1	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	_____	_____	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____	_____	_____
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____	_____	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.
Signature of certifying official: *Ramon P...* Date: August 27, 1988
State Historical Preservation Officer, 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:)
Signature of the Keeper: *Alana Byer* Date of Action: 10/13/88

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)
Recreation and culture; theater;
movie theater

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)
Vacant/not in use

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival;
Italian Renaissance

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete
walls Brick/terra cotta

roof Built-up asphalt
other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Booth Theater (1911, 1926-27) is located at 119 W. Myrtle Street in Independence, Montgomery County, Kansas (pop. 10,598). This building stands in a row of commercial buildings less than one block west of Pennsylvania Avenue and one block north of Main Street in the town's central business district. The rectangular two-story brick theater has a buff-colored terra cotta facade expressing an eclectic blend of Spanish and Italian renaissance stylistic features. The building has a basement and stands on a reinforced concrete foundation. It has a nearly flat roof sloping to the rear. The main three-bay facade is oriented to the north. The building is approximately 50 feet wide from east to west and 148 feet long from north to south. To the west stands one remaining bay of the original Booth Building from which the theater was reconstructed. This building retains a substantial degree of structural and architectural integrity despite some alterations as well as recent deterioration. The present full-length suspended metal marquee was installed after 1939. The theater entrance has been altered since 1980. A central ticket booth and adjacent playbill cases have been covered with wood.

Adapting a commercial building into a movie theater created a large two-story volume with the entrance, storefronts, office, and balcony at the north end and stage and screen at the opposite end. An ornamental facade was applied to this block. The plan and massing of the building are related to its use as a movie theater.

The facade is covered with coursed buff-colored terra cotta tile. Contrasting ornamental terra cotta moldings are a darker tan. The side and rear walls are red brick in English bond with eight stretcher rows per header row. There are steel roof trusses supporting an asphalt built-up roof. Sidewall parapets have a semicircular tile cap. There is a square brick tower at the southeast corner of the building.

Since the Booth Theater is part of a row of commercial buildings, there is only one principal facade. It has three horizontal bays and two vertical divisions. There are two central theater entrances with paired glazed wooden doors. Two flanking storefronts have side entrances with modern glazed metal doors and tile bulkheads, display windows, and multi-pane fixed transoms. There is a terra cotta water table and to the east a contrasting inset tile inscribed with the date of construction and designer's name. A full-length projecting belt course runs under the second floor windows. There is a large

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central tripartite window with stained glass panes. This window is comprised of upper and lower sections with a semicircular shaped head. The window is ornamented with a prominent fluted molding and recessed panels between the two sections. Flanking windows are paired wooden 4/8 casements with stained glass panes. These also have a molded surround and flat projecting hoods crowned with ornament. Above the side windows there are small fixed round-headed windows and horizontal rows of recessed round-arched terra cotta lighted sconces. The facade is crowned with a high shaped parapet in the center. The parapet is ornamented with molded coping as well as decorative urns in the center and on each end block.

The interior plan of the Booth Theater is well-preserved. There is a foyer with side entrances to the main hall and side stairways to the mezzanine. The foyer has an ornamental tile floor. The stairs have open wooden balustrades with turned spindles. In the hall there is a stage with curved front to the south. Above the stage a wooden grid and rigging for changing canvas backdrops remains. There is a rear exit on the east side of the stage and a basement stair entrance to the west. The hall has a sloping concrete floor. All the theater seats have been removed. The interior walls are plaster on metal lath. Much of the theater's colorful interior detail has been painted over or removed. However, the ornamental plaster dome, four pairs of beams with decorative brackets, the arched proscenium, and wall panels remain. The theater roof above the hall is deteriorated and there are areas of water-damaged plaster ceiling in the hall. The restrooms and manager's office are located in the corners of the mezzanine floor. Modern partitions have been constructed to further subdivide this area. There are side entrances from the mezzanine to the double tier balcony. There is a projection booth centered in the upper level of the balcony. The balcony has a wooden floor and a solid railing with wainscoting. The balcony wings, which once extended along the sides of the hall, have been removed.

Because much of the original interior detail which distinguished the Booth as an "atmospheric" movie house has been altered or removed, the interior is not a significant example of this form. Nevertheless, the building structure, facade, and interior plan still convey a sense of the theater's use and historic significance as a community entertainment center and eclectic style movie house during the period from 1927 until 1938.

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The Booth Theater was the only structure specifically designed as a motion picture theater to be built in Independence. Thomas J. Booth, the owner, explained his intention when interviewed February 3, 1927,

I did not want to bring a competitor into an already crowded field, which I would have done if I had encouraged any one of a number of businesses to establish themselves here. I wanted to bring something into the town, that the town needed.

Glenn Dickinson, president of Dickinson Enterprises, the regional theater chain which leased the Booth, echoed Thomas Booth's sentiment when Dickinson insisted that the theater's construction was a result of his desire that Independence should have the fine modern show house that it deserved.

Later in 1927, a booster pamphlet stated, "Independence has long been the amusement center of this section of the country." Before the Booth was completed, residents were entertained in the Beldorf, Best, and Quality theaters. The Beldorf, constructed in 1907, was designed as an "opera house" primarily for live stage performances. The Best and Quality theaters were housed in ordinary commercial buildings. By 1929 the Quality had gone out of business. In addition to the Beldorf, Best, and Booth theaters, Memorial Hall was also used in 1927 to show movies in an effort to help pay for the operating expenses of this monumental community center. Another commercial building on Main Street was remodeled in 1930 to present talking pictures. As late as 1939, four theaters in Independence competed for customers--the Beldorf, Best, Booth, and Main Street.

In 1939 the Booth Theater was redecorated and improved. According to the Reporter June 15, 1939:

The outstanding accomplishments in the remodeling campaign will be a new and modern cooling system, something that will make the new Booth most comfortable during the hot summer months, and that goes for any seat in the house. The installation provides a cooling atmosphere in every nook and corner of the theatre.

During the two weeks of renovation, new seats, light fixtures, carpets, and a new silver screen providing a larger picture were installed as well as new sound and projection equipment. A twenty-two foot vertical neon sign spelling out the theater's name was erected in the center of the theater front above a new marquee with revolving neon sign in the center.

William Wagner purchased the franchise to operate the Booth Theater in 1956. He had managed the Beldorf since 1935 when he returned to Independence after working five years with the Fox Theater chain in Kansas City. Wagner closed

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the Beldorf when he acquired the Booth franchise. The Booth finally closed as a movie house in 1980. The building was used by the Community Church until September, 1987. Since then, the theater has been vacant and offered for sale.

According to the Reporter in 1927, T.J. Booth had always sought to do the thing "that would help Independence. That has been his motive since he organized and directed the Union Implement Company here many years ago." Reportedly, the Booth Building was erected when Booth saw that a building was needed to house a modern department store. According to the article, the construction of this block materially affected the movement of the business district. In fact the district did not move, but Booth's investment helped expand it to the west. Community spirit was again the newspaper's explanation for the apparent delay in securing new tenants for the Booth Building, left vacant in 1926 when the Halsey Brothers department store moved to a location on Pennsylvania Avenue. Actually, Booth was negotiating an agreement with Glenn Dickinson to provide a movie theater. Two bays of the Booth Building, a commercial block, were adapted for the new theater.

T.J. Booth's influence on the development of Independence began in 1894 when he founded the Union Implement and Hardware Company. The business moved into a fine new building in September, 1900. About ten years later, Booth chose a site across the street for the town's new modern hotel. At the same time he began construction of the Booth Building at Eighth and West Myrtle. The commercial block was completed in March, 1911 while the hotel was under construction. The hotel was finished in December. A few months later, the new Independence post office opened across the street from the Booth Building. So although Pennsylvania Avenue was the main commercial street in Independence, Thomas Booth developed three major buildings west of this axis on Eighth.

Booth announced August 18, 1926 that plans for the "New Booth" theater would reach Independence in the next day or two; he asked for contractors' bids for remodeling the Booth Building. The Tribune noted October 6, 1926 "ten days of sunshine and real work will see a roof on the new theatre building... When the structure is enclosed the work can be rushed." T.J. Booth expected completion of the project by the first of the year, but the Tribune explained, "the theatre building work has been necessarily slow as plans called for tearing down considerable of the old building and extension to the rear, as well as remodeling of the west side of the building for office and small stores."

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The theater was not completed by New Year's Day, but this was overlooked in the enthusiastic coverage when it actually opened. The Reporter February 3, 1927 announced, "rushed to completion on time, in spite of unforeseen delays, the \$100,000 plant will be thrown open to the public promptly at 6:30," February 4. The theater's architecture and interior finish was described as "a modern blending of the best in the Spanish and Italian renaissance styles." More than 1,650 persons jammed into the new "fireproof" building for the premiere performance. The theater orchestra was Harris' Serenaders and Robert Hale was the organist. The crowd enjoyed an English comedy, "The Cheerful Fraud." The area manager for the Dickinson theater chain, A.R. Zimmer, boasted about the company's philosophy,

Service is the only thought we have in mind, that includes, for our patrons, comfort, the proper selection of music and entertainment in all its branches, courtesy from our employees, unadulterated sincere advertising, and the finest moving pictures from the master directors.

Boller Brothers were the architects for the Booth Theater; they stated, "for its size, there is no better or modern theatre in the country." The firm specialized in the design of movie houses. The Reporter commented in 1927 that among the 125 movie houses built under their supervision and according to their plans were some of the industry's finest and largest theaters. Boller Brothers had just finished the new Lytle theater in San Antonio at a cost of \$1,500,000. Other recent projects included the "Electric" in St. Joseph, Missouri and the "Varsity" in Lawrence, Kansas. Theaters under construction in 1927 included a \$2,500,000 palace in Kansas City for Shanber, Wolff & Co., the "Missouri" in St. Joseph, and a handsome new house in Ponca City, Oklahoma. By this time the Boller Brothers were so successful that a branch office was established on the west coast in Los Angeles. This was headed by Carl Boller; Robert Boller supervised the original Kansas City office. Construction superintendent for the Booth Theater was Lee DeCamp. He had learned the trade drawing plans and supervising construction for the Sullivan and Considine vaudeville circuit. By 1927 DeCamp had spent 45 years in the business.

A contemporary description of the new Booth Theater presented a colorful portrait of the interior of an "atmospheric" movie house. The foyer was distinguished by handworked tile ornament. The theater ceiling was supported on massive walnut beams, grained and stenciled in attractive designs. There was a hand-painted plaster dome with sky and cloud motif surrounded by a bronzed circle of plaster reproductions of harvest fruits. A three-circuit three-color indirect lighting system was used. Ruby, blue, and gold globes were hidden throughout the theater and centered in the \$1,500 chandelier

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hanging below the ornamental dome. Walls had textured panels of blue, highlighted with red and gold, and the balcony and mezzanine ceilings were decorated in the same shades. "The stage is always set. There are no movable curtains except the crumpled green-gold draw curtain immediately in front of the screen." There was an arched proscenium ceiling. All the woodwork was walnut and all moldings were handworked in bronze. The floors of the mezzanine, loge, foyer, stairs, and the aisles of the main floor and balcony were covered with Axminster carpets laid over sound-deadening felt. The carpet color scheme was black, orange, and green. Hanging draperies were heavy silk-finished velour in reds, antique gold, and peacock blue with golden fringe and tassels. The 1,100 seats were of walnut, upholstered in blue leather. One notable feature of the mezzanine, "common to all two-floor theaters such as the Booth," was that it could be entered directly either into the foyer and then to the main floor, or into the balcony. The mezzanine had wicker furniture. The smoking room, ladies' room, and manager's office were entered from this floor.

The Reporter proudly concluded that the theater was largely a home product made by home men of products sold by home men. The Brune Plumbing and Electric Company supplied fixtures and installed the plumbing, ventilating, and writing systems. Originally, the Booth had both gas and steam heating systems. The Sell-Orr Company supplied an oil heater for the hot water system. The Rock Island Lumber Company provided cement, sand, and metal lath; the Long-Bell Company provided roofing. The Union Implement & Hardware Company supplied the builder's hardware. R.C. Hait Furniture Company supplied the wicker furniture. Moving and hauling was performed by the Independence Transfer Company. Despite the newspaper's claim, most of the distinctive features of the theater came from out of town. The interior decorator was J. Carlton Creators of the A.D. Weaver Department Store, Lawrence, Kansas. The Reuter Organ Company, also of Lawrence, provided the electro-pneumatic organ.

The original Booth Building was first described in the South Kansas Tribune August 3, 1910. Thomas J. Booth let the contract for:

Three two-story business houses at the corner of Eighth and Myrtle Streets, opposite the new post office building. Contractor Lavery began work on three basements and foundations (23 x 120, 47 x 120, and the one fronting west 20 x 46). The second story of the new block will contain fifteen suites of offices--all large, airy and modernly equipped. The foundation and walls are built heavy enough to put on two more stories at a later date. The city and interurban lines will pass this block. One fact about this block of six business houses is that it is built by home people and home capital.

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The reference to six business houses included Cook's Hotel, Case's Bookstore, and the Stevens Brothers Drugstore which occupied the rest of the block east of the corner of Eighth and Myrtle. The foundations of the Booth Building were completed by October 26, 1910.

Harry B. Smith was credited in 1916 with the concrete and brick work on the Booth office and store building. Presumably, he worked with Lavery. A.E. Todd apparently had the contract for the interior carpentry because the Tribune February 1, 1911 commented that:

Contractor Todd is rapidly finishing the work in the three-room three-story business house opposite the new post office building, and the building will be ready for occupancy by March 1. Mr. Booth had had many applicants for the ground floor rooms, but prefers to lease the three to one big store, and had held it for a few weeks. Applications for the office suites and rooms are coming in and most will be taken by March next. They will be provided with heat, light and water, and with janitor service.

The Tribune announced March 1, 1911 that the Booth business house and office building was completed and called it the finest in the city. The large offices were arranged in suites. Tenants include attorneys J.B. Tomlinson, Walter McVey, E.J. Lambert, C.G. Sloop, dentist E.C. Glass, Charles Evans, real estate, Smith & Swan, the Bellevue Oil Company, and the office of T.J. Booth, capitalist. The most prominent tenant was the Halsey Brothers Department Store on the first floor. The store sold dry goods, women's wear, and millinery.

From 1911 until 1926 then, the Booth Building was considered one of the finest business and office buildings in Independence. It is evidence of the passion for motion picture entertainment that Thomas J. Booth sacrificed most of the building to construct a movie house in 1926-27. Despite his public comment, the profitability of such an enterprise must have been a consideration as well. The Booth Theater's historical significance through its association with motion picture entertainment in Independence extends from 1927, when it opened, until 1938, the National Register fifty year-exclusion rule. Construction of the Booth consolidated Independence's reputation as a local entertainment center. The theater's historical significance through its association with Thomas J. Booth is defined by the reconstruction dates of 1926-27. This was the last of Booth's major development projects and the fourth on the west side of Independence's central business district. The Booth Theater was a final contribution to the community by the man described in the statement made in 1907, "there is probably no man in the city who is better known and who has fewer enemies than 'Tom' Booth." The theater's architectural significance as an eclectic style movie house is defined by the period of construction, 1926-27.

This nomination was prepared under a Survey and Planning grant from the Kansas State Historical Society to the City of Independence.

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

Entertainment/recreation

Period of Significance

1926-1927

1927-1938

Significant Dates

1926-1927

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

Thomas J. Booth

Architect/Builder

Boller Brothers, Architects

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

The Booth Theater (c. 1911, 1926-27) is being nominated to the National Register under criterion A and B for its historical associations with the local development of motion picture entertainment and Thomas J. Booth, one of the town's leading capitalists. The property is also being nominated under criteria C as an example of the eclectic style movie house popular during the 1920s. The two-story brick theater has a terra cotta facade and interior designed by Boller Brothers of Kansas City in a blend of Spanish and Italian renaissance styles. Constructed as a business and office block in 1911, the structure was rebuilt in 1926 to become the largest and most elaborate movie house in Independence. The theater opened February 4, 1927 and did not close until April 20, 1980. The main facade and structure retain a substantial degree of architectural integrity. Although some interior details have been altered, the plan and major features remain intact, although in deteriorated condition.

The Booth was erected during the peak years of the decade called the golden age of movie palace architecture, 1925-1930. According to David Naylor, Boller Brothers perpetuated their own idiosyncratic styles of design in the theaters they built across the cornbelt and southwest. They were probably influenced by the "atmospheric" interiors designed by John Eberson. During the 1920s, Eberson became famous for his romantic imitations of exotic environments. Because much of the original interior detail which distinguished the Booth as an "atmospheric" movie house has been altered or removed, the interior is not a significant example of this form. Nevertheless, the building structure, facade, and interior plan still convey a sense of the theater's use and historic significance as a community entertainment center and eclectic style movie house during the period from 1927 until 1938. The facade in particular is a classic rendition eclectic Spanish and Italian renaissance revival architecture that is employed frequently during this decade in the construction of movie theaters, and although its first level has been slightly altered the facade still retains a fairly high degree of integrity.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

City directories: Independence, KS 1911-1939.

Independence, Kansas-"Kansas Grows the Best Wheat in the World" (1927).

Independence Reporter 2-03-1927, 2-05-1927, 6-15-1939, 6-28-1980.

Naylor, David. American Picture Palaces: the Architecture of Fantasy (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1981).

Sharp, Dennis. The Picture Palace (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969).

South Kansas Tribune 8-03-1910, 10-26-1910, 2-01-1911, 3-11-1911, 3-08-1916, 8-18-1926, 10-06-1926, 1-10-1926, 1-01-1927.

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 15 259905 4123100
 Zone Easting Northing

C _____

B _____
 Zone Easting Northing

D _____

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description The nominated property stands on a rectangular tract (approximately 7500 square feet) comprising part of Lot 20 and part of the west half of Lot 21, Block 42 in Independence, Kansas. It is bounded on the east by the adjacent property line (West line E half Lot 21) on the south by the S lot line on the west by the adjacent property line and on the north by West Myrtle Street.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The nominated property stands on a rectangular tract comprising part of Lots 20 and part of the west half of Lot 21, Block 42 in Independence, Kansas. This is the area historically associated with the Booth Theatre.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Dale Nimz
 organization Independence Main Street Project date May 27, 1988
 street & number P.O. Box 611 telephone (316) 331-2300
 city or town Independence state Kansas zip code 67301