

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name Lane Theater
other names/site number WH-W-28

2. Location

street & number 510 Main Street not for publication N/A
city or town Williamsburg vicinity N/A
state Kentucky code 40769 county Whitley code 235 zip 40769

3. 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

David L. Morgan 10-12-04
Signature of certifying official David L. Morgan, SHPO Date

State Historic Preservation Office/ Kentucky Heritage Council

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):

Edson Beall 11/26/04
Signature Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u> 1 </u>	<u> </u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects
		<u> 1 </u>	<u> 0 </u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0
Name of related multiple property listing NA

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions Recreation and culture—theater
Current Functions Vacant/Not in Use

7. Description

Architectural Classification Art Deco

Materials foundation Concrete
 roof Asphalt
 walls brick
 other Metal and Wood façade and marquee

Narrative Description (begins p. 7-1)

8. Statement of Significance: Applicable National Register Criteria

- 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

- 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/achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance **Entertainment**
Period of Significance **1948--1954**
Significant Dates _____ 1948
Significant Person _____ N/A
Cultural Affiliation _____ N/A
Architect/Builder _____ **Builder: White, A.L.**
Narrative Statement of Significance (begins p. 8-1)

9. Major Bibliographical References

- 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: Kentucky Heritage Council _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 5 acres

UTM References	Zone	Easting	Northing	Williamsburg Quad
	17	753 450	4069 770	

Verbal Boundary Description and Boundary Justification (see p. 10-1)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Marian E. Colette

Organization Williamsburg Action Team

street & number 510 Main Street

city or town Williamsburg state KY

date 6/20/04

telephone (606)-549-4977 (-0539 fax)

zip code 41008

Property Owner

name Williamsburg Action Team, Inc

street & number 510 Main Street

city or town Williamsburg state KY

telephone (606) 549-1151 or -4977

zip code 41008

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Continuation SheetLane Theatre
Whitley County, KYSection number 7 Page 1**Narrative Description:**

The Lane Theater (WH-W-28), is located at 508 Main Street in downtown Williamsburg, seat of Whitley County, in southeast Kentucky. The building is of brick construction with a concrete foundation and an arching asphalt-covered roof. It was constructed in 1948 and operated as a movie theater continuously until closing in 1987. Since that time the former theater was used for a brief period by the Whitley County for circuit court sessions. After that, the City of Williamsburg used it to store records and surplus hardware.

The building faces in a southeasterly direction, opening directly onto Main Street. The building includes a 5,704 square foot movie theater with seating for 600, a second floor projection room and office areas, and an attached 1,248 square foot back furnace room. The property also includes two adjacent shops, one on each side of the main theater building; one these has 300 square feet and the other has 242 square feet. These shops are rented out by the current property owners. A small area behind the theater is graveled and available for parking. The small areas behind the two retail stores are covered in wild growth and extend back toward the gravel parking lot

The Lane Theater exhibits Art Deco/Moderne styling. It features the simple geometric Art Deco style with metal, glass and chrome materials, suggestive of the modern and machine-age themes associated with the Art-Deco style. Hallmarks of the style seen on the theater are horizontal banding on the main floor's façade, at near-shoulder level that curves inward to the centrally located ticket booth. Vertical lines demarcating the panels covering the second floor give it an upward thrust that its stone coping does not terminate. The counterpoint between the wider, horizontally-oriented mass of the first floor against the vertical lines of the second floor reference the composition of high rise buildings of the 1920s and 1930s, the moderne-styled skyscraper.

The ground-level of the façade is covered in yellow and brown horizontal striped panels of enameled metal, accented with chrome. The marquee features roving lights around the message areas, Neon letters. Its scroll work decoration is an element of Art Deco styling. Above the street level, the façade is faced in vertical yellow and brown striped panels of enameled metal surrounding second floor glass block windows.

The interior of the theater features lobby walls painted in the same yellow and brown stripe pattern found on the façade. Pictures of the original lobby show that it was carpeted in a floral pattern and contained a simple glass and chrome candy/popcorn counter. The carpet and counter no longer remain but can be easily replicated, as can the

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original women's lounge which contained simple period furnishings. The theater interior featured red padded seats which still exist and are in good condition. The walls are covered in a red drapery that no longer is usable. The plastered ceiling has sustained a great deal of water damage and will also need to be maintained after being sealed to prevent any asbestos contamination. The stage and stage curtains have rotted out; their reconstruction is planned. Additional plans call for enlarging the stage to accommodate live performances.

Integrity Considerations

The setting of the Lane has maintained its historic integrity with no changes to facade or Marquee or interior or exterior structures since it was built in 1948.

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Statement of Significance

The Lane Theater (WH-W-28) in Williamsburg Kentucky meets Criterion A, and is a locally significant feature in "Entertainment in Whitley County, Kentucky, 1900-1954," a historic context developed to evaluate the significance of the facility in the local past. The building has a high degree of historic integrity. With both local significance and a high degree of integrity, the building meets the National Register eligibility criteria.

ENTERTAINMENT IN WHITLEY COUNTY, KENTUCKY, 1900-1954

Research Design

To evaluate the historic significance of the Lane Theater, and to understand its role in local entertainment and social activities during the historic period, required that this author compose a short contextual study where none existed previously. This author reviewed documents pertaining to local entertainment out of which she built that working context narrative. Particularly helpful were Lovitt's *History of Williamsburg 1918 -1978*, and local newspaper coverage of the opening of the Lane in July, 1948, and Sanborn Insurance maps.

Creation of the County

Whitley County was created in 1818. The Cumberland River bisects the county into a northern and southern half. The county seat was named at Cox's Crossing, an important ford of the Cumberland. For many years, the town functioned more as an extension of county government than as an independent city. The penetration of the railroad into the county, in the early 1880s, laid the groundwork for many changes. By 1886, Cox's Crossing had become Williamsburg, and that year established an independent city government (*History and Families*, p. 22-23). By the opening of the 20th century, Whitley County consisted of rural areas, coal mining camps, and two primary towns, Williamsburg in the center and Corbin at the northern reaches. Corbin emerged as the county's area of greatest urban activity, with 1500 people in 1900 and 10,000 in 1920 (*History and Families*, p. 128)

Early Local Entertainments

Two facts seem to distinguish historic entertainments from modern day ones: prior to the second decade of the 20th century, people had less leisure time, and when they did, many of the residents of Whitley County entertained themselves. Certainly by the post-WWII era, people had more time and money to spend on leisure pursuits, thus becoming consumers of leisure products.

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Lovett gives an early portrait of how local folks found entertainments in seemingly everyday events. He writes, not entirely out of sentiment, "People came to the depot to watch the trains come and go. It was pastime and amusement" about Williamsburg a century ago (*History and Families*, p. 27).

Before 1900, one noted venue existed in the county at Joefields, which is today Woodbine, three miles south of Corbin. In addition to hosting boxing and wrestling matches and footraces, the town held one of the only horse race tracks in eastern Kentucky (*History and Families*, p. 69). Prohibitive ordinances passed in Williamsburg in the late-19th- and early-20th-century, also give a glimpse to ways that people entertained themselves. Football and baseball were outlawed from the courthouse lawn or depot grounds. Swinging from trains would result in fines. Rolling hoops on sidewalks and gambling were declared illegal (Lovett, p. 8).

Other early forms of activity included such outdoor amusements as baseball or softball games, contests between mining camps, church picnics and socials, family gatherings for weddings, births, baptisms and reunions. Popular, too, were swimming or fishing in the Cumberland River and hiking throughout the mountains. The Community Fairgrounds was established in Williamsburg in 1908 (Lovett, p. 10). Summers brought the Redpath Chatauqua to Williamsburg, and with it, cultural presentations. Within the home, artistic endeavors such as quilting and music performance continued as important entertainment activities through WWI and the Depression eras.

Early 20th Century Local Entertainments

Books, magazines, and newspapers served as the earliest forms of popular commercialized entertainment for people in this area. Once houses were electrified, professionally produced entertainment from outside the house, in the form of radio, brought into the home a world that many people had only read about.

Within Williamsburg and Corbin, commercialized entertainments occurred in the downtown areas. Williamsburg's Main Street had a pool hall in the back room of a restaurant and a dance floor and bar on the 4th floor of the old Curd building on the Corner of 2nd and Main. As early as 1908 Corbin had two skating rinks, an opera house, a pool room, and a bowling alley. In Corbin stood the Railroad YMCA, a facility that seems associated with large railroad switching towns. It might have resembled such a facility in another large L&N switching town, the Russell Railroad YMCA, which had several leisure activities within it for residents (Kennedy, National Register nomination 2001). By 1910, men of Williamsburg and Corbin could choose from among several fraternal organizations that had located in the upper rooms of various downtown

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buildings (1908 Corbin and 1906 Williamsburg Sanborn maps). Corbin had a dance hall in the 'teens on the site of the old Auditorium Skating rink, and a Carnegie Library by the 'twenties (Corbin 1913 and 1924 Sanborn maps).

Rise of American Cinema Industry

During the period covered by this historic context, the American motion picture industry was born and flourished. According to the 1935 United States Census of Business, the motion picture industry thrived from its beginning. From the early kinoscope and silent films, the film industry was more than just an entertainment-based phenomenon. Americans not only saw movies, but at the movie palaces they witnessed innovations in technologies, were surrounded by architectural exoticism, became a vital component in the finance of a modern business, and adopted new social mores. Movies, for Hollywood and the financial community, were a business; for most of the rest of the country, they were a product that few chose to do without.

Whitley County's citizens did not have to wait long to enjoy motion pictures. By 1913 the Dixie Theater had opened in Williamsburg at the corner of Main and Fourth Street, and the Palace Theater had opened in Corbin on Railroad Street between Gordon and Monroe (1913 Sanborn maps). Even outside of these two towns, movies were shown in coal camp theaters, such as in Packard, which operated from 1911-1944 (*History and Families*, p. 65-66), and Gatliff.

While the country suffered the Great Depression in the 1930's, the motion picture industry enjoyed unparalleled success. Personal income, particularly disposable income, might have been under a strain at this time, yet the business of movies showed little of that impact. According to the 1935 United States Census for Business, Kentucky had 206 motion picture theaters. These Kentucky Theaters had total receipts of \$4,848,000, which comprised approximately 62 percent of all amusement receipts. It is not hard to speculate that movies succeeded during tight economic times by providing relief from the grim realities that existed outside the darkened theater.

Whitley County's economy fared as other local economies in southeastern Kentucky. Tied to the coal industry, these places experienced economic and social strife in the late 1920s and 1930s. Despite these economic hardships, entrepreneurs found the capital to continue operating movies theaters. The Majestic Theater on Main near the corner of First Street in Corbin, had opened as an opera house by 1908, was converted to a movie house by the 1930s. On the 1930s Corbin Sanborn maps, an unnamed movie house, possibly the Hippodrome Cinema, appears near the corner of West Second and Main. Local Historian Allen Disney recalls that the Hippodrome was completed in

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1921. The Hippodrome was demolished in 1975 after the property was purchased by the First National Bank for an expanded banking operation on the site (Interview with Colette, July 2004).

In nearby London, the Palace Theater was built in the 1920's and demolished in the late 1980s when a feasibility study revealed structural weaknesses which prohibited restoration (Ken Harvey, London & Laurel County Tourism, interview with Colette, July, 2004). By the period between the World Wars, two other theaters opened in neighboring Jellico, Tennessee, also within driving range of Whitley County's residents.

Mid-20th Century Entertainments

Toward the century's midpoint, Whitley County towns began to provide outdoor recreational facilities for their citizens. Possibly as early as 1930, Corbin had established the city Ball Park and tennis courts, in separate but nearby facilities near the junction of South Laurel Street and Barbourville Road. Also, closer to downtown, on the corner of White Oak and West Third Streets was a pool, gym, and auditorium with performance stage (Sanborn Maps).

Williamsburg sponsored a civic recreation facility after WWII. This decision came shortly after one of the town's youth drowned in the Clearfork branch of the Cumberland River in June of 1952. Despite local laws against swimming in the Cumberland, area children and local law enforcers ignored it. At the end of September, in response to the drowning, Mayor White proposed a bond of \$80,000 to develop a municipal recreation area on the former Tye property on South 3rd street. The newspaper swelled with articles urging citizens to vote for the bond issue. "Every civic club, service unit and community organization from the Chamber of Commerce and VFW to the Williamsburg Women's Club and the PTA came out publicly in support of the issue because they wanted the city to be a more desirable place for business to locate with a place for safe and healthy recreation and entertainment" (*Whitley Republican*, September 26 and October 1, 1952). The property became the city park with a ball field, tennis courts, playground and swimming pool.

Williamsburg businessman and former mayor, Foster Lane, responded to the great interest in cinema that continued during the period of peace and prosperity after WWII by operating three theaters in the area. He ran both the Dixie and the theater bearing his name in downtown, and about 4 miles outside of town, he opened the Dixie Drive-In in the 1950s, closing it in the late 1980s. The site of the Drive-In was cleared in 1999, and a feed store opened there in 2001 (Interview Lori Bargo, July 2004).

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According to Lane's daughter Betty Witt, the old Dixie Theater would fill to capacity at every showing. Lane's choice to build the new movie house took advantage of this huge demand, but also became a chance to bring the most modern cinema experience to Williamsburg in the late 1940s (Interview with Witt, October 2000).

The July 15, 1948 cover story in the *Whitley Republican* on the opening of the Lane states "The Lane has a seating capacity of 600, is thoroughly fireproof and has the best projection and sound equipment available. An attractive Lady's Lounge and a modern men's room have been provided for the comfort and convenience of patrons along with air conditioning, a sanitary drinking fountain and numerous other items designed to make theater going a pleasure". The Falls City Equipment Company of Louisville installed the projection and sound equipment. This business also supplied the auditorium chairs incorporating the latest features in comfort.

Historic Significance of the Lane Theater

During the late 1940s, the 1950s and 1960s, going to the movies at the Lane in Williamsburg, or at the Majestic or Hippodrome in Corbin, was a favorite recreational past time for young people and adults alike. It was a place to take a date, to meet friends for a Saturday afternoon matinee. It seems fair to say that, next to church, the theater was the most important social gathering place in town.

The Lane is important because, as the only historic movie theater remaining extant in Whitley County, it gives us the greatest witness to the importance that American cinema occupied among local entertainments. Other local historic theaters, the Hippodrome in Corbin and the Palace in London, have been torn down. In fact, of the 818 art deco style theaters identified nationally on the website [Cinema Treasures.com](http://CinemaTreasures.com), only 411 (about half) remain open; 165 are closed; 157 have been demolished and only 85 of the remaining art deco theaters are being restored or renovated. That same website lists only 17 classic movie theaters in the entire state of Kentucky, with seven functional and open, five closed, and three, including the Lane, being restored or renovated. This website does not contain an exhaustive listing of such theaters, since there are at least two older cinemas—one in Pineville and one in Benham in Harlan County—that also exist, having stood empty for many years, and are being re-opened. Cinema Treasures was the best reference on classic cinemas which the author identified at the time of this writing.

The early use of the Lane followed social strictures of the day. Its opening in 1948 came 15 years before the civil rights movement and the national laws against segregation. As with most places in the country, public facilities in Williamsburg were segregated. At the Dixie Theater, African American ticket holders had to sit in the

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balcony. In the Lane, they sat in the back rows. The daughter of the Lane Theater, Mrs. Witt, recalled that in her childhood that most employees of the Theater were African American. She related that in childhood she often sat with her Black friends in the back part of the theater, though her White friends did not join her (Interview with Witt, July 29, 2004). After being asked about this segregated seating arrangement, one life-long African American resident of Williamsburg, 75-year old Helen Turner, said it always struck her as unfair that she paid the same price for a theater ticket, or for a meal in a restaurant for that matter, and her seating options were limited to less favorable parts of those establishments (Interview with Turner, July 2004). Williamsburg did not experience open racial protests during the 1960s or 1970s, but it appears that the Lane Theater offered little to advance the cause of civil rights locally.

Initially the Lane packed the house, but attendance gradually declined until the Lane family was forced to close it in 1987. Shopping and entertainment patterns shifted adversely for the Lane. The improvement of transportation infrastructure and growth of automobile ownership enabled many businesses to move out of Williamsburg's historic downtown, to strip centers along interstate exits. The few businesses left in the old downtown lost the support of cross-over retail purchases. Also, as early as the 1950s, people brought their entertainment home in the form of television, and in the 1980s drove to multiplex cinemas for a greater choice of movies. The Lane, like many small historic theaters, became another casualty of TV and multiplex cinemas. Thus, the 1987 closing of the Lane was a commercial decision that helps document local changes in entertainment patterns and social activities.

The City of Williamsburg has also invested heavily in the Hal Rogers Family Entertainment Center, which includes a water park, golf driving range, go-cart track, batting cages and indoor arcade and game room, located near interstate I-75. Local entertainment options also include a 5-screen cinema at the Cumberland Mall outside of town and a privately-owned game room with pool tables near the water-park.

The Williamsburg Action Team is a broad-based successor to the Williamsburg Chamber of Commerce. The Action Team is committed to the preservation of Williamsburg's historic downtown and to its revitalization as a center of entertainment, culture and commerce. The Action Team's efforts are beginning with the Lane, which the group purchased from the city, to prevent its demolition. One of the Action Team's members also has purchased the historic Curd building and intends to revive the dance hall for dances and other forms of entertainment. This nomination will help highlight the importance of the Lane Theater as a local entertainment landmark, will guide efforts to rehabilitate it, and could provide vital financial help in the form of Investment Tax Credits.

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Bibliography

Editor

2000 *Corbin Times Tribune* October issue

Editor

1948 *Whitley Republican*, July 14 edition
1952 *Whitley Republican*, September 26 edition
1952 *Whitley Republican*, October 30 edition

Kennedy, Rachel

2001 Russell Railroad YMCA. National Register nomination.

Lovitt, Eugene

1981 *The History of Williamsburg, 1918-1978*. Williamsburg, KY: by author.

Sanborn Insurance Maps

1906	Williamsburg	1908	Corbin
1913	Williamsburg	1913	Corbin
1923	Williamsburg	1924	Corbin
		1930/1948	Corbin

1935 United States Census of Business

Whitley County History Book Committee

1994 *Whitley County, Kentucky, 1818-1993, Histories and Families*. Paducah:
Turner Publishing Company.

Interviews conducted by Marian Colette (nomination's primary author)

Mrs. Betty Witt, daughter of Foster Lane, October, 2000 and July 29, 2004

Mr. Ken Harvey, London/Laurel Tourism Commission, July 2004

Mr. Allen Disney, Corbin Historian, July 2004

Ms. Lori Bargo, member of family of farm store occupying old Dixie Drive-In
Site, July 2004

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Verbal Boundary Description:

The Lane Theater includes the following described property. A certain tract or parcel of land lying on Main Street, Williamsburg, Whitley County and being the same land as conveyed by deed from Foster Lane, dated May 24, 1988 and recorded in Deed Book 327, Pages 381-382 Whitley County Clerk's Office and bounded and described as follows:

BEGINNING at a cross-mark cut in the sidewalk at the Southwest corner of the Mahan Motor Company garage building, same being 11" from the wall of such building; thence with the South line of Sycamore Street 35 1/2 W, 69 feet to an iron stake driven in the ground by the parties hereto; thence S 50 198.2 feet to an iron stake driven in the ground by the parties hereto at the edge of the sidewalk on Main Street' thence N38E, 69 feet to the point of BEGINNING.

Verbal Boundary Justification:

The boundary of the Lane Theater includes the lot described above historically associated with the motion picture theater.