

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED FEB 5 1976
DATE ENTERED MAY 17 1976

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC *llh*

Al Ringling Theatre
AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

136 Fourth Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Baraboo

STATE

Wisconsin 53913

___ VICINITY OF

CODE

55

___ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Second

COUNTY

Sauk

CODE

111

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
___ DISTRICT	___ PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	___ AGRICULTURE ___ MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	___ UNOCCUPIED	___ COMMERCIAL ___ PARK
___ STRUCTURE	___ BOTH	___ WORK IN PROGRESS	___ EDUCATIONAL ___ PRIVATE RESIDENCE
___ SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT ___ RELIGIOUS
___ OBJECT	___ IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	___ GOVERNMENT ___ SCIENTIFIC
	___ BEING CONSIDERED	___ YES: UNRESTRICTED	___ INDUSTRIAL ___ TRANSPORTATION
		___ NO	___ MILITARY ___ OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Baraboo Amusement Corporation

STREET & NUMBER

9715 West Center

CITY, TOWN

Milwaukee

___ VICINITY OF

STATE

Wisconsin 53222

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Sauk County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

515 Oak Street

CITY, TOWN

Baraboo

STATE

Wisconsin 53913

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Wisconsin Historic Preservation Plan: Volume II, The Inventory

DATE

1975

___ FEDERAL STATE ___ COUNTY ___ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

State Historical Society of Wisconsin

CITY, TOWN

Madison

STATE

Wisconsin 53706

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Al Ringling Theatre has a two-story, terra-cotta street facade with Neo-Classical detailing. The entrance to the theater is marked by a triumphal arch motif. Applied to the piers are paired pilasters with Ionic capitals. A heavy entablature defines the arch, and above each of the spring points is an urn supporting a sphere. The marquee is not original. To the left of the entrance are three bays with space for stores on the first floor and offices above. The second story of each bay is divided into three parts by Ionic columns, and each part has a French window and an iron railing. Behind the street facade is the brick auditorium and stage house.

The entrance lobby is elliptical and has paired travertine columns supporting a replica in high relief of Luca della Robbia's Singing Gallery figures. A narrow inner lobby divides the entrance from the truncated-ellipse-shaped auditorium which is modeled on the opera house at the Palace of Versailles. Seven hundred persons can be seated on the main floor, and an additional 102 can be seated in seventeen mezzanine-level boxes. The boxes are separated by Corinthian columns which support a heavy entablature. Above the cornice are murals depicting allegories of joy, delight, and other pleasurable emotions. A large chandelier hangs from the center of the ceiling. The draperies, carpet, and upholstery are a deep rose color that complements the pastels of the murals and the ivory and gold woodwork.

The pipe chamber for the Barton organ which replaced the original Hope Jones unit is located above the stage left proscenium so that the source of the music appears to be the auditorium dome rather than the organ console. The stage is seventy-four feet wide by thirty-one feet deep by fifty feet high with fly galleries located both left and right. The original fire curtain and two of the stock settings, a castle scene and a garden scene painted by the Chicago firm of Sosman and Landes, survive in good condition, as does the original switchboard. The dressing rooms are located below stage level.

The Al Ringling Theatre is in excellent condition and has had only minor alterations to the ticket window and the offices.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1915 ~~SOURCE~~/ARCHITECT C. W. and George L. Rapp

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

During the first two decades of the twentieth century many theaters were built to handle the demand for movies accompanied by stage shows. These theaters were consciously designed to create the illusion of a luxurious environment where anyone who could afford the price of admission could sit in surroundings known only by the wealthy. The Al Ringling Theatre, built in 1915, is an outstanding example of such a small community and a monument to the munificence of Al Ringling, the eldest of the Ringling brothers.

The theatre was designed by the Chicago firm of C. W. and George L. Rapp, specialists in theatre design from 1906 to c. 1930.¹ Their major commissions include the Oriental Theatre in Chicago, the Paramount Theatre (Manhattan) and the Kings Theatre (Brooklyn) in New York City, and the Ambassador Theatre and Office Building in St. Louis. The firm also designed the Capitol Theatre in Madison. When compared with these other theatres, the Al Ringling Theatre is significant for its intimate scale and the quality of its interior decoration² when grandeur and quantity were dictating the use of ornament more than good taste.

Al Ringling (1852-1916), famous for his role as the leader of the Ringling Bros. Circus empire, was one of Baraboo's leading citizens. The presentation of a theatre to the community was a fitting gesture for a great showman, and Ringling spent over \$100,000 on the building, intending that it would eventually be publicly owned. The Al Ringling Theatre has been well-maintained, and it continues to present stage productions as well as films.

¹George L. Rapp (1878-1941), C. W. Rapp (d. 1926)

²Interior decoration designed by G. A. Brand Co., Chicago; lighting fixtures designed by Pearlmand Co., Chicago

