

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Name of Property

County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number ____ Page 1

Supplementary Listing Record

NRIS Reference Number: SG100004752

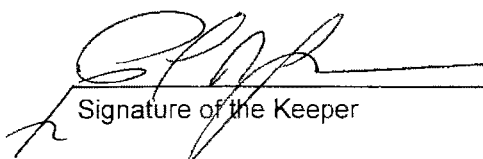
Date Listed: 12/04/2019

Property Name: Forest Theatre

County: Dallas

State: TX

This Property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation


Signature of the Keeper

12/04/2019
Date of Action

=====

Amended Items in Nomination:

Historic Function

Add *Commerce-Specialty store, Restaurant* under Historic Functions [While not as significant as the theater operation, the decision to build a combined theater/strip mall complex was a key component of the development of the suburban project by Interstate Theater and a visually characteristic element of the overall design.]

Photographic Documentation

Note that the photographic notations found in the description narrative are one off (e.g. text noted Photo 12 is actually Photo 13 in the photo log, etc.)

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The TEXAS SHPO was notified of this amendment.

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DISTRIBUTION:

National Register property file

Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

United States Department of the Interior

National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

4752



1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Forest Theatre

Other name/site number: NA

Name of related multiple property listing: NA

2. Location

Street & number: 1904 Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard

City or town: Dallas

State: Texas

County: Dallas

Not for publication: ☐Vicinity: ☐

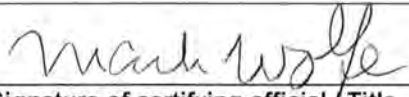
3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 at the following levels of significance:

☐ national ☐ statewide ☒ local
Applicable National Register Criteria: ☒ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ D

 Signature of certifying official / Title Texas Historical Commission State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government	State Historic Preservation Officer Date 10/21/19
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In my opinion, the property <input type="checkbox"/> meets <input type="checkbox"/> does not meet the National Register criteria.	
Signature of commenting or other official	Date
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government	

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- ☒ entered in the National Register
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other, explain: _____


 Signature of the Keeper

 12/4/2019
 Date of Action

Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas, Texas

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Private
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public - Federal

Category of Property

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions: RECREATION AND CULTURE/Theater

Current Functions: WORK IN PROGRESS

7. Description

Architectural Classification: MODERN MOVEMENT/Moderne

Principal Exterior Materials: Concrete; Brick; Metal: porcelain-enameled steel; Stone: cast stone, granite; Terra Cotta

Narrative Description (see continuation sheets 7-7 through 7-14)

Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas, Texas

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	A	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
<input type="checkbox"/>	B	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	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.
<input type="checkbox"/>	D	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations: NA

Areas of Significance: Entertainment, Social History, Architecture

Period of Significance: 1949-1965

Significant Dates: 1949

Significant Person (only if criterion b is marked): NA

Cultural Affiliation (only if criterion d is marked): NA

Architect/Builder: Pettigrew-Worley & Co. (architect), O'Rourke Construction Co. (builder)

Narrative Statement of Significance (see continuation sheets 8-15 through 8-28)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography (see continuation sheet 9-29)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested. (*Part 1 approved 8-28-2018*)
- ☐ 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 (*Texas Historical Commission, Austin*)
- ☐ Other state agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other -- Specify Repository:

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): NA

Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas, Texas

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: approximately 1.6 acres

Coordinates (either UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates)

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: NA

1. Latitude: 32.763480° Longitude: -96.774210°

Verbal Boundary Description: EDGEWOOD PLACE, BLK 10/1152, LTS 3, 5, 10 & 11 and PT LTS 2, 6, 8, 9 & 12 ACS 1.6333 (Property ID# 142174000100, Dallas Central Appraisal District) as shown on the Map 4.

Boundary Justification: The boundary includes all property historically associated with the building.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Jay Firsching, Senior Historic Preservation Specialist
Organization: ARCHITEXAS – Architecture, Planning & Historic Preservation, Inc.
Street & number: 1907 Marilla
City or Town: Dallas State: Texas Zip Code: 75201
Email: jfirsching@architexas.com
Telephone: 214-748-4561
Date: February 19, 2019

Additional Documentation

Maps (see continuation sheets Map-30 through Map-31)

Additional items (see continuation sheets Figure-32 through Figure-47)

Photographs (see continuation sheets Photo-48 through Photo-58)

Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas, Texas

Photographs

Name of Property: Forest Theater

City or Vicinity: Dallas

County, State: Dallas, Texas

Photographer: Jay Firsching – Architexas, Andreea Hamilton – McCoy Collaborative

Date Photographed: 1/22/2018 (Photo 5), 6/10/2019, 6/14/2019, and 7/14/2019 (Photo 4)

Photograph 0001

North elevation

Architexas - 6/10/2019

Photograph 0002

Streetscape – View looking north on S. M. Wright Freeway (South Central Expressway)

Architexas - 6/10/2019

Photograph 0003

North elevation detail at lobby and retail

Architexas - 6/10/2019

Photograph 0004

North elevation detail

McCoy Collaborative - 7/14/2019

Photograph 0005

Exterior vestibule at theater entrance with ticket booth – View from the east

Architexas - 1/22/2018

Photograph 0006

East elevation

Architexas - 6/10/2019

Photograph 0007

South elevation

Architexas - 6/10/2019

Photograph 0008

West elevation from above with neighboring building in foreground

Architexas - 6/10/2019

Photograph 0009

North wall of auditorium block looking southeast

Architexas - 6/10/2019

Photograph 0010

North elevation detail at retail

Architexas - 6/10/2019

Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas, Texas

Photograph 0011

Retail storefronts looking southeast

McCoy Collaborative - 6/14/2019

Photograph 0012

Main theater lobby looking east to concession area

McCoy Collaborative - 6/14/2019

Photograph 0013

Main theater lobby looking south

Architexas - 6/10/2019

Photograph 0014

Detail of balustrade looking south at ramp

McCoy Collaborative - 6/14/2019

Photograph 0015

Upper lobby looking north

McCoy Collaborative - 6/14/2019

Photograph 0016

View to stage from balcony facing west

McCoy Collaborative - 6/14/2019

Photograph 0017

Auditorium ceiling detail looking southwest

Architexas - 6/10/2019

Photograph 0018

Retail #1906 looking south

McCoy Collaborative - 6/14/2019

Photograph 0019

Retail #1914 looking south

McCoy Collaborative - 6/14/2019

Photograph 0020

Retail #1916 looking south

McCoy Collaborative - 6/14/2019

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Narrative Description

The Forest Theatre is a two-story Streamline Moderne movie theater with attached one-part commercial block in Dallas, Dallas County, Texas.¹ Built in 1949, the nominated building is on MLK Jr., Blvd. (formerly Forest Avenue) between the S.M. Wright Freeway and I-45 in, what was once, a historic suburb of South Dallas. It is a roughly rectangular-shaped, steel frame and clay tile building on a concrete foundation with a flat roof; exterior cladding varies by façade and functional sections. The movie theater lobby and auditorium form an L-shaped section of the nominated building, and the corner entrance features a towering, three-sided green “Forest” beacon sign topped with a red orb. Its Streamline Moderne details include dramatic ornamentation on its primary façade with porcelain enameled steel cladding and marquee, ribbed tile, granite, neon and incandescent lighting displays, and porthole windows. The brick masonry auditorium rises above and behind Forest Theatre lobby and commercial block. Interior features include a sweeping ramp in the theater lobby, rounded transitions between rooms, and sculptural ornamental plaster with cove lighting. The spacious auditorium retains its interior volume with a sculptural ceiling cloud, other acoustical treatments, and a large balcony. The connected one-story commercial block has eight storefronts of plate glass and is faced with red roman brick. Storefronts and interiors show alterations that reflect the changing needs of its retail tenants. The Forest Theatre retains a high degree of architectural and historic integrity.

Location and Setting

The Forest Theatre is located at 1904 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd in Dallas, Dallas County, Texas.² It is approximately three miles southeast of downtown Dallas at the southwest corner of Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard (MLK) (formerly Forest Avenue) and the S. M. Wright Freeway Service Rd. (formerly South Central Expressway), which was built in the 1950s. The street grid is rotated approximately 30 degrees from the cardinal points. For the purposes of this description, the primary façade facing MLK Boulevard is considered plan-north.

The building is on the northern half of the full block bounded by S. Harwood Street on the west and Peabody Avenue on the south. On the southern half of the block is theater parking. At the northwest corner is single 50’ by 156’ lot that was historically-residential with a single-family home, but which is now the site of a clinic building that was constructed in 1983. The entire block is overshadowed on the west by Interstate 45, which is elevated above the street grid. The neighborhood is a mix of residential and commercial development, with businesses along the major east-west thoroughfares of MLK Boulevard and Pennsylvania Avenue two blocks to the south. Several National Register of Historic Places districts are adjacent to the nominated property. These include the South Boulevard-Park Row Historic District (northeast), Colonial Hill Historic District (southeast), and the Queens City Heights and Romine Avenue Historic Districts (east).³ The districts demonstrate the historic suburban character of South Dallas.

The Forest Theatre is oriented on an east-west axis with the primary façade facing MLK Boulevard. The theater entry feature is at the block’s northeast corner. A single row of angled parking and a narrow traffic island are between the Forest Theatre and the roadway. On the east, a sidewalk provides access to the parking area at the rear of the building. A

¹ During the period of significance (1949-1965), the preferred spelling for the nominated property was “Forest Theatre.” References to the proper noun in the nomination follow the historic naming, “Forest Theatre,” and it uses the noun, “theater,” as a general identifier.

² The historic addresses for Forest Theatre and the attached commercial building were 1902-1920 Forest Ave.

³ National Register of Historic Places, South Boulevard-Park Row Historic District, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas, National Register #79002930; National Register of Historic Places, Colonial Hill Historic District, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas, National Register #95000334; National Register of Historic Places, Queen City Heights Historic District, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas, National Register #95000332; National Register of Historic Places, Romine Avenue Historic District, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas, National Register #95000333.

Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

narrow strip of grass separates the sidewalk from the expressway feeder road, and three mature live oak trees adjoin the sidewalk on the east side of the parking lot. The site lacks any character-defining landscaping.

Exterior⁴

The Forest Theatre, built in 1949, is rectangular in plan and is a single building composed of two functional sections: a movie theater and commercial block (**Figure 1**). The theater is an L-shaped section of the building with the lobby at the northeast portion of the building, and the auditorium comprises the rear. The one-part, rectangular commercial block is the northeast section of nominated building. The entire building is slab-on-grade with isolated footings and a steel and clay-tile structure. Exterior wall materials vary by façade and block. The one-story retail block is clad with buff face brick on the primary north-facing elevation with storefronts composed of roman brick, glass, and aluminum. The two-story Forest Theatre lobby with the theater entrance is a late example of Streamline Moderne moviehouse design. It has strong horizontal orientation, clad with enameled steel panels, has a dramatic corner-mounted marquee, porthole windows, and a soaring signage tower. The auditorium encompasses the rear of the nominated building. It rises to three stories at the easternmost end and slopes down to two-stories at the westward end to accommodate the balcony seating inside. The auditorium is clad in buff brick with scrolled cast stone coping on primary (north) elevation and red common brick on secondary elevations. Roofs on each building section are flat except for the auditorium block which slopes downward from east to west and includes a stepped parapet.

Forest Theater Lobby and Auditorium (Photos 3-8)

The **lobby** encompasses the building's northeast corner and measures roughly 40-feet by 80-feet with the short side (primary façade) facing MLK Boulevard. It is two stories in height and features Streamline Modern architectural details. In addition to providing the theater's primary entry, the north-facing façade also includes a narrow retail storefront approximately 13-feet wide with a recessed entry and angled plate-glass window.

The large projecting marquee at the northeast corner shades the entry and is a visual divider for the upper and lower portion of the façade. Architectural decoration, materials, and the marquee on the north elevation wrap around the building's northeast corner to its east elevation where it continues for approximately 25 feet. Below the marquee, the eastern half of the lobby-block façade is recessed approximately 8 feet to form an open entry vestibule. Paving within the vestibule is red terrazzo with three inset circular medallions in two shades of pink that mimic porthole windows used on the exterior and interior. Sidewalks in front of the theater block are red-stained concrete and unstained concrete is along the east wall.

Wall cladding under the marquee is a granite base and a wall surface of square, 6-inch, vertically-ribbed tile in a stacked pattern to a level of approximately 7 feet. It is topped with mirror glass panels. The northeast structural column under the marquee originally followed this same finish pattern with framed recesses to advertise film posters. The column is now clad in painted brick. Another poster display is on the north wall to the west of the vestibule and two more on the east wall south of the vestibule. There is a single ticket booth, half-octagonal in shape, within the vestibule adjoining the west wall.⁵ The entry originally featured a row of four sets of paired, three-quarter glazed wood doors. All door openings are now externally covered, two sets were replaced, and the original doors were moved elsewhere inside the theater.

⁴ Original stylistic details and materials vary from what is depicted in historic drawings (**Figures 2-8**).

⁵ Following initial photographs taken for tax credit purposes in January 2018, the property owner enclosed the entry vestibule (with the ticket booth) with temporary wood walls to secure the property. According to the consultant, **Photo 4** from January 2018, accurately shows the ticket booth in its current state. Photos in the nomination that were taken in 2019, like **Photo 3**, show the temporary enclosure that now obscures the ticket booth.

Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

The marquee and all façade elements above it are of porcelain enameled steel.⁶ This includes the soffit of the marquee and vestibule which is covered in a complex array of light sockets for incandescent bulbs. The marquee face is approximately 4-feet high and around the letter display is an enameled steel border ornamented with neon arrows. Based on historic images, this neon was set to flash in a chase-pattern around the marquee.

The porcelain enameled wall panels above the marquee are 2-feet square and arranged in a regular grid pattern. Each panel features a raised square at its center. A rectangular section of panels in the center of the north elevation are recessed, and the feature carries over to the east façade (**Figure 17**). Set back approximately 6-inches and at a slight angle to the main façade, the recessed section is framed with an 8-inch trim band accented with a second steel band with quatrefoil cutouts that were originally back-lit. Five total porthole windows punctuate the recessed area on the north and east elevations. The windows have simple trim bands, also in enameled steel. Above the marquee, the northeast corner of the building has a dramatic tower feature. It is green, trefoil-shaped, extends two stories above the Forest Theatre parapet, and is topped with a large cylindrical finial capped by a red sphere. Like the marquee, the tower features an elaborate neon display. Each side of the tower includes "FOREST" in horizontally-aligned box letters.

Most of the façade elements already described have been over-painted and the underlying original colors will be determined as part of future discovery. Preliminary evaluations indicate some of the panels are a shade of tan. Exceptions to this are the tower, which is two shades of green, and the brown granite base.

Architectural ornamentation continues to the **east elevation** for approximately 25 feet. The rest of the east façade is without decoration. It is of buff scratch-faced brick (painted white) with a simple cast-stone parapet cap. This façade has a single recessed fire-exit vestibule, and two utilitarian access doors placed higher on the façade. At this elevation, the one-story height differentiation between the lobby and auditorium is visible.

The **south (rear) elevation** is clad in red common brick with a utilitarian, glazed terra-cotta parapet cap. Four equally-spaced louvered openings below the parapet ventilate the attic. The façade has three sets of steel, paired fire-doors: two at grade and one at the balcony level that are flush to the wall plane. The westernmost set of doors are not original. The balcony doors open onto a cantilevered steel fire escape with an articulated lower section. The parapet steps gradually downward to the west. At the building's southwest corner, remnants of a concrete platform on the roof indicate the building once featured a water tank or cooling tower.

The **west elevation of the auditorium** is also of red common brick with a terra-cotta parapet cap. The brick is partially-painted. This façade has two sets of paired fire-doors flush with the wall plane. Large ducts penetrate the wall and are served by side-mounted equipment in a fenced yard. Here the auditorium-block intersects the one-story retail-block, forming an inside corner.

The retail block is placed at the inside angle formed of the L-shaped theater and auditorium and one-story in height. Therefore, when viewed from MLK, the **west exterior wall of the lobby** and **north exterior wall auditorium** are visible

⁶ Porcelain enamel is a thin layer of ceramic or glass applied to a substrate of metal. Used for thousands of years in jewelry decoration, it was first perfected for use in protecting ferrous metals in the middle 19th-century and was used industrially on cookware and household fixtures. The ability to apply porcelain enamel to steel sheets was developed by 1900 making it popular for sign making. In 1930, technical advancements made the manufacture of porcelain enameled steel more efficient and effective. Industrial designers like Walter Dorwin Teague popularized the material for use in building cladding, using it to create consistent, modern architectural branding for gas stations and other commercial structures. Texlite Sign Company of Dallas was an industry leader both in the production of neon and porcelain enamel. Texlite was the nation's largest provider of porcelain enamel at the time of the Forest Theater's construction and provided cladding, signs and neon for Interstate Theaters among others.

Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

above the one-story retail section. For that reason, these otherwise secondary and featureless walls are clad in high-quality materials of buff, scratch-faced brick with cast stone parapet caps. At the north wall of the theater, the parapet steps downward to the west. Here the parapet caps feature a circular medallion at each step that forms a wave pattern.

Commercial Block (Photos 9-10)

The one-part commercial block extends approximately 25-feet further west than the auditorium. The resulting short section of **south elevation** is of common brick with a terra-cotta parapet cap. Two steel doors provide rear access to adjoining retail spaces. The **west elevation**, also of common brick, is without detail.

The **north (primary) façade** of the retail block is divided into eight storefronts, each 18-feet 9-inches wide. The sidewalk in front is of natural, smooth-finished concrete. The upper section of the façade above the storefronts and the terminal end of the façade to the west are clad in buff-scratch faced brick. This serves to form a frame around the band of storefronts which are composed of red roman brick, plate glass, and aluminum. A wide, horizontal band of ribbed aluminum at the top of the storefronts forms a transition between the two types of masonry. The parapet is topped with a simple cast stone cap. The upper portion of the wall and parapet are now covered with a non-historic aluminum awning system, but original masonry remains intact and in good condition underneath.

The arrangement of the storefront systems serving each retail space varies, and some show modifications made by tenants to accommodate changing businesses in past decades. All originally had aluminum and plate glass storefronts, and modified openings retain similar window and door systems. Each has a single aluminum entry door. The two easternmost storefronts have recessed entries with transoms flanked by plate glass display windows. Compared against historical photos (**Figure 12**), both appear to retain original materials and fenestration. Moving westward, the next two are not recessed and have asymmetrical arrangements with the entry door on the left and plate glass windows on the right. Here the plate glass windows are smaller and are surrounded by roman brick. The next two have centrally-placed doors flanked by display windows with roman brick above. The final two are also flush to the building face and symmetrical but extend upward to the ribbed aluminum band (an alteration), and with fixed transoms above the doors.

Interior

Forest Theatre Lobby and Auditorium

The interior of the Forest Theatre features architectural details, amenities, and ornament that were designed to provide movie patrons with a dramatic and luxurious experience. Sculptural ceiling clouds, fur downs, and coffers—in irregular rounded shapes—throughout the two-story lobby and theater hid cove lighting. Sloping floors (now level) and a sweeping ramp in the main lobby funneled moviegoers to their seats in the three-story auditorium. Coaxed by rounded transitions between each functional space, visitors were welcomed into secondary lobbies outside the auditorium entrances. Other secondary spaces included generous restrooms, usher rooms, and a cry room for mothers with fussing children. The auditorium, with two balcony-levels, also integrated sculptural ceiling clouds with zig-zagging walls to control lighting and sound for the optimal movie viewing experience. Some of the historic materials and features characteristic of the building's architectural drama—carpeted floors, a two-story mural, lighting—are missing or painted over, but the interior retains a preponderance of its original, ostentatious design.

Lobby - First Floor (Figure 16, Photos 11-13)

Upon entering the Forest Theatre lobby, the ceiling height is markedly low. There are two apparent reasons for this: First, the northernmost section of the lobby has a second floor that, according to the original plans, has several rooms for

Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

offices. Second, the low ceiling boosts the dramatic effect for visitors transitioning from the entry and concession area to the main lobby, which is a full two stories in height.

The geometry of the lobby space is irregular and is replete with curves, rounded corners, angled walls, ceiling clouds, and wall and ceiling coffers. Walls are generally of sand-finished plaster, with ceilings and some wall ornamentation of more heavily-textured acoustical plaster. Floors, originally sloping and covered in plush carpeting with floral patterns are now level and covered in a checkerboard of black and white vinyl tile.

From the lobby entrance, to the right is an angled wall with a built-in wood service counter. Behind this counter is a simple cloak room and access to the box office. The original location of the concession stand (now removed) is to the left. The low ceiling near the entry includes a curved fur down, ornamented at its outside edge with a ribbed serpentine plaster element to form a stylized cornice. The finish on the plaster appears to be gold metallic paint but historic photographs indicate it was originally lightly-painted in alternating tones. The rest of the low ceiling features a kidney-shaped plaster cloud with two cut-outs, one circular and one kidney-shaped. **(Photo 11)**

Stepping further into the two-story section of the main lobby, the most striking feature is the curved ramp **(Photo 12)** that provides access to the theater balcony. The ramp and the wall adjoining it sweep across the lobby from right to left. The ramp includes a curved bronze guardrail with two horizontal intermediate rails. Originally the rail included a row of circular wood medallions between the two intermediate rails. Only one of these medallions remains. The curved wall behind the ramp shows evidence of the original lobby murals, painted by muralist Eugene Gilboe, under white paint and a contemporary mural.

An obvious modification to the lobby is the floor, which originally sloped downward to the auditorium doors to the south. With the floor now leveled, a short set of steps leads down to the auditorium. The left wall of the lobby features a large kidney-shaped coffer. Below this, a door provides access to a simple staircase leading to the second floor. The southwest corner has two wood-framed display cases for posters. At the bottom of the steps is a short corridor to the east fire exit. The main lobby ceiling has a large coffer with a circular central medallion accented with gold mirrors.

From the first-floor main lobby there is a smaller, lower auditorium lobby originally accessed by three pairs of flush, wood-veneer doors with porthole windows. The door frames remain, but the doors were relocated to other areas of the theater. The east side of the auditorium lobby has restrooms with entrances at the extreme north and south ends of the lobby's east wall. At the center of the wall was originally a tall and wide niche with a square head and stepped plaster frame and a fountain. Flanking the niche are two recesses in the wall for the display of posters. The acoustical plaster ceiling includes an engaged cloud in a wave pattern along the west wall. At the south wall of the lobby a wide punched opening provides access to a short corridor leading to a fire exit. To the right of this and adjoining the auditorium is a single flush door with three porthole windows. The room beyond was the original "cry-room" but was converted to a second projection room in the 1960s.

Upon entering the auditorium lobby from the north, the ladies' restroom is on the left through a wide opening with a scalloped plaster detail at the head. Within the opening is a low pony wall with wood spindles screening a small lounge area with a built-in bench. From the lounge a punched opening in the east wall leads to an anteroom with a counter and deeply-recessed mirror. The restroom beyond features green and white tile but it has been over-painted, and vinyl tile applied to the floor. The men's lounge and restroom room are similarly arranged at the south end of the lobby but lacks an ante-room. The plumbing fixtures in this room have been destroyed, the tile painted, and the floors covered with vinyl tile.

The west wall dividing the first-floor lobby from the auditorium has six large openings. Two wide portals provide access to the aisles. Four wide rectangular window openings provide views into the auditorium. These are now filled with glass-

Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

block, but historic photographs indicate that these were windowless. The exception was the cry-room window which was fitted with a two-way mirror for privacy.

Lobby – Second Floor (Figure 17, Photo 14)

Traveling up the ramp, the curved south wall terminates at a round column, and a short set of stairs leads from the ramp to the mezzanine, which features a secondary lobby and small lounge. The upper part of the wall has a rectangular opening with a screen of wood spindles topped by a band of ribbed ornamental plaster. This spindle arrangement turns the corner and acts as a screen. From the landing, the lobby is to the south and the lounge is west. The curved back wall of this lounge has a recess with a built-in upholstered bench. A narrow opening at the west wall is a small telephone room. A sculptural ceiling cloud curves from the ramp landing around the corner and into the lounge, widening and terminating at a large circular medallion.

In the second-floor lobby, smooth plaster walls feature curved corners and punched openings that adjoin other public areas. The ceiling has a long and narrow central coffer overlapped at the center by a large porthole medallion with a heavy, ribbed rim-band. To the right, a short flight of steps leads up to the auditorium balcony seating. Simple flush doors flanking the steps open to the original usher rooms. The south end of the lobby has two cased openings, one to the south and one to the west that lead to restroom areas. Each restroom has a small outer lounge with built-in bench seating. Restrooms are sea foam-green glazed ceramic wall tile with white accent bands. Floors are green and white porcelain mosaic. Original marble toilet partitions remain in some restrooms but have been painted.

There are several rooms on the north side of the second floor that originally functioned as offices. A door in the east wall of the main theater lobby provides stair access to these rooms. It is believed that, originally, a L-shaped corridor provided access to five offices and a heater room (Figure 5). The floorplan was altered at an unknown date to its current arrangement, and there are no historic materials present. The area is now characterized by one large room lit by the building's five porthole windows, with five partitioned rooms of various sizes on the west side of the space (Figure 17).

Auditorium – First Floor (Figure 16, Photo 16)

The Forest Theatre auditorium is accessed by double doors in the west wall of the first-floor lobby. Inside the auditorium, original seats were removed, and the once-sloping floor is currently tiered. The entire room was painted black. Except for a low cement-plaster wainscot in circulation areas, the walls and ceilings are of acoustical plaster and the design improved the acoustical characteristics of the space. Under the balcony, the soffit has three rows of three square-shaped cutouts that form coffers. The horizontal surfaces within the coffers are set at a slight angle. The balcony soffit steps upward slightly before continuing to the front edge, turning upward and becoming the balcony face.

The tall side walls of the auditorium are folded in a shallow zig-zag pattern. Above, the center two thirds of the ceiling is lowered slightly to form a large cloud with the edges paralleling the zig-zag pattern of the walls. This cloud terminates at the west end with a large plaster element of five semicircular ribs. The curved west wall of the auditorium is draped from the ceiling to the top of the shallow stage-platform. The velvet drapes appear to be original. Where the sidewalls and the drapes intersect, the wall steps back slightly resulting in the drapes being recessed from the primary wall plane. This intersecting edge curves inward toward the stage and around the two wide portals leading to the fire exits. Corridors behind these portals lead to the west fire exits. At the stage level, a ship's ladder leads to a small utility space at the auditorium's northwest corner. The theater screen is missing.

Auditorium – Second and Third Floors (Figure 17-18, Photo 15)

Access to two levels of balcony seating is from the second-floor lobby. A single flight of wide steps leads to an intermediate level between the upper and lower seating tiers. The upper tiers are accessed via smaller sets of steps to the

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left and right. Guardrails within the balcony are solid concrete pony walls. The upper corners of these walls are eased and the sides and top finished with a continuous band of wood trim. Some of the guardrails also feature an applied round top rail with wide triangular supports. Seats are missing. Behind the seating tiers at the top of the balcony is the central projection booth flanked by two large mechanical/storage rooms. A large section of the ceiling above the south end of the balcony is missing due to long-term deterioration.

Commercial Block (Figure 16)

The Forest Theatre has nine total retail spaces, with eight in the commercial block. The smallest of these, roughly 13x13 feet, is west of the theater entrance within the lobby section of the building. Eight retail spaces in the commercial block each measure approximately 25-feet wide by 80-feet deep. Original wall finishes are hard sand-finished plaster over clay tile. Existing spline ceilings appear original but are covered with lay-in ceilings in several spaces. Floor finishes vary by space. Most lease spaces were modified with contemporary partitions subdividing back-of-house areas and some fur downs. However, historic finishes remain largely intact behind these modern intrusions. Below, the addresses listed follow the property's historic numbering and is used here to help distinguish individual retail areas.

Notable retail spaces include the following:

1906-1908 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. (Photo 17) – In the early 1960s these spaces were internally connected to serve the Green Parrot Restaurant and Club. Spline ceilings and plaster walls remain as does a large bar in the 1906 space (**Photos 0018-0045**).

1914 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. (Photo 18) – The location of the Jim Beck Studios until 1956, this space was occupied by KNOK Radio throughout the late 1950s and 1960s. Knotty pine paneling (visible through the storefront windows in a 1956 photograph) remains but has been painted (**Figure 12**). The paneling rises to 8 feet where it is topped by a crown molding. The sand finished plaster walls are exposed above. Floors are dark quarry tile in a common bond brick pattern. The ceilings are obscured by a contemporary lay-in ceiling.

1916 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. (Photo 19) – This space was occupied by the buildings long-term tenant, Gardner's Florist, which operated throughout Interstate's ownership of the building. Now occupied by a barber shop, it retains its large, original retail space with display niches on the south wall. Intact plaster remains on the walls and a modern lay-in ceiling obscures the original ceiling above.

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Integrity

The Forest Theatre retains integrity of location and setting in a neighborhood of mixed commercial and residential development and constructed alongside S.M. Wright Freeway, Dallas' first highway. The towering Interstate 45 overshadows the property but does not significantly diminish the prominence of theater and its signature tower. Retail parking on the north side of the building and theater parking on the south remain intact. These site elements were characteristic conveniences touted by suburban movie theaters of the era. The Forest Theatre retains integrity of design and workmanship as its late Streamline Moderne theater style is conveyed through the enameled steel façade, marquee and tower, tile, mirror and cast stone accents, and porthole windows. Changes to the exterior of the lobby and auditorium blocks are limited largely to the overpainting of brick and enameled steel panels, and some loss to mirrors and other ornamentation at the theater entry. Despite these changes, the overall integrity of the design and character defining features remain. The good condition of the original materials reflects the workmanship of the construction. These elements also communicate its historical significance as a mid-century movie theater. Storefronts on the retail block show some alteration that reflect the periodic modernization common to commercial buildings. An aluminum slipcover at the retail parapet diminishes the design somewhat but a preponderance of the historic exterior building materials remains intact underneath. The Forest Theatre also retains integrity of design as the historic interior floorplan, unique decorative features, sweeping ramp, and ornamental plaster detailing are intact. The layout, which includes separate lobbies for men and women, conveys its association and feeling with grand theaters of the mid-20th century. The overpainting of interior decorative finishes diminishes the overall architectural integrity of the interior design, but it is significantly bolstered by the largely-intact architectural ornamentation. Although the building is vacant now, a proposed certified rehabilitation of the building will ensure its future as a cultural and commercial asset to South Dallas.

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Statement of Significance

An exceptional late example of a Streamline Moderne movie theater, the 1949 Forest Theatre's grandiosity reflected a concerted and prolific effort by movie theater companies to invest in neighborhood theaters as Dallas' suburban development exploded in the mid-20th century. Forest Theatre was built in an all-white residential development for the exclusive enjoyment of that race, but in 1956 Interstate converted it to African American-only movie house. The policy change reflected a major mid-century demographic shift in South Dallas whereby the historic African American neighborhoods expanded into previously all-white areas. Forest Theatre showed first and second-run movies until 1965 when Interstate closed it following several years of declining profits. The Forest Theatre is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the areas of Entertainment/Recreation and Social History as a significant example of a mid-20th century suburban movie theater with operating policies that reflected prevailing American social attitudes of race and segregation. It is also eligible under Criterion C at the local level of significance in the area of Architecture. The 1949 Forest Theatre is a late example of a Streamline Moderne movie theater. Designed by the Dallas firm Pettigrew and Worley, its exuberant exterior style followed the idiom, "the show starts on the sidewalk," that advertised experience, escape, and entertainment through architecture. The Forest Theatre demonstrates Streamline Modern style in modernistic schemes of boldly-scaled decoration. Its sculptural marquee, futuristic beacon tower, slick panel walls, and porthole windows created a three-dimensional façade that was enhanced by a dazzling array of lights. The period of significance is 1949-1965.

Suburban Development and Race in South Dallas

In 1900, African American enclaves in Dallas were generally centered north and east of downtown. Other communities existed south of the city limits, having been settled by ex-slaves at the end of the Civil War. As the city experienced suburban expansion with the increasing reach of streetcar lines, developers catering to middle class Black families advertised new residential additions of neat, single-family homes in far South Dallas. White areas south of downtown reflected a mix of class and ethnicity related to the proximity of residential development to industrial districts. Neighborhoods comprised of homes for Dallas' wealthy elites bordered the working-class districts of those they employed.

Historically, the Cedars neighborhood south of downtown had been the location of some of the city's finest homes. In the neighboring Edgewood Addition (the location of the nominated property) to the east, construction of the Temple Emanuel El at South Boulevard and Harwood in 1913 resulted in the area becoming the center of the city's Jewish community.⁷ Edgewood quickly became home to many of Dallas' most well-to-do residents. The addition's two most prominent streets, South Boulevard and Park Row, featured homes designed by the city's leading architects. The area continued to prosper after World War I, but in the decades to follow demographic shifts and segregationist pressures changed the area.⁸

The southward growth of Dallas's working-class districts and the northern growth of African-American neighborhoods brought the two populations together by 1920, much to the alarm of white property owners who tried to establish a "color line" across which African Americans should not move. The South Dallas Improvement League sought to formally-establish the line, which was generally along Cooper Street about six blocks south of Forest Avenue (now MLK Jr. Blvd.). Whites were to exclusively maintain the area north of the line and the few African American families already living there were pressured to leave. In the 1940s and 1950s, African Americans who purchased homes in traditionally all-white neighborhoods faced violent consequences. Dozens of homes in South Dallas were bombed in

⁷ *South Boulevard/Park Row* National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form

⁸ *South Boulevard/Park Row*

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this period. Where the white community was working to prevent further encroachment of the African American population, African American community leaders encouraged further development and the purchase of homes in the area. By 1950 the “color line” gave way, brought on in part by white migration to other neighborhoods.⁹

In 1937 the federal government’s Home Owners’ Loan Corporation (HOLC) evaluated Dallas as part of its efforts to create “security maps” of the nation’s major cities. In a process now known as redlining, areas with African-American populations were labeled as undesirable, and discriminatory policies instituted that limited home ownership and economic opportunity there. The Edgewood Addition was evaluated by HOLC as being an area with “... a mixed population and practically no outstanding features in its favor.” Another HOLC evaluation stated that South Boulevard and Park Row “would normally be classed as a 2nd grade area, but due to location, surroundings and tendency to infiltration of lower grade population...” it was downgraded to an undesirable area. Such characterizations shaped the development of the South Dallas neighborhoods, further segregating them and exacerbated wealth and racial inequality.¹⁰

20th Century Theater Development in Dallas, Texas

Theaters came to Texas as early as 1838. Early theaters operated both with professional actors and with community volunteers, and until after Reconstruction, theaters were largely limited to the Gulf Coast and German-language communities in Central Texas. In the 1870s, as railroads opened inland markets and spurred growth, the presence of theaters began to increase. The railroads allowed traveling troupes to perform at local theaters and opera houses, some of which were purpose-built and included full scene-changing equipment, traps, and the latest theatrical technology. Theaters presented touring performers, melodramas, Shakespearean plays, minstrel shows, and musical extravaganzas.¹¹

The development of theaters in Dallas closely followed this pattern. The city’s first official theater, Field’s Theater, opened on Main Street in 1873.¹² Small and relatively primitive theaters were the norm until the construction in 1883 of the Dallas Opera House at the corner of Commerce and Austin Streets. With a large stage and extensive amenities, the opera house was the premier venue for legitimate theater in the city, and in 1894 had the distinction of being the first in Dallas to display motion pictures. It served the city for more than a decade before being destroyed by fire in 1901.¹³ The Dallas Opera House was immediately replaced with a theater that was even finer than its predecessor. The building featured electric lighting, fine décor, and 1,800 seats. This building served the Dallas Opera until 1917, then was used by two other operators before being destroyed by fire in 1921.¹⁴

Theaters for African American patrons were constructed in predominately African American neighborhoods east and northeast of downtown. The first was the Black Elephant Variety Theater at Young and Central Avenues which opened in the 1880s.¹⁵ Perhaps the best remembered of these venues is the Harlem Theater on Elm Street. Opened as the Standard Theater in 1908, it underwent remodeling and renaming several times before finally being opened as The

⁹ Daniel Hardy and Terri Myers. “Historic and Architectural Resources of East and South Dallas,” National Register Multiple Property Listing, 1990, 1994 and 1995.

¹⁰ Robert K. Nelson, LaDale Winling, Richard Marciano, Nathan Connolly, et al., “Mapping Inequality,” *American Panorama*, ed. Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers, accessed January 23, 2018.

¹¹ Michael Barnes, “Theater,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed December 07, 2017, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/kkt01>.

¹² Troy D. Sherrod. *Historic Dallas Theatres* (Arcadia Publishing, 2014):10.

¹³ Sherrod, *Historic Dallas Theatres*, 12-13

¹⁴ Sherrod, 13-14

¹⁵ Sherrod, 50.

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Harlem in 1933. It became the most popular African American theater in town owing to the quality of its shows, which included performances by musicians Leadbelly and Blind Lemon Jefferson.¹⁶

Interstate Theater Circuit

Karl St. John Hoblitzelle founded the Interstate Theater Circuit. A native of St. Louis, Missouri, Hoblitzelle was born on October 22, 1879 and was one of 13 children. To support his large family, Hoblitzelle began working after completing grammar school. Isaac S. Taylor, Director of Works for the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, hired Hoblitzelle for administrative work. Within a period of four years, he rose from this simple position to that of acting director in charge of deconstructing the fair grounds.¹⁷

Through his work at the fair, Hoblitzelle developed relationships with a group of concessionaries who encouraged him and his brother George to invest with them in a group of vaudeville theaters in the South, an area with few such theaters at the time. In 1905, he invested \$2,500 to help establish the Interstate Amusement Company with theaters in Little Rock, Shreveport, Birmingham, Dallas, Fort Worth, Waco and San Antonio.¹⁸ Although he intended his interest in the company to be simply an investment, Hoblitzelle quickly overtook direct management of the business. He was elected president of the company in 1906 at the age of 27.¹⁹

At the time, vaudeville was frowned upon as an immoral form of entertainment, and Hoblitzelle set to work on improving the image of Interstate's theaters. He instituted a policy of censoring to make show content appropriate for family audiences, later remarking:

*It was a heart-breaking job to convince the good people of Texas in those early days that we were presenting only clean, wholesome entertainment. A good many of the men connected with the theater of that day occupied questionable positions in the community. They had graduated out of the saloon or gambling business and the public looked askance at them.*²⁰

Interstate constructed its first Dallas theater at the corner of Commerce and St. Paul Streets in 1905. The Majestic Theater design featured characterized Pan Asian themes in fine interior decoration.²¹ Programming generally consisted of seven daily vaudeville acts with occasional moving picture exhibitions. Interstate's greatest success was found in the Texas market, and the company relocated its headquarters to its Dallas Theater in 1915.²² This theater was destroyed by fire in 1917, and the Majestic was immediately moved across the street when it took over the Dallas Opera House.²³

Hoblitzelle's success bred imitators and new vaudeville theaters sprang up downtown. Soon Elm Street became the popular location for theaters large and small. At one-point Elm Street had more theaters in one location than anywhere

¹⁶ Sherrod, 53.

¹⁷ William H. Crain, "Hoblitzelle, Karl St. John," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed January 23, 2018, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fho05>; *The Hoblitzelle & Interstate Theater Collection*. Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas at Austin, www.hrc.utexas.edu/collections/film/holdings/interstate/.

¹⁸ Crain, "Hoblitzelle;" *Interstate Theater Collection Overview & History*. Dallas Public Library Texas & Dallas History Division, dallaslibrary2.org/dallashistory/archives/07701.php.

¹⁹ *Interstate Theater Collection Overview & History*.

²⁰ *Hoblitzelle & Interstate HRC*

²¹ Sherrod, *Historic Dallas Theatres*, 18.

²² *Ibid.*, 18.

²³ Sherrod, 13.

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else in the world except for Broadway.²⁴ Interstate opened its own Elm Street theater in the spring of 1921, and the beautiful new venue remained the permanent home of Interstate's offices in Texas for more than 50 years.²⁵ Today, the Majestic is the last surviving reminder of Dallas' Theater Row.

Hoblitzelle was an innovator. He expanded his holdings to include moving-picture theaters, provided air conditioning, sound, assisted listening devices for the hearing impaired, cry and play rooms, and children's seating. He also instituted a profit-sharing plan, giving veteran employees 10-percent of the company profits.²⁶ He invested considerable resources into the construction of palatial movie houses designed by prominent architects. In 1920, Interstate introduced full-length feature films. With the rising popularity of movies, Hoblitzelle introduced a "vaudeville-film" policy that proved quite successful throughout the 1920s, but by the end of the decade it was clear that motion pictures were bringing the popularity of vaudeville to an end.²⁷

With the decline of vaudeville came the need for reorganization of Interstate to meet the needs of the movie-going public. Karl Hoblitzelle decided to leave that effort to others, announcing his retirement in 1929 and entering negotiations to sell his interests. He sold the company to RKO, closing the deal in 1930 and leaving on an extended European vacation with his wife Esther. Under the deal, he kept ownership of several theater buildings with a lease agreement with RKO.^{28 29}

In the ensuing years, the Great Depression decimated the major studios, forcing RKO and Paramount into receivership in 1933. RKO's troubles resulted in Hoblitzelle taking possession of the theaters he still owned. He subsequently entered into an agreement with Paramount trustees to organize Interstate Circuit, Inc. to operate the RKO and Paramount theaters in Texas. Hoblitzelle was granted 50% interest and management-control of the new company. That same year the Paramount trustees asked him to assume management of its small-town Publix theaters in Texas. This formed the basis for a second company, Texas Consolidated Theaters. By 1935, the reorganizations were complete with Hoblitzelle president of both companies.³⁰

Under Hoblitzelle's management, Interstate's success was renewed, and its network of theaters expanded. The company bought, leased, or constructed new theaters, and entered into partnerships with other major amusement companies. Other major circuits that operated in the market included the Paramount-affiliated Jefferson Amusement Company, 20th Century Fox-affiliated Robb and Rowley, and the unaffiliated Griffith Amusement Company and J. C. Long circuits.³¹

Part of the success of these major circuits was a coordinated effort to limit competition. Each benefitted from gentleman's agreements to operate in distinct territories, and together they used their influence to prevent smaller circuits and independent operators from contracting for first run pictures.³² When such pictures were contracted, the smaller operators were often forced to wait to show them until they were no longer in demand.³³ In 1938, the U.S.

²⁴ Sherrod, 21.

²⁵ *Majestic Theater* National Register of Historic Places Inventory – Nomination Form.

²⁶ Crain, "Hoblitzelle."

²⁷ *Interstate Theater Collection Overview & History*.

²⁸ *Interstate Theater Collection Overview & History*

²⁹ *Hoblitzelle & Interstate HRC*.

³⁰ *Hoblitzelle & Interstate HRC*.

³¹ *Interstate Theater Collection Overview & History*.

³² *Interstate Theater Collection Overview & History*.

³³ *Interstate Theater Collection Overview & History*.

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government sued. In the case of *Interstate Circuit, Inc. v. United States*, a 5-3 majority of the United States Supreme Court found that Interstate had unfairly conspired to limit competition.³⁴

After an additional decade of litigation, the Department of Justice issued the 1948 Paramount Judgment. Because of the judgement and a later consent decree with Paramount, chains were forced to separate their production and exhibition operations, and to either buy or sell-out joint ventures. Paramount was split into two new corporations, Paramount Pictures Inc. which produced and distributed films, and United Paramount Pictures which showed films. Hoblitzelle sold 100% of his stock in Interstate Theater Circuit to United Paramount Theaters but remained manager until his death in 1967. United Paramount Theatres merged with the American Broadcasting Company in 1953 and eventually became American Broadcasting Companies (ABC). The Interstate subsidiary kept its regional offices at the Majestic Theater in Dallas until 1976.³⁵

Suburban Movie Theaters

For the first two decades of the 20th century, Dallas' grandest movie theaters were on Elm Street, an area known as "Theater Row." A second-class of smaller theaters, however, catered to neighborhoods. In 1914, the Colonial Theater Circuit built the Colonial Theater at the corner of Forest and Colonial Avenues near the Edgewood Addition in South Dallas.³⁶ The small suburban theater showcased vaudeville, community meetings, and moving pictures. Its construction also included a strip of retail shops. The secondary commercial unit was not a new concept, as many downtown movie houses functioned as office (often for theater companies) and small retail business, usually next to the box office. The commercial strip form, however, was unique to suburban theaters. Often found along streetcar lines in commercial districts between neighborhoods, the theater-retail buildings catered to Dallasites taking public transportation to and from downtown. As automobiles became more ubiquitous, theater owners advertised parking for retail customers and theater patrons.

Companies, like Interstate Theater Circuit, increasingly focused on suburban theater construction. In the late-1920s, Interstate purchased the Colonial and renamed it the Forest Theatre.³⁷ Considered one the oldest suburban theaters in Dallas, the original Forest Theatre (later replaced by the nominated property) still stands. The popularity of motion pictures and the growth of suburbs northeast of downtown brought about the construction of the city's first major suburban theater to rival its downtown counterparts. On March 22, 1927 Dent Theaters announced the construction of a 1,500-seat vaudeville and motion picture house on Greenville Avenue in East Dallas. Theater advertisements for May of 1928 indicate the new theater, called the Arcadia, was the city's only major movie house outside of downtown's Theater Row.³⁸

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, theater companies competed to build the grandest suburban movie houses. The Texas Theater (NR 2003) was constructed by the Oak Cliff Amusement Company in 1932 according to plans by W. Scott Dunne. The 2,000 seat, Venetian-style building was part of the R & R Circuit under the ownership of Howard Hughes.³⁹ In 1932, twelve suburban theaters were advertising their film schedules in the *Dallas Morning News*. In addition to the Arcadia and Texas, suburban theaters included the smaller Peak, Rosewin, Midway, Knox Street, Haskell, Varsity, Melrose, East Grand, Columbia and Dal-Sec. These new suburban theaters put serious pressure on

³⁴ *Hoblitzelle & Interstate HRC.*

³⁵ *Hoblitzelle & Interstate HRC.*

³⁶ Sherrod, *Historic Dallas Theatres*, 83; Don Lewis, "Colonial Theater." <http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/16690/photos/82826>.

³⁷ Don Lewis, "Colonial Theater."

³⁸ "Dent's to Build Suburban Theater," *Dallas Morning News*, March 8, 1927, 4.

³⁹ "Texas' Largest Suburban Theater to Open Doors Tuesday Night," *Dallas Morning News*, April 21, 1931, 10.

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their downtown counterparts. In addition to the convenience of proximity, they provided patrons another very important amenity: abundant on-site parking.⁴⁰

In 1933, with Karl Hoblitzelle's Interstate Circuit now in almost full control of Dallas' Theater Row and much of the state's small-town theater stock, the company announced plans to build its first suburban unit. The Village Theater, part of the newly-built Spanish Village Shopping Center in Highland Park West, was part of the company's initiative to build suburban theaters across Dallas.⁴¹ Hoblitzelle believed suburban theater patrons deserved "the same comfort and splendor in the neighborhood that is available in the larger downtown theaters."⁴² Interstate's policy between 1930 and 1950, was to "build a new theater whenever a community develops sufficiently to justify it," and by 1949 the company boasted 13 suburban theaters in the Greater Dallas area.⁴³

The new theaters rivaled downtown movie palaces. The *Dallas Morning News* noted the phenomenon and attributed "the spread of these [suburban] houses...where the whole family can attend in a body, without parking problems, and in comfortable non-dress up clothes, [as] a pretty good indication of the growth of [Dallas'] population."⁴⁴ The 1,000-seat Lakewood Theater in East Dallas, at Gaston Avenue and Abrams Road, included a dramatic tower illuminated with neon, and interior murals executed by Perry Nichols, Harry Carnohan and Victor Lallier under the direction of Eugene Gilboe.⁴⁵ Opened in 1938, the theater remains an important landmark in the Lakewood Shopping Center. The Inwood Theater followed in 1941 (again including interiors by Gilboe) and a dramatic marquee and tower with neon lighting. The theater remains intact and in operation as a triplex.⁴⁶

The period of suburban theater construction was a series of one-upmanship between companies to build larger, more technologically-modern, and grander movie houses. The glamorous buildings were promoted as part of community life, where culture and luxury were accessible to anyone with money to buy a ticket. This open invitation, however, was not extended to Dallas' African American community. Separate theaters for African American and Anglo audiences remained the norm in Dallas until integration in the mid-1960s.

In general, African American movie houses in the 1940s were small and more austere than the white-exclusive theaters.⁴⁷ Interstate announced the construction of the Preston Theater in 1945, the company's first suburban movie theater with a designated entrance, box office, and balcony for African American patrons.⁴⁸ The Preston, however, was ultimately not constructed. In 1950, the Wheatley Theater became "Dallas' first de-luxe film theater" for African Americans when it opened at Southland Street and Oakland Avenue (now S. Malcom X Blvd.), approximately two miles south of the nominated building. E.J. Jobe, who operated the Harlem Theater in Terrell, Texas, opened the Wheatley and hired an all-African American staff to run it. Constructed at a cost of \$85,000, the Wheatley sat 550 and was furnished with modern sound and projection equipment.⁴⁹ Other local, contemporaneous African American-exclusive theaters included the Century and the State theaters.

⁴⁰ "Suburban Theater Programs," *Dallas Morning News*, December 18, 1932, 7.

⁴¹ "\$250,000 Theater Will be Erected in Highland Park," *Dallas Morning News*, December 10, 1933, 1.

⁴² "Progress of Neighborhood Houses Seen, Interstate Heads Devote Efforts to Planning," *Austin American Statesman*, August 18, 1939.

⁴³ The theaters included: Village, Esquire, Lakewood, Inwood, Circle, Wilshire, Varsity, Knox, Lawn, White, Fair, Forest, Dalsec. "Trend, Theaters Move Out to Suburbs," *Dallas Morning News*, May 22, 1949.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ "Suburbia's Newest Showhouse," *Dallas Morning News*, October 24, 1938, 6.

⁴⁶ ⁴⁶ Sherrod, *Historic Dallas Theaters*, 115.

⁴⁷ ⁴⁷ Sherrod, *Historic Dallas Theaters*, 53-58.

⁴⁸ "Suburban Theater Plans Include Negro Balcon.." *Dallas Morning News*, September 3, 1945.

⁴⁹ "Wheatley, De Luxe Negro Theater, to Open Friday," *Dallas Morning News*.

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The Forest Theatre

In 1948, Interstate was operating thirteen suburban movie houses throughout the Greater Dallas area, and despite efforts to upgrade it, the 1914 Forest Theatre in South Dallas was the smallest and oldest of these.⁵⁰ The surrounding, historically all-white, community was under-served and the need for a new, larger theater was clear. Interstate announced plans to build a *new* Forest Theatre east of the original at the 1900 block of Forest Avenue and the new Central Expressway. Under construction in 1947, the new highway provided the proposed theater a prominent and strategic location to advertise to passing motorists.⁵¹ Plans included an attached commercial block with ample parking in a convenient location along the existing business district.

Forest Theatre was designed by Pettigrew-Worley & Co., a Dallas architecture firm responsible for several Interstate movie houses. Interstate invested more than \$300,000 in the 1,480-seat theater and commercial block, which became the company's largest theater upon completion. Full page spreads in the *Dallas Morning News* touted its technological and architectural innovations. Push-back seats, a "scientific revolutionary idea" at the time, enabled patrons to remain seated while others entered or left an aisle. Air conditioning "cooled to mountain freshness" provided year-round comfort, a novelty for those who remembered when movie theaters closed during Texas' scorching summers. Forest Theatre also boasted a cry room, "a soundproof glassed-in room for mothers who insist on seeing the picture despite crying babies."⁵² Interstate installed the latest sound equipment and a woven fiber glass screen that improved the acoustical qualities of the show. Essentially, every seat in the house was the best seat.

The Streamline Moderne-style Forest Theatre shared many of the characteristics of other Interstate suburban theaters including a brightly lit marquee, soaring 3-sided tower, and elaborate neon display. The interiors, executed under the direction of artist Eugene Gilboe, included an elaborate two-story lobby mural of tropical plants and birds. Gilboe's mural served as a backdrop for a unique and dramatic feature of the new building: a sweeping ramp in the foyer that led patrons to the mezzanine (**Figure 13**). Walls and ceilings throughout were decorated with sculptural coffers, clouds, and fur down in abstracted round shapes. Cove lighting within these elements aided in establishing a dramatic atmosphere.⁵³

The grand-opening celebration on July 29, 1949 was attended by more than 5,000 patrons who jammed the building and overflowed into the street. The celebratory program included speeches, a square-dancing contest with more than a hundred contestants, and an organ performance by Norma Ballard. The opening night film was "It Happens Every Spring." The following Saturday morning, a special children's premiere was held and included a program of cartoons and western films.⁵⁴

Changing demographics in South Dallas adversely effected business at the white-exclusive Forest Theatre, and ultimately caused the company to completely restructure theater policy. Its first few years of business were successful, and like other suburban theaters, entertainment was marketed to the whole family. The Forest Theatre showed first and second-run movies, children's matinees, and hosted community events. In 1949, however, the neighborhood already showed signs of change. Nearby synagogues that reflected the historic Jewish community who resided in Edgewood, relocated to suburbs farther north, and most of the area's remaining white population soon followed.⁵⁵ By 1954,

⁵⁰ *Dallas Morning News*, June 28, 1948, 4.

⁵¹ "New Forest Features Modern Architectural Innovations," *Dallas Morning News*, July 28, 1949, 6.

⁵² "Crying Babies Fenced In," *Austin American*, January 12, 1946.

⁵³ "New Forest Features Modern Architectural Innovations."

⁵⁴ "5,000 Jam Opening of New Forest," *Dallas Morning News*, July 30, 1949, 4.

⁵⁵ *South Boulevard/Park Row*.

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Interstate lowered the price of admission to boost slumping sales.⁵⁶ The nationwide increase in television ownership likely affected movie theaters sales, too. Between 1947 and 1957, movie attendance in the United States fell by 50% as television sets became affordable for the American middle class.⁵⁷ For the Forest Theatre, however, Interstate's solution to decreased profits was to re-open the theater for the exclusive use by South Dallas' majority African American citizenry.

On February 21, 1956, Interstate closed the Forest Theatre to white customers. Headlines about the change noted the likelihood that it had become the largest African American theater in the southern United States.⁵⁸ It re-opened on March 2 with as much fanfare as the original dedication seven years earlier. Large spotlights, likely seen for miles around Dallas, were placed in front of the theater. The gala featured addresses by local civic leaders, the Negro Chamber of Commerce, and radio DJ Jim Randolph was the master of ceremonies. Inside, the Booker T. Washington High School band and Harry T. Burleigh Choir of Lincoln High performed (**Figure 14**). A double-feature of "Helen of Troy" and "The Nat King Cole Story" played to a packed house.⁵⁹

Programming did not alter much from its previous years, but Interstate marketed the theater with less prestige in weekly newspaper movie listing. Ads in the *Dallas Express* showed it offered the same main-stream movies shown at white-only venues, but typically as second-runs.⁶⁰ Children's matinees, special midnight shows, and occasional first-run presentations were noted in various years of its operation after 1956. Within two years, business at Forest Theatre dropped, and Interstate reduced the theater's hours to weekends.⁶¹

Forest Theatre's transition coincided as Dallas was entering a critical period of the Civil Rights movement. Desegregation of public institutions and businesses in Dallas was a protracted process.⁶² The Committee of Fourteen, a group comprised of seven white and seven Black community leaders, achieved incremental and symbolic progress, like the 1960 integration of lunch counters in Woolworth's and Walgreen's. Protests across the city in 1960 and 1961 targeted retail stores, lunch counters, restaurants, and movie theaters like the Palace and Majestic. Interstate executives' dispassionate response to theater integration said the company offered balcony seating at the Majestic and the entire Forest Theatre for black patrons. Demonstrators were quick to point out the difficulty of hearing from balcony seats, and they argued the Forest Theatre was in an inconvenient location and only offered second-run features.⁶³ After a series of protests at two theaters near the University of Texas at Austin, Interstate simply reaffirmed their strict policy of segregation.⁶⁴

In May 1963, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy called a meeting of theater owners to discuss the process of desegregating southern movie theaters. John Q. Adams attended the meetings on behalf of Interstate Theaters.⁶⁵ Within a month, theaters and other public accommodations were integrated. A melancholy article in the *Dallas Morning News* entitled "Mood of Texas: Integration in Silence" wrote:

⁵⁶ "Suburban Theater to Reduce Price of Adult Tickets" *Dallas Morning News*, June 24, 1954, 8.

⁵⁷ *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk*, 163.

⁵⁸ "Forest Theater Has Reopening for Negro Use," *Dallas Morning News*, March 3, 1956, 12.

⁵⁹ "Forest Theater Has Reopening for Negro Use," *Dallas Morning News*, March 3, 1956, 12.

⁶⁰ *Dallas Express*, March 3, 1956.

⁶¹ "Forest Theater Sets New Playing Policy," *Dallas Morning News*, November 29, 1958, 7.

⁶² Michael Phillips, *Black Metropolis: Race Ethnicity, And Religion in Dallas, 1841-2001* (University of Texas Press 2006) 138-158.

⁶³ "Theaters near UT Campus Adopt Policy of Integration," *Dallas Morning News*, September 6, 1961, 9.

⁶⁴ McCain, Nina. "Groups Stage 'Stand-Ins'," *Dallas Morning News*, February 13, 1961, 1.

⁶⁵ "Integration of Theaters due Study," *Dallas Morning News*, May 27, 1963, 1.

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*Texas last week was riding a riptide of social change and studiously failing to notice what was happening. Over all the state except the northeast corner, without street mobs or headlines or fiery crosses, its people were busily tearing up a way of life that had separated men into white and black.*⁶⁶

During this period, Interstate sought new ways to protect their investment at the Forest Theatre. In 1958, they explored leasing the building for a municipal library.⁶⁷ Two years later, the Cincinnati-based Jack F. Goldman Theaters offered to buy the building for \$125,000, much lower than what the building was worth, with the claim that, "...a Negro situation cannot profit..." and argued that finer theaters had been sacrificed by their owners where "Negro's (sic) have occupied white areas."⁶⁸ Interstate declined the offer, and stated that the commercial leasing profits covered expenses and "even delivered a 'throw-off' at the end of the year."⁶⁹

Indeed, the Forest Theatre commercial block was an important part of Interstate's operation of the property. Interstate did not just manage movie theaters, it was also a major manager for other commercial property types. The company bought residential property along Peabody Avenue for additional revenue. The company was apparently a poor landlord for these homes, with at least one being condemned by the city as a threat to public safety.⁷⁰ Long term tenants of the retail section were Gardner's Florist and the Green Parrot Café.⁷¹

From 1953-1956, one retail space became the new home to the Jim Beck Studio.⁷² A native of Marshall, Texas, Jim Beck was something of an electronics prodigy, reportedly building a radio station in his bedroom at the age of 14. Following his service as an army radio engineer during World War II, Beck was a part-time announcer at KRLD radio where he developed an interest in country music and artists like Ray Price and Lefty Frizzell.⁷³ In 1949, he recorded demos for Price that effectively launched the musician's career. The following year, Beck recorded Frizzell at his Ross Avenue studio resulting in the breakout hit single "If You've Got the Money, I've Got the Time."⁷⁴ Beck's signature sound was attributed to both his technical expertise and his strong group of studio musicians. He made regular recordings for major record labels and artists like Jim Reeves, Leon McAuliffe, Roy Orbison, the Light Crust Doughboys, Marty Robbins, Billy Walker, Floyd Tillman, Carl Smith, Sonny James, Fats Domino, and Buddy Holly.⁷⁵ Beck died in 1956 after he became ill from the carbon tetrachloride he used to clean his equipment in the Forest Avenue studio. When the studio closed, KNOK, a station targeted to Dallas' African- American market, leased the space.⁷⁶

⁶⁶ "Mood of Texas: Integration in Silence," *Dallas Morning News*, June 30, 1963, 18.

⁶⁷ John Q. Adams, Letter to The Honorable R L Thornton, (MS. Interstate Theater Collection Dallas Public Library Texas & Dallas History Division, Dallas, TX) April 18, 1958.

⁶⁸ Jack F. Goldman, Letter to John Q Adams, (MS. Interstate Theater Collection Dallas Public Library Texas & Dallas History Division, Dallas, TX) October 29, 1960.

⁶⁹ John Q. Adams, Letter to Jack L Goldman, . (MS. Interstate Theater Collection Dallas Public Library Texas & Dallas History Division, Dallas, TX) October 18, 1960.

⁷⁰ *Interstate Theater Collection*. Dallas Public Library Texas & Dallas History Division.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Beck had, at least, four studios during his career: the Forest Avenue location, 1101 Ross Ave., and one on Main Street. The first studio was at his home, 3525 Mockingbird Lane in Highland Park. The Mockingbird Lane and Forest Avenue studios are the only known locations associated with the producer that are extant.

⁷³ Martin Donell Kohout, "Beck, James A. [Jim]," *Handbook of Texas Online*, accessed January 23, 2018. <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fbece>.

⁷⁴ Charles Wolfe, "Jim Beck." *The Encyclopedia of Country Music: The Ultimate Guide to the Music* (Oxford University, 2012).

⁷⁵ Kohout, "Beck, James A. [Jim]."

⁷⁶ *Interstate Theater Collection*

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In September 1965, Interstate ceased operating the Forest Theatre as a movie theater.⁷⁷ Two years later, it became the Central Forest Club, and owner Rubin Willis featured great musical acts like Gladys Night & the Pips, Marvin Gaye, Aretha Franklin, The Drifters, Archie Bell, Wilson Pickett, B. B. King, and Redd Foxx.⁷⁸ The music-venue conversion included removal of the auditorium seating, and flattening of the lobby and auditorium floors.⁷⁹ The Central Forest Club closed in 1971, but the building would be used sporadically as a club and concert venue for another four decades hosting acts from Ike and Tina Turner to Prince.⁸⁰ Other physical changes to the building came in 1976 when Theater Management Corp. drew up plans to subdivide the auditorium. A wall was constructed in front of the balcony to create two, stacked theaters seating about 450 each.⁸¹ The west end of the space was designated the Forest Central Night Club. The cinema apparently operated only in 1978 and specialized in Blaxploitation films.⁸² The building was finally sold in 1979 to Albert H. Reynolds of San Antonio-based Meadowbrook Corporation, and again in the late 1990s to Julinmar Investments, Inc.⁸³ Musician Erykah Badu leased the property from 2003-2009, reopening the auditorium space to its original volume and conducting general repairs and improvements. Badu operated the auditorium as the Black Forest Theatre, hosting concerts, community events and film screenings.⁸⁴

The theater has been vacant since 2009, and the retail strip at the Forest Theatre is largely-vacant. Tenants include a barber shop and restaurant. In 2017, CitySquare, a non-profit whose mission is to, “fight the causes and effects of poverty through service, advocacy and friendship” bought the property. CitySquare is in the fundraising and planning phases of a comprehensive rehabilitation of the property for use as a community arts and training facility. Initiated for local historical designation, the building will be rehabilitated under review of the Dallas Landmark Commission. The owner intends to utilize state and federal historic preservation tax credits to accomplish the project.

Criterion C: Architecture

The Forest Theatre, built in 1949, is a late example of a Streamline Moderne movie theater. Designed by the Dallas firm Pettigrew and Worley, its exuberant exterior style followed theater architect Charles Lee’s unofficial idiom, “the show starts on the sidewalk,” that sold experience, escape, and entertainment through architecture. Although equipped with the latest technology, the Forest Theatre’s exterior style was more akin to the late-1930s modernistic theater architecture than 1940s-1950s movie house design, which emphasized elements of shape, light, and color over flamboyance.⁸⁵ Following the Streamline Moderne idiom, the Forest Theatre demonstrates modernistic schemes of boldly-scaled decoration on its three-dimensional façade. Its sculptural marquee, futuristic beacon tower, slick porcelain-enameled steel panel facade, and enframed porthole windows were all enhanced by a dazzling show of lights. The Forest Theatre’s architectural drama enticed audiences from the sidewalk ticket booth through the lobby

⁷⁷ W. R. Curtis, Letter to John H Regazzi, (MS. Interstate Theater Collection Dallas Public Library Texas & Dallas History Division, Dallas, TX) September 24, 1965.

⁷⁸ “Forest Theater,” Cinema Treasures.

⁷⁹ James Railey, Memo to John Q Adams, (MS. Interstate Theater Collection Dallas Public Library Texas & Dallas History Division, Dallas, TX) August 22, 1967.

⁸⁰ “Forest Theater,” Cinema Treasures.

⁸¹ From Drawings – Dallas Permit Archives.

⁸² “Forest Theater,” Cinema Treasures.

⁸³ “Realty Insight Blanco builds in Royal Oaks,” *Dallas Morning News*, January 21, 1979, 3H.; Dallas Central Appraisal District

⁸⁴ “Forest Theater,” Cinema Treasures.

⁸⁵ In the late-1940s, architect Ben Schlanger (1904-1971) gained prominence as the leading designer for modern American movie theaters. He wanted the movie experience to be immersive and, in doing so, designed theaters with wider screens, innovative lighting, promoted new types of chairs, and removed distracting ornament from auditoriums. Exterior theater architecture reflected his approach to become less flamboyant. An *Architectural Record* building type study of theaters in 1948 iterates Schlanger’s influence. In Dallas, theaters like the Delman (1949) demonstrated his increasing impact to movie house construction.

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and into the auditorium. The interior, enhanced by sculptural cove lighting and rounded transitions between functional spaces, featured a two-story lobby with an exotic mural by artist Eugene Gilboe and sweeping ramp that beckoned patrons to the mezzanine. It is an excellent local example of late Streamline Moderne style and retains good integrity to communicate its architectural and historical significance.

The Forest Theatre and Streamline Moderne

Streamline Moderne style architecture, popular from 1930-1945, was inspired by that era's industrial engineering. It evolved out of Art Deco, a style that became familiar to American architects following the 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Moderne* in Paris. German architects in the mid-1920s also were influential in its development, and it became a popular American style of architecture following the Great Depression.⁸⁶ Streamline Moderne, like Art Deco, celebrated technological innovation but expressed modernism through form rather than decoration. Industrial designers of the day applied progressive concepts of aerodynamics to locomotives, buses, appliances, automobiles, and consumer goods. Designs celebrated technological innovation of materials, too. In architecture, Streamline Moderne buildings emphasized horizontality, featured curved projections, smooth wall surfaces, flat roofs, and simplified functional components like metal handrails, doors, and trim.⁸⁷ Nautical themes such as porthole windows were also common, owing to the influence of the ocean liner *Normandie* (1936).

To "Modernize Main Street," commercial architecture, many businesses of the 1930s and 1940s adopted Streamlined Moderne style.⁸⁸ Innovative building technology also ushered new forms into building design. Businesses remodeled storefronts with new materials like Vitrolite (colored glass panels) and used neon tube lighting to advertise at night. Many buildings in Texas demonstrated the pervasive influence of this modernistic style, but "no other building type," according to Jay C. Henry, "would participate as completely as the motion-picture theater."⁸⁹ Indeed, for American movie theaters like the Forest Theatre, the futuristic beacon tower, slick metal paneled veneer, elaborate neon lighting, and continuous marquee were a "giant billboard advertising entertainment inside."⁹⁰

By the mid-1930s, theater circuits were increasingly focused on second-generation movie-house design. First generation theaters had been built to support stage performances while second generation theaters were intended exclusively for the presentation of motion pictures and for the enjoyment of the movie-going public. Theater design was increasingly focused on the reduction of ornamentation in theater auditoriums in favor of architecture that placed the focus on the screen, improved circulation, seating efficiency, and acoustics. Television, initially seen as an opportunity for the offering of live broadcasts, was seen by the 1940s as a serious threat that could only be met with the most up-to-date facilities, and experts recommended movie theaters be modernized every ten years.⁹¹

Streamline Moderne was enthusiastically applied to the design of theaters, particularly new modern suburban movie houses. Although the style's ornament was relatively simple in shape and design, theater exteriors exhibited ornament in large-scale, bright colors, and amplified at night by flashing neon lights. Increased suburbanization and the proliferation of automobiles drove the development of visual imagery that was easily-recognizable from a distance.⁹²

⁸⁶ Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles* (MIT Press: Cambridge, 1992): 241-243.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ In 1935, the Libby-Owens-Ford Glass Company sponsored the Modernize Main Street competition that was conducted by *Architectural Record* in its July and October issues. Contestants designed new storefronts for drugstores, grocers, clothing shops, and auto shops that utilized modern glazing, metal facades, and other innovative materials.

⁸⁹ Jay C. Henry, *Architecture in Texas* (University of Texas Press: Austin, 1993): 235.

⁹⁰ Henry, 235.

⁹¹ "Theaters: Cinema, Community Broadcasting." *Architectural Record*, July 1938.

⁹² Alan Hess, *Googie Redux: Ultramodern Roadside Architecture*. (Chronicle Books. 2004).

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Massive and modern marquees with curved corners, large decorative towers and signs, and complex lighting displays essentially turned the buildings into enormous advertisements.

The Forest Theatre is a late example of Streamline Moderne that appears to reference designs like The Vern Theater by S. Charles Lee. Completed in Los Angeles in 1941, The Vern included a massive corner marquee and tower, porthole motifs, asymmetrical massing and the incorporation of a small retail space adjoining the theater entry.⁹³ The interior of the Forest Theatre, however, reflects a shift in how films were presented to the movie-going public by the end of the decade. The lobbies and lounges remain dramatic in the use of modernistic plaster ornamentation and murals, but the auditorium interior is much more subdued. A reduction in ornament was intended to focus the public's attention on the screen that was framed by drapery. Acoustical plaster surfaces were shaped and finished to improve acoustics, and the projection, screen, and sound equipment were, at the time, the latest technology.

While beautiful in its execution and an important local example of its type, the Forest Theatre was stylistically-dated by the time of its completion in 1949, by which time other architects had moved on to ever more modern and progressive compositions.⁹⁴ Even the theater interiors seem dated when compared to the simplified design aesthetic and functional emphasis promoted in *Architectural Record*.⁹⁵ Dallas' Delman Theater, completed two years before the Forest by the Isadore B. Adelman Theater Circuit reflected the popular progressive design of theaters and was shown as an example in the architectural journal. Pettigrew & Worley's final theater, the Wynnewood in South Dallas, more closely resembled the Delman than the Forest but was no more forward-thinking than its predecessor as it retained many of the decorative flourishes the architects used in earlier theaters. The firm's approach to theater design appears to reflect their rather rapid entry into the industry in 1939, their close relationship to the Interstate Theater Circuit, and the on-the-job training provided by interstate's executive in charge of construction, J. R. Elder.

*Pettigrew & Worley*⁹⁶

Henry Frank Pettigrew was born in Chisolm, Texas on December 28, 1906. Pettigrew attended Dallas schools, graduating from Bryan Adams High School. He found work as a draftsman with the firm of Thompson and Swaine (later H.B. Thompson), a position he held for a decade before forming a partnership with John Arron Worley in 1938. John A. Worley was born in Dallas on October 22, 1913. He attended North Dallas High School before being accepted into the Texas A&M School of Architecture. Worley graduated in 1935 and obtained his architecture license three years later. Upon formation of their partnership in 1938, Pettigrew & Worley went to work designing theaters, among the first being the Broadway Theater in San Antonio. How the pair so quickly became a popular choice for theater design is unclear. Later they would credit J. R. Elder, executive in charge of construction for Interstate Theaters, for their knowledge on theater construction, design and equipment.

In 1941, H. F. Pettigrew and Winfield Morten filed a patent for a prefabricated building for use by the U.S. military. John Worley designed and coordinated the production system for the buildings but decided not to be associated with

⁹³ Maggie Valentine, *The Show Stats on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theater* (Yale University Press, 1994).

⁹⁴ Valentine, *The Show Stats on the Sidewalk*.

⁹⁵ *Architectural Record*, July 1938, June 1944 and November 1948.

⁹⁶ Ancestry.com. *U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011. "Rites set for architect John Aaron Worley," *Dallas Morning News*, October 12, 1982, 21.

"Theater Specialists Handling Construction of Campus Movie," *Denton Record Chronicle*, July, 31, 1949, 13.

Telephone interview with Jack Worley, November 3, 2018.

Patent Designation 135,797, Prefabricated Building, H. F. Pettigrew et al.

"Movie theaters Designed by Pettigrew & Worley," *Cinema Treasures*, <http://cinematreasures.org/firms>.

Ancestry.com. *Texas, Death Certificates, 1903-1982* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2013.

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the patent due to a perceived conflict of interest. A specialist in the provision of military housing, Worley was called to serve in the Army Engineering Corps as a lieutenant. With the onset of World War II, the Pettigrew & Worley partnership was dissolved. Worley served in the European theater from 1941 to 1946, earning a bronze star and the rank of major. Pettigrew spent the war years operating the Texas Prefabricated House & Tent Company. Between 1941 and 1946, the company shipped more than 100,000 units (called Victory Huts) to the armed forces. Worley never imagined that his design for the huts would be in such demand or that Pettigrew would profit so handsomely, but this apparently did not undermine their relationship.

The duo renewed their partnership when Worley's returned from war service, and they expanded the business to include contracting. The pair continued in their work of remodeling and designing theaters, primary in Texas. Over the next five years they completed approximately two dozen movie-theater projects in the state, the last being the 1951 Wynnewood Theater in Dallas. Pettigrew claimed the firm participated in the design of at least 75 theaters, 60 of which were for Interstate.

Pettigrew and Worley shifted their efforts to the housing market. By 1952, Pettigrew Worley Reynolds developed housing subdivisions in Dallas and surrounding suburbs. Each also formed separate partnerships with others and became leaders in regional housing development. For example, Worley formed the Worley Corporation with his son in 1958, which built residences under the TexAnn and TexMark labels. The men were responsible for the construction of thousands of homes and dozens of apartment developments over two decades, and this came to overshadow their important role in the design of movie houses. None of their original drawings and associated records were retained. Both men died of cardiac arrest, Pettigrew in 1975 and Worley in 1982.

*Eugene J. Gilboe (1881-1964)*⁹⁷

Eugene Gilboe (Johannes Eugene Gilboe) was born to Amund and Helene Syversen Gilboe on September 23, 1881 in Oslo, Norway. Gilboe studied at the Royal Academy of Arts and Decoration in Norway and studied in Germany and England before emigrating to the United States in 1903. He took a job with the Rambusch Decorating Company of New York where he continued to develop his skills, then moving to the William F. Behrens Studio in Cincinnati before moving the Minneapolis in 1910. His marriage that year to Claudia H. Fjelde, also a native of Norway, produced two sons, Eugene and Rolf. Over the next 23 years Gilboe worked alternately as an independent artist, an employee for various decorating studios, or in partnership with other artists. This included a brief partnership in Duluth with Henrik Holmboe where the two completed interior decorations for the Zelda and Grand Theaters (1914) and the Minnesota Tea Company (1915). He would return to Duluth for the redecoration of the NorShor Theater in 1946. The artist returned to Minneapolis in 1916 where he worked for G.F. Weber Studios, William A French Company, Harold A. Larsen Decorating, and finally in the partnership of Craig & Gilboe.

⁹⁷ Ancestry.com. *Norway, Select Baptisms, 1634-1927* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2014
Ancestry.com. *U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011.
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<http://zenithcity.com/archive/historic-architecture/the-norshor-theatre>
"Designer Gilboe Added the Touch at the new Campus Theater," Denton Record Chronicle, October 4, 1949, 4
"New Theater Rated," *Amarillo Daily News*, October 29, 1947, 12.
"Gilboe seen as best all jobs," *Brownsville Herald*, July 1, 1938, 5.
"E. J. Gilboe Dies at 83," *Dallas Morning News*, November 16, 1964, 4.
Buie Harwood, *Decorating Texas* (Texas Christian University Press, Fort Worth, 1993).

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In 1933, Gilboe moved to Texas where architect George Dahl hired him to paint murals in the University of Texas Library and Student Union. Like Gilboe, Dahl's parents were Norwegian immigrants who settled in Minneapolis, raising George in the same area where Gilboe lived and worked. While it is not known if they were acquainted prior to 1933, they certainly shared this common history. Gilboe collaborated closely the architect and the director of the building committee, William J. Battle, in the conception and development of the elaborate decorations. In 1935, Dahl hired Gilboe to be one of the decorative artists for the Texas Centennial Exposition grounds in Dallas. Gilboe executed dramatic watercolor studies of the exposition grounds and buildings and served as a colorist and supervisor of decorative treatments.

Following the exposition's completion, Gilboe partnered with George A. Franklin in the firm Franklin and Gilboe Company, which officed in the Melba Theater in downtown Dallas. Between 1937 and 1940, the company completed several Texas theater interiors including: The State in Amarillo (1937), The Yale in Houston (1938), The Plaza in Paris, and The Capitol in Brownsville. In 1940, he established a proprietary business called the Eugene Gilboe Decorating Company. It is not clear what "decorating" services beyond murals he offered. His reputation as a theater decorator fully established, Gilboe continued a working-relationship with the Publix and Interstate chains, both managed by Karl Hoblitzelle. Gilboe is credited for interior design work in 26 Texas theaters, and there are numerous other works in hotels and office buildings.

Gilboe executed his works in a variety of styles and motifs individually-catered to his clientele. His murals demonstrated Native American designs, western and nautical scenes, and regional history among others. His work at the Forest Theatre in Dallas and Galveston's Broadway Theater reflected Gilboe's love of exotic landscapes that featured birds and tropical flora. Gilboe retired in 1954 and died ten years later at the age of 83 following a six-and-a-half-year battle with cancer.

Conclusion

The Forest Theatre is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the areas of Entertainment/Recreation and Social History. Interstate Theater Circuit built the 1949 Forest Theater for movie-goers who lived in South Dallas suburbs, and it served that community until 1965 when the company closed the theater. Forest Theatre was originally intended for exclusive recreation by white patrons, but Interstate converted it to a segregated African American theater in 1956 following a major change in the area's demographics. It is also eligible under Criterion C at the local level in the area of Architecture as an excellent late example of Streamline Moderne style architecture. The Forest Theatre exhibits classic features of the style in a strong horizontal orientation, flat roof, porthole windows, and rounded corners. Its façade elements—marque and towering "Forest" sign—are boldly-scaled and the enameled steel panel façade communicates the machine-made vocabulary celebrated in Streamline Moderne style architecture. The period of significance is 1949, the date of its construction, to 1965 when Interstate officially closed the Forest Theatre and ceased its operation as a suburban movie theater.

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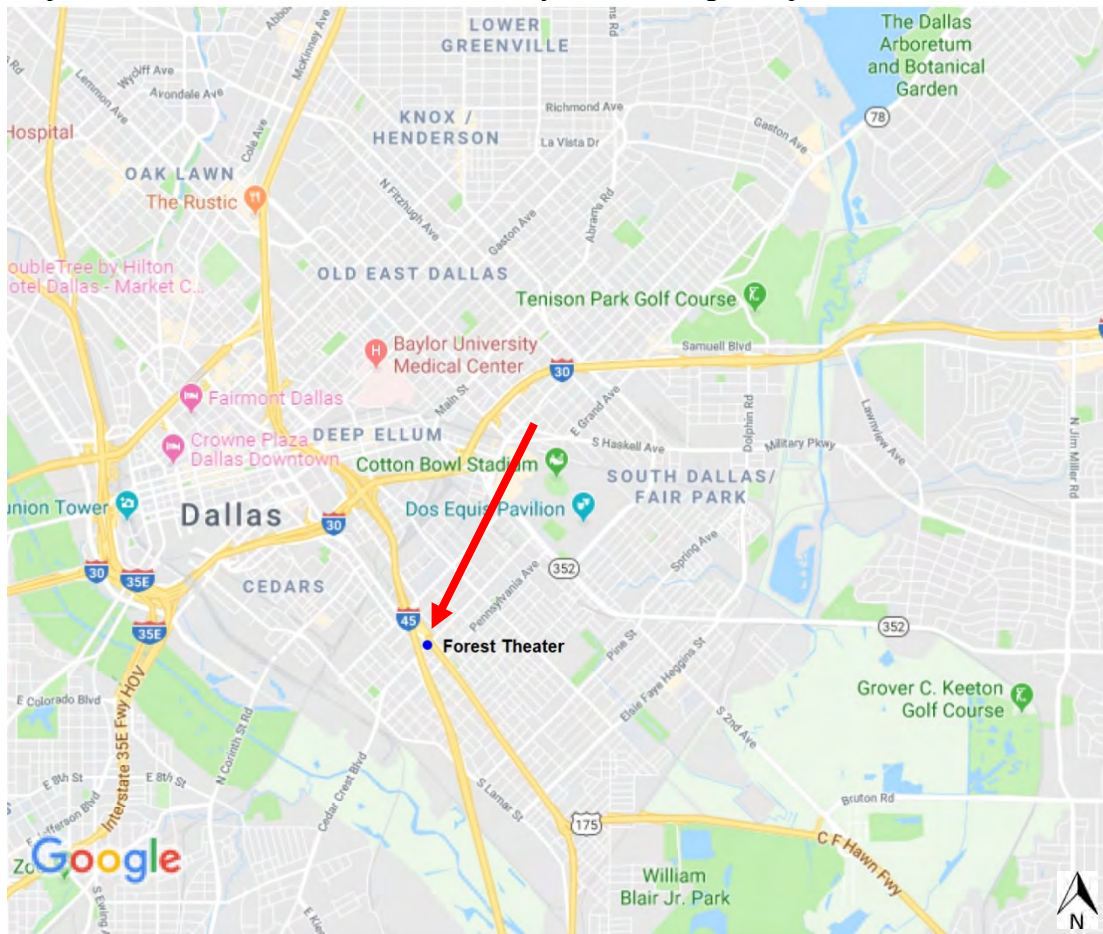
Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Maps

Map 1 – Dallas County, Texas



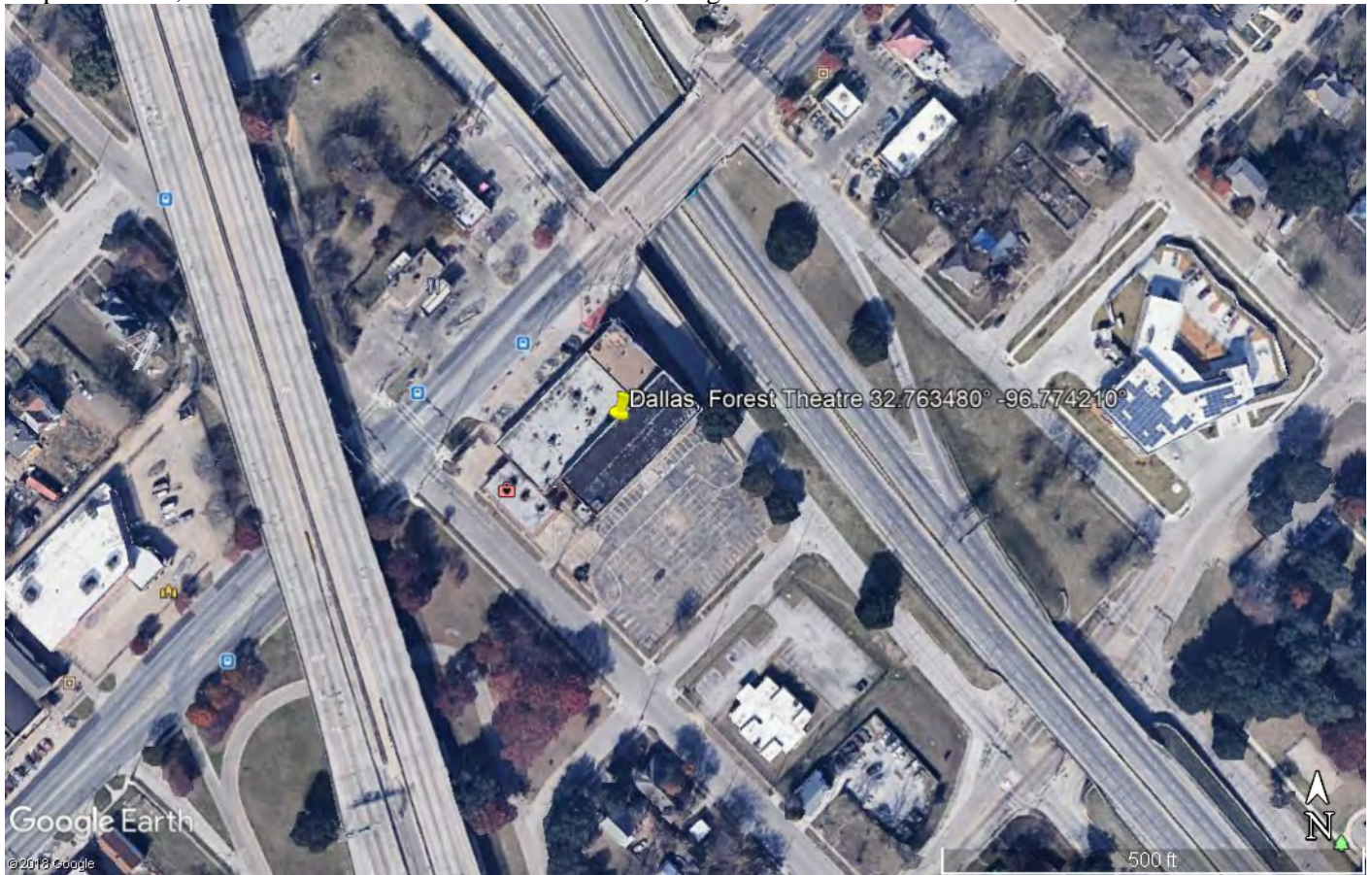
Map 2 – Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas. Google Maps.



Map data ©2019 Google 1 mi

Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Map 3 - Dallas, Forest Theatre 32.763480° -96.774210°, Google Earth accessed June 20, 2019.



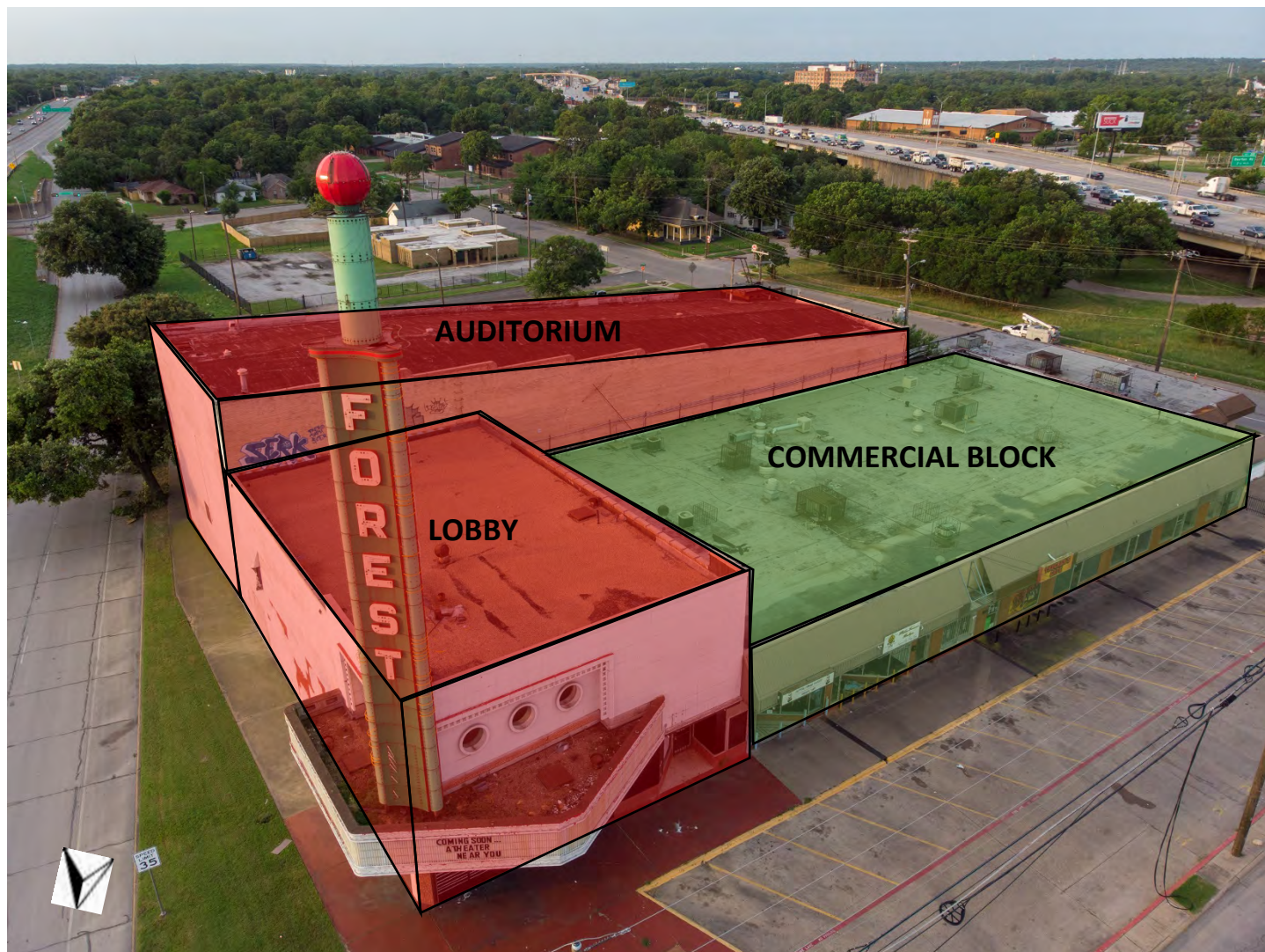
Map 4 – The nominated boundary is the legal parcel: EDGEWOOD PLACE, BLK 10/1152, LTS 3, 5, 10 & 11 and PT LTS 2, 6, 8, 9 & 12 ACS 1.6333 (Property ID# 142174000100, Dallas Central Appraisal District).



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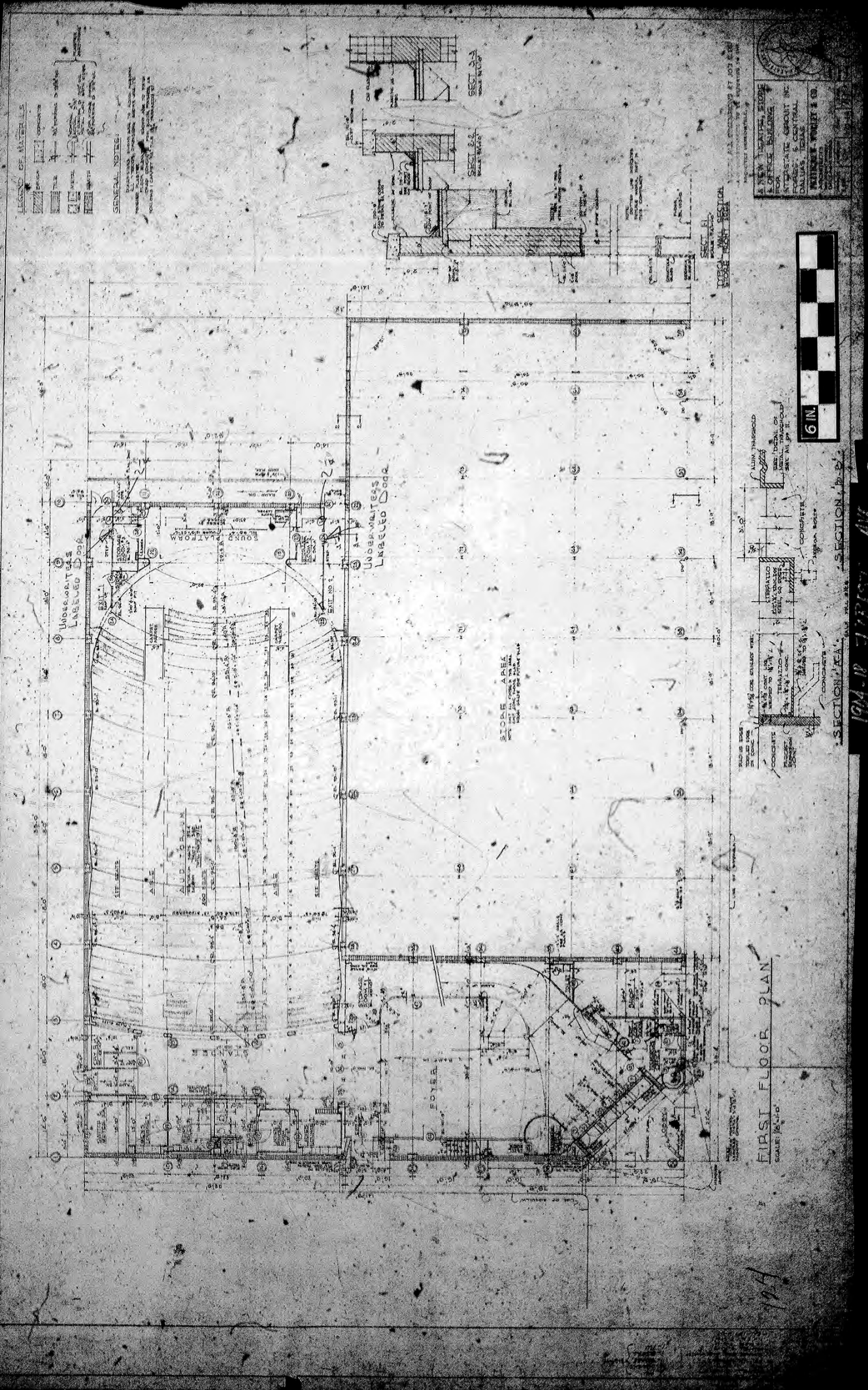
Figures

Figure 1 – The nominated building has two functional sections: Forest Theatre Lobby and Auditorium (red), and Commercial Block (green). Looking south.



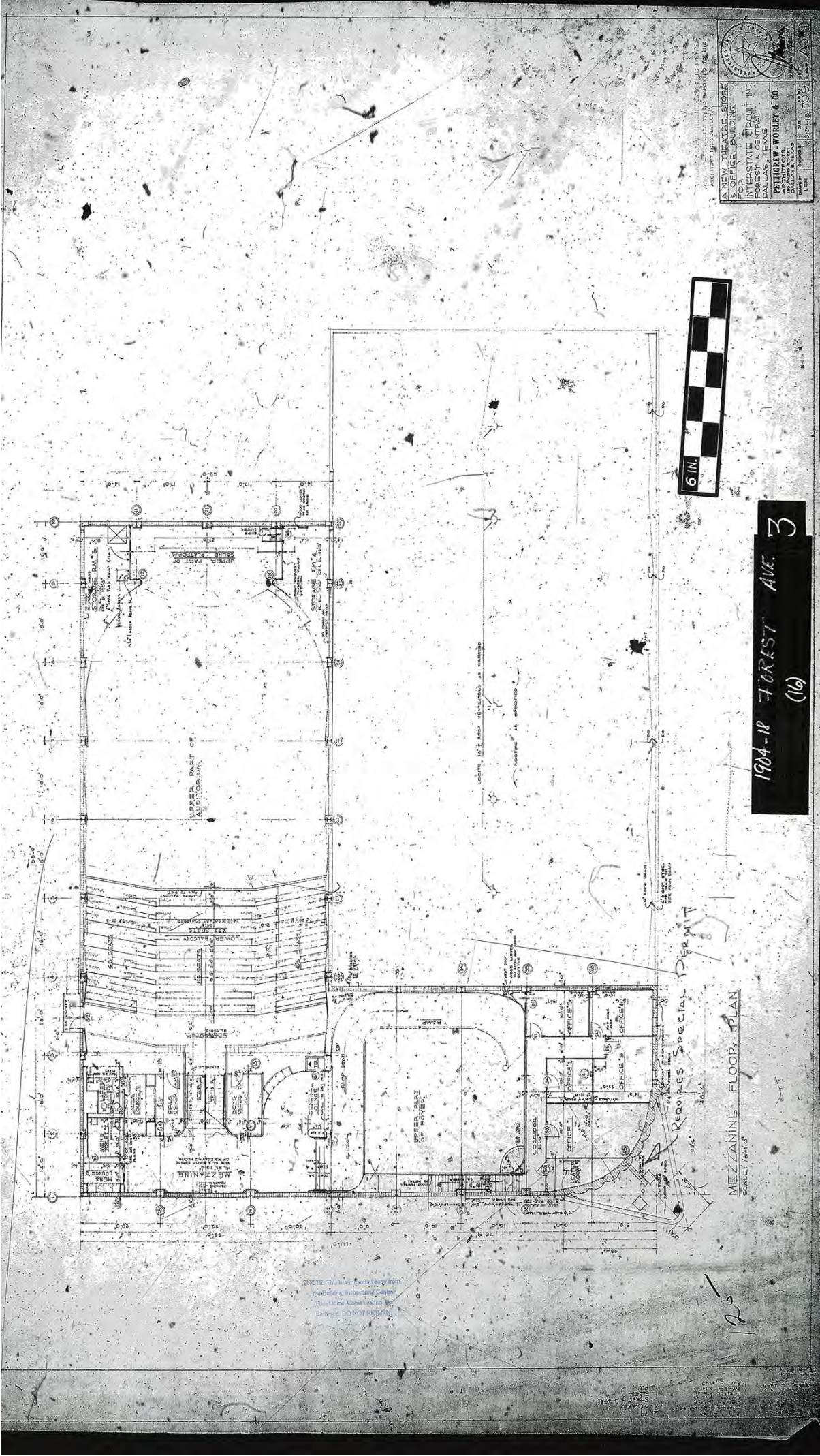
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Figure 2 – Historic First Floor Plan (1947) – The original plans differed in façade design (particularly the lobby entrance) from the final building. Source: Dallas Permit Archives



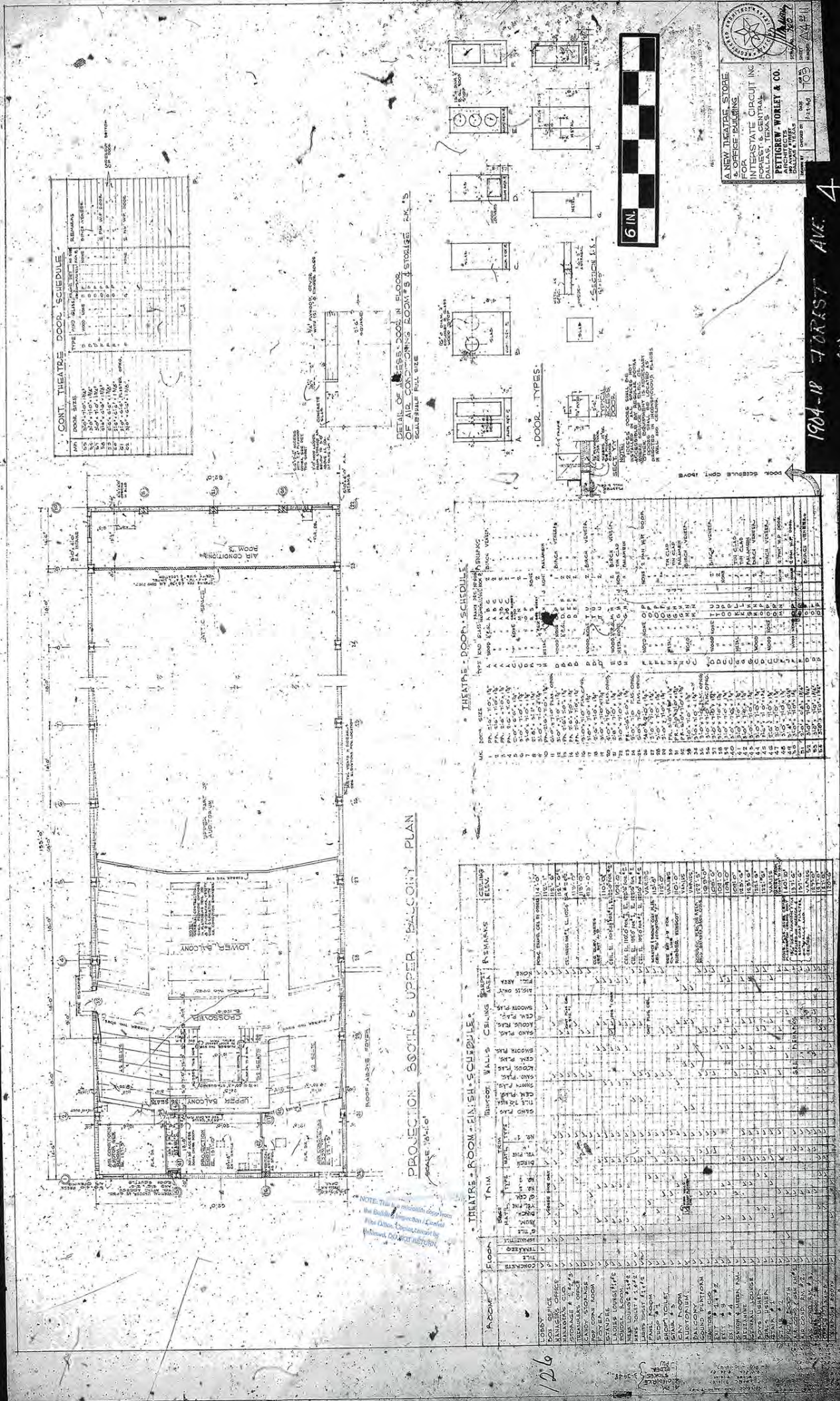
Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Figure 3 – Mezzanine Level Plan (1947). Source: Dallas Permit Archives



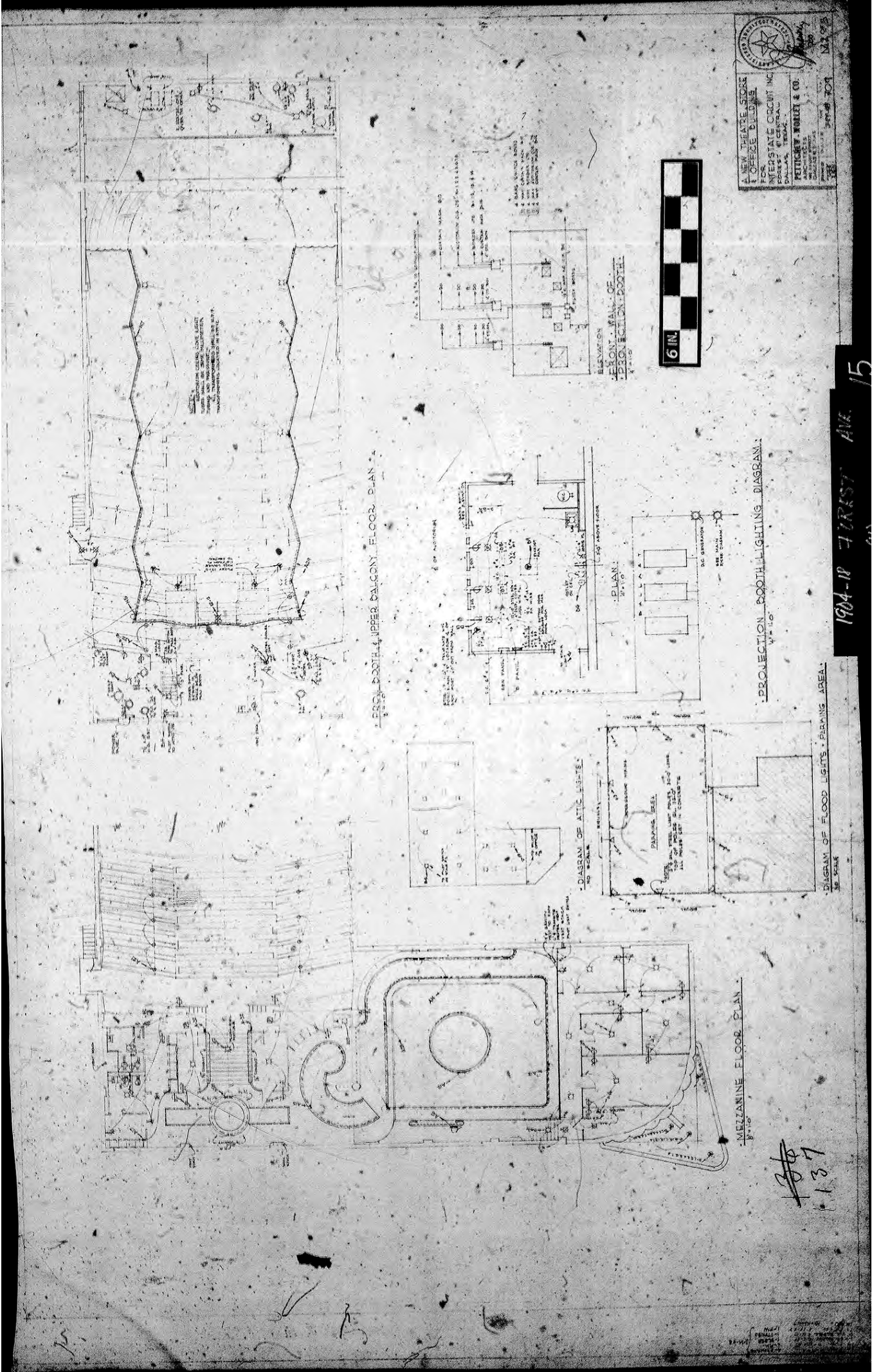
Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Figure 4 – Upper Balcony Plan (1947). Source: Dallas Permit Archives



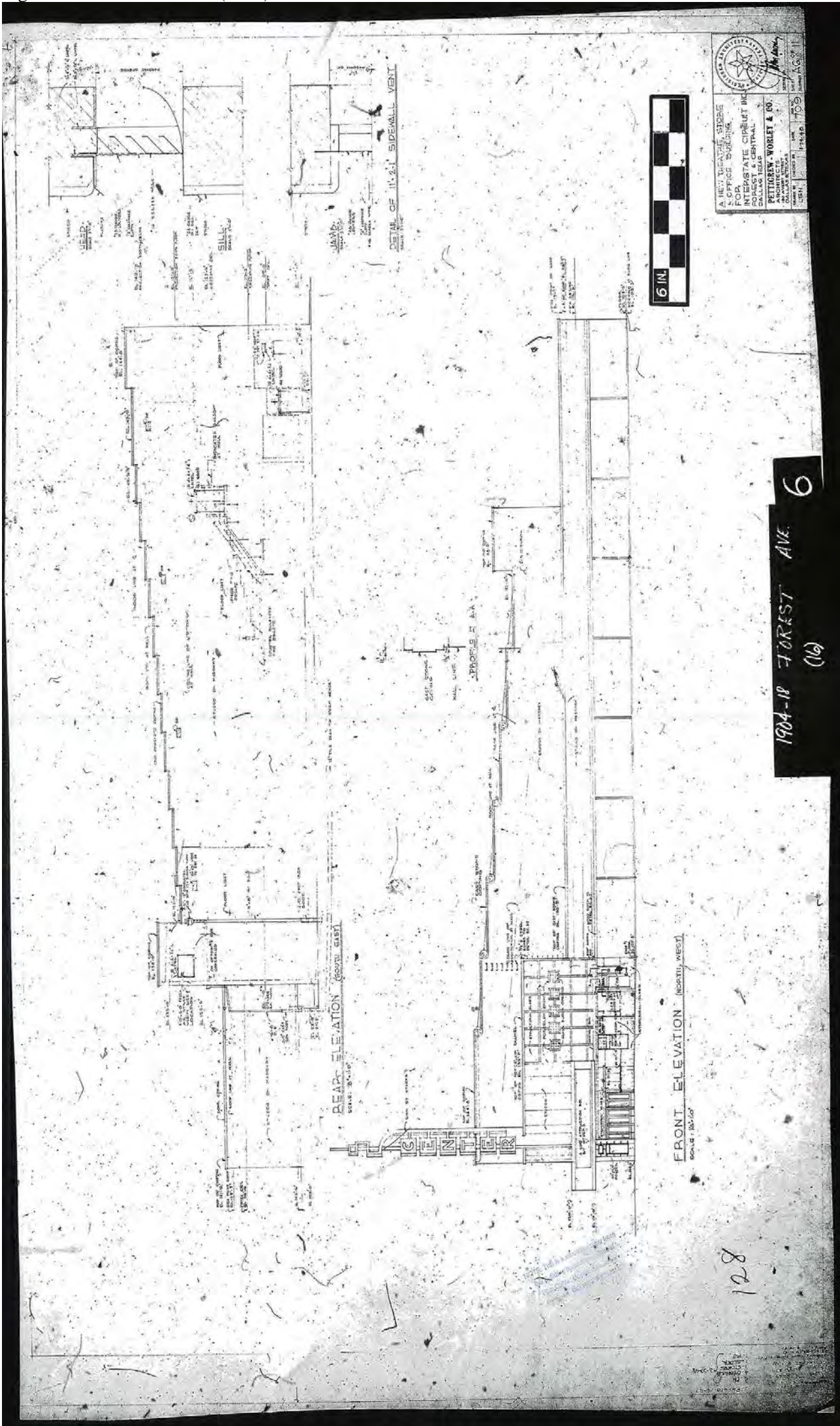
Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Figure 5 – Mezzanine Floor Plan (1947). Source: Dallas Permit Archives



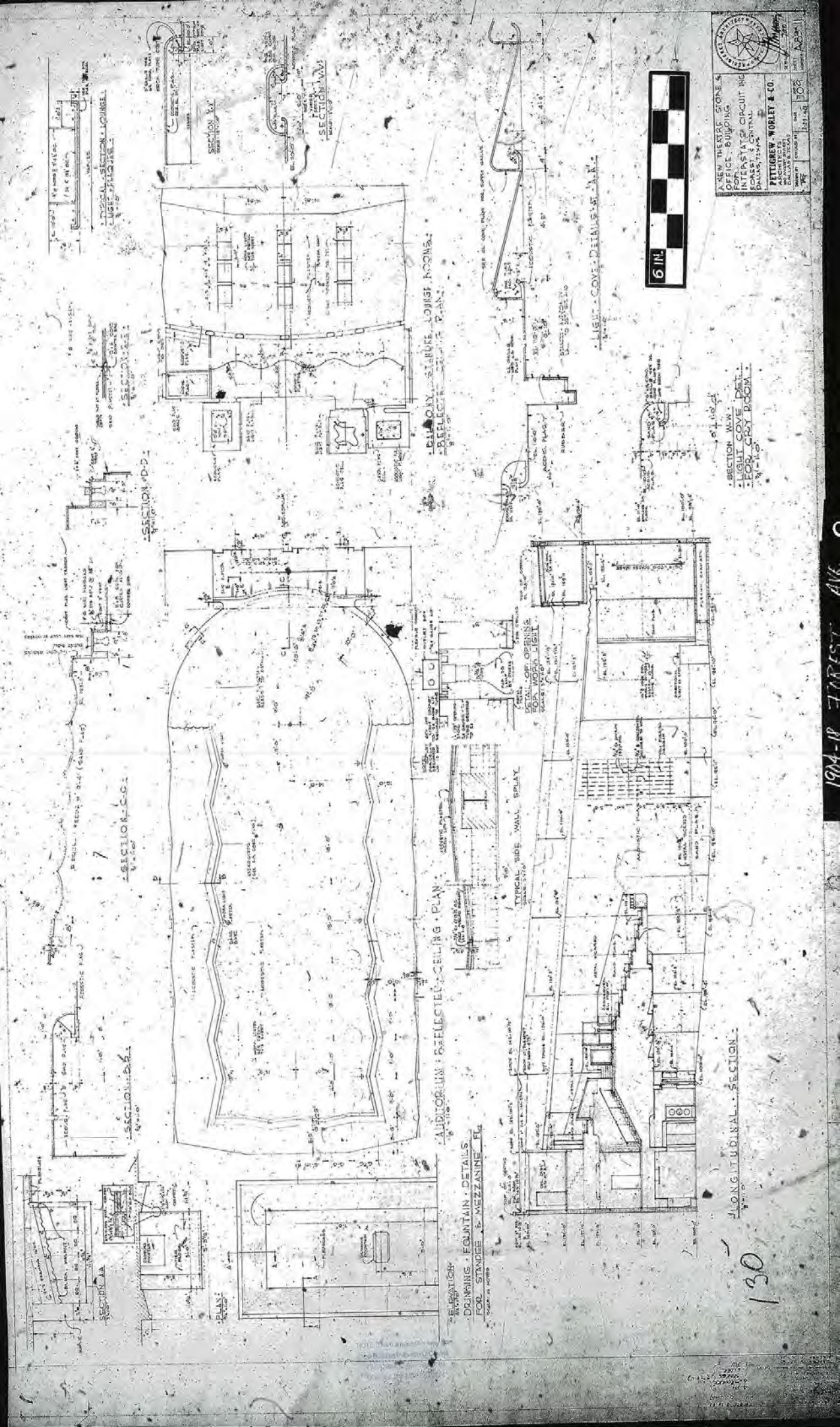
Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Figure 6 – Front Elevations (1947). Source: Dallas Permit Archives



Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Figure 8 – Auditorium Details (1947). Source: Dallas Permit Archives



[illegible]

Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Figure 10 – Dallas Morning News Opening Day Advertisement – July 28, 1949

INTERSTATE announces ITS LARGEST
and Most MAGNIFICENT Suburban THEATRE

The NEW Forest THEATRE
FOREST at HARWOOD

Note
THESE FEATURES
THAT MAKE THE
New FOREST
A THEATRE OF UNIQUE
DESIGN and BEAUTY—
★
1500 SEATS
★
RICH DAZZLING DECOR
Modern ★
REFRESHMENT BAR
Spacious ★
LOBBY and LOUNGES
INTRODUCING THE LATEST
MARVEL OF ARCHITECTURE
... THE RAMP
★
PUSH BACK SEATS
★
NU-SCREEN
★
The CRY ROOM
★
SYMPHONIC SOUND
★
Westinghouse
AIR CONDITIONING
★
Spacious FREE
PARKING FACILITIES
PHONE
H8-0300

MAMMOTH CARNIVAL of FUN
celebrating the spectacular
OPENING FRIDAY Evening
JULY 29 at 7:00 P.M.
OUTSIDE FESTIVITIES Include:
WESTERN MUSIC!
HOLLYWOOD LIGHTS
NORMA BALLARD AND HER ORGAN
Inaugural BROADCAST!
HUGE BLOCK PARTY!
SQUARE DANCE CONTEST
GAILY DECORATED STREETS
Something Going on from
7 p.m. to Closing!!
POPULAR NEW FOREST PRICES:
NIGHTS and SUNDAYS 50c
Matinees 35c
Children 9c
INCLUDING TAXES

SCREEN ATTRACTION FRI. EVENING AND ALL DAY SAT
THE DIPSY-DOODLE DANDY OF THE YEAR!
RAY MILLAND
JEAN PETERS
PAUL DOUGLAS
IT HAPPENS EVERY SPRING
Directed by LLOYD BACON • Produced by WILLIAM PERLBERG

NOTE! The Former "FOREST" at 1702 FOREST AVE., is now the "COLONIAL."

Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Figure 12 – Forest Theatre Grand re-opening 1956, view from the northwest. Dallas Public Library.



Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Figure 13 – General view of lobby, c. 1950. Dallas Public Library.



Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Figure 14 – Grand re-opening 1956, Booker T. Washington High School Band in lobby. Dallas Public Library.



Figure 15 – Grand re-opening 1956, view in auditorium. Dallas Public Library.



Section FIGURE, Page 46



Figure 18 – Current third floor plan. Source: HKS, Inc.



Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Photographs

Name of Property: Forest Theater

City or Vicinity: Dallas

County, State: Dallas, Texas

Photographer: Jay Firsching – Architexas, Andreea Hamilton – McCoy Collaborative

Dates Photographed: 1/22/2018 (Photo 5 only), 6/10/2019, 6/14/2019, 7/14/2019 (Photo 4 only)

Photograph 0001 North elevation. Architexas - 6/10/2019



Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Photograph 0002 Streetscape – View looking north at S. M. Wright Freeway (South Central Expressway). Architexas - 6/10/2019



Photograph 0003 North elevation detail at lobby and retail. Architexas - 6/10/2019



Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Photo 0004 North Elevation Detail. McCoy Collaborative - 7/14/2019



Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Photograph 0005 Exterior vestibule at theater entrance with ticket booth – View from the east (1/22/2018)⁹⁸.



Photograph 0006 East elevation. Architexas - 6/10/2019



⁹⁸ The property owner enclosed the vestibule in 2018 with temporary wood walls to secure the property. In 2019, the nomination preparer was unable to capture the ticket booth because the walls could not be removed. According to the applicant, the 2018 picture accurately reflects the current condition of the ticket booth.

Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Photograph 0007 South elevation. Architexas - 6/10/2019

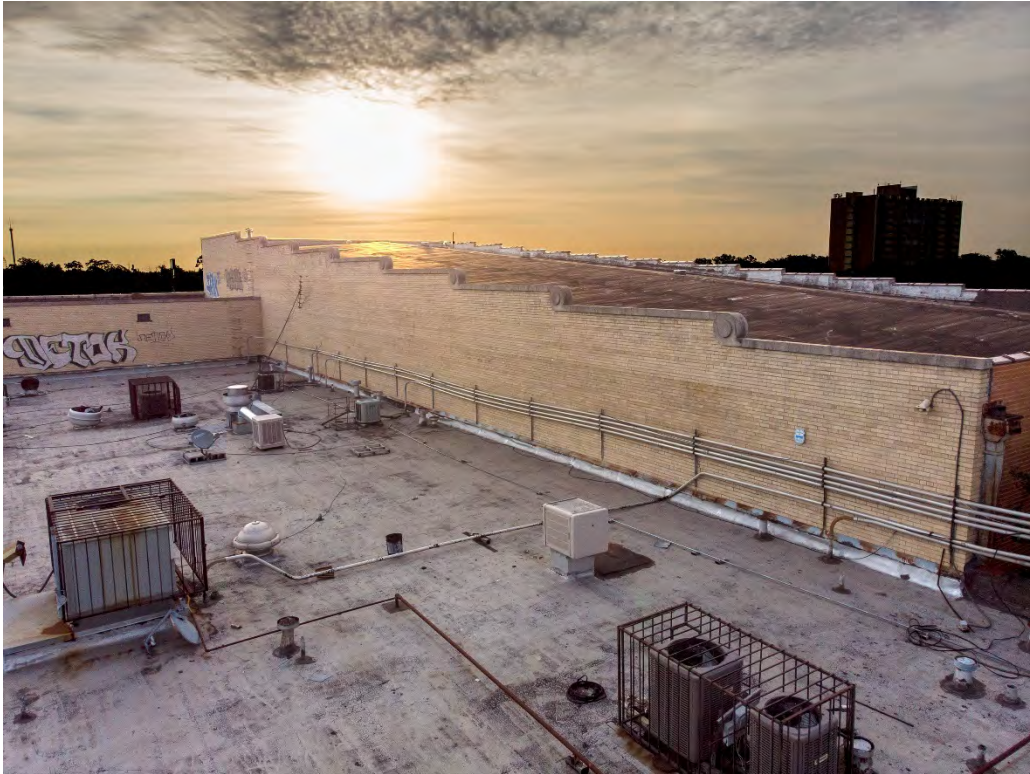


Photograph 0008 West elevation from above with neighboring building in foreground. Architexas - 6/10/2019



Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Photograph 0009 North wall of auditorium block looking southeast. Architexas - 6/10/2019



Photograph 0010 North elevation retail. Architexas - 6/10/2019



Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Photograph 0011 Retail storefronts looking southeast. McCoy Collaborative - 6/14/2019



Photograph 0012 Main theater lobby looking east to concession area. McCoy Collaborative - 6/14/2019



Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Photograph 0013 Main theater lobby looking south. Architexas - 6/10/2019



Photograph 0014 Detail of balustrade looking south at ramp. McCoy Collaborative - 6/14/2019



Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Photograph 0015 Upper lobby looking north. McCoy Collaborative - 6/14/2019



Photograph 0016 View to stage from balcony facing west. McCoy Collaborative - 6/14/2019



Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Photograph 0017 Auditorium ceiling detail looking southwest. Architexas - 6/10/2019



Photograph 0018 Retail #1906 looking south McCoy Collaborative - 6/14/2019



Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

Photograph 0019 Retail #1914 looking south. McCoy Collaborative - 6/14/2019



Photograph 0020 Retail #1916 looking south. McCoy Collaborative - 6/14/2019









STREET

COMING SOON...
AT THEATER
NEAR YOU

FILL IN THE BLANK
NAME YOUR TALENT

DISCOUNT CHANGE MONSTER

Public Storage
Storage Units
Self Storage

FIRE LANE
NO PARKING















TRUCKER'S
CAFE

TRUCKER'S
CAFE



mobile

FOREST

106
1902



















UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Nomination

Property Name: Forest Theatre

Multiple Name:

State & County: TEXAS, Dallas

Date Received: 10/29/2019 Date of Pending List: 11/18/2019 Date of 16th Day: 12/3/2019 Date of 45th Day: 12/13/2019 Date of Weekly List:

Reference number: SG100004752

Nominator: SHPO

Reason For Review:

<input type="checkbox"/> Appeal	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PDIL	<input type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue
<input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request	<input type="checkbox"/> Landscape	<input type="checkbox"/> Photo
<input type="checkbox"/> Waiver	<input type="checkbox"/> National	<input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary
<input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission	<input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource	<input type="checkbox"/> Period
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> TCP	<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years
	<input type="checkbox"/> CLG	

☒ Accept ☐ Return ☐ Reject 12/4/2019 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments: The Forest Theater is locally significant and meets National Register Criteria A and C in the areas of Entertainment/Recreation, Social History and Architecture. Located in South Dallas and built in 1949, the two-story, steel frame and clay tile theater is an exemplary local example of mid-century Streamline Moderne design. The work of prolific theater architects Pettigrew and Worley, the theater's soaring three-sided beacon sign and dramatic interiors speak to the desire of the theater developers (Interstate Theater) to capitalize on the post-war demand for suburban recreation and modern theaters. The theater's transition from an operation serving an all-white clientele to an African American theater mirrored the significant social and demographic changes witnessed in the South Dallas area during the post-war period. [Part 1 tax cert approved 8/28/18 Case No. 38947]

Recommendation/ Criteria: Accept NR Criteria A and C

Reviewer: Paul Lusignan

Discipline: Historian

Telephone: (202)354-2229

Date: 12/04/2019

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : **Yes**

TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
real places telling real stories



TO: Paul Lusignan
National Register of Historic Places
Mail Stop 7228
1849 C St, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

From: Mark Wolfe, SHPO
Texas Historical Commission

RE: Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas

DATE: October 24, 2019

The following materials are submitted:

X	Original National Register of Historic Places form on disk. The enclosed disk contains the true and correct copy of the National Register of Historic Places nomination of the Forest Theatre, Dallas, Dallas County, Texas.
	Resubmitted nomination.
X	Original NRHP signature page signed by the Texas SHPO.
	Multiple Property Documentation form on disk.
	Resubmitted form.
	Original MPDF signature page signed by the Texas SHPO.
X	CD with TIFF photograph files, KMZ files, and nomination PDF
	Correspondence.

COMMENTS:

- ___ SHPO requests substantive review (cover letter from SHPO attached)
- ___ The enclosed owner objections (do___) (do not___) constitute a majority of property owners
- ___ Other:

