

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 98000124

Date Listed: 2/19/98

Rialto Theater
Property Name

Powell
County

MT
State

N/A
Multiple Name

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.

Paul R. Ferguson
to Signature of the Keeper

2/19/98
Date of Action

=====
Amended Items in Nomination:

State Certification/Level of Significance:

The appropriate level of significance is: local.

[The original nomination did not note a level of significance.]

This information was confirmed with Lon Johnson of the MT SHPO.

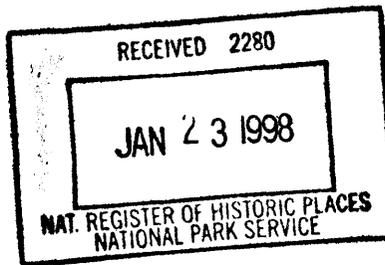
DISTRIBUTION:

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



124

1. Name of Property

historic name: Rialto Theater

other name/site number: N/A

2. Location

street & number: 418 Main Street

not for publication: n/a
vicinity:

city/town: Deer Lodge

state: Montana code: MT

county: Powell code: 077

zip code: 59722

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

1-16-98
Date

Signature of certifying official/Title

Montana State Historic Preservation Office

State or Federal agency or bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register
 see continuation sheet

 determined eligible for the National Register
 see continuation sheet

 determined not eligible for the National Register
 see continuation sheet

 removed from the National Register
 see continuation sheet

 other (explain)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

2/19/98

5. Classification

Ownership of Property: Private	Number of Resources within Property		
Category of Property: Building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing	
	ng	ng	
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	building(s)
Name of related multiple property listing: N/A	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions: Recreation and Culture, theater	Current Function: Recreation and Culture, theater
---	---

7. Description

Architectural Classification: Beaux-Arts	Materials: foundation: Concrete walls: Brick roof: Ceramic tile, asphalt other: Terra cotta
--	--

Narrative Description

The Rialto Theater is located on the west side of Main Street, between Milwaukee and Missouri avenues, in the heart of downtown Deer Lodge. Constructed in 1921, the theater embodies elements of the Beaux-Arts style of American "movie palace" architecture. The Rialto is a two-story masonry building constructed over a partial concrete basement. The long axis of the rectangular plan building is oriented east/west. The flat roof of the main portion of the building has a built-up surface; a mansard style roof along the front (east) elevation is covered with red clay tiles. The glazed brick facade faces Main Street; the rear of the building is bounded by an alley, and the two side elevations abut adjacent commercial buildings.

The north third of the asymmetrical facade contains a projecting entrance pavilion. The two-story pavilion is flanked by pairs of fluted columns with Corinthian capitals; a wide entablature rests on the columns and is topped by a wrought iron railing. The frieze of the entablature is decorated with raised terra cotta garlands. The pavilion terminates in a shaped roof parapet with a decorative terra cotta shield in the center. The street-level entrance consists of two pairs of aluminum frame storefront entry doors with fixed transoms. A wood-frame, arched, divided transom above the aluminum storefront is original to the building. This original transom is covered by a marquee that is hung from the building between the columns. The marquee consists of a horizontal metal canopy which projects from the front of the building; metal chains at either end of the marquee attach to the facade via decorated fittings. The second story above the marquee contains three, evenly spaced, six-over-six-light, double-hung windows. A single, wall-mounted globe light fixture is located on either side of this row of windows.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7

Rialto Theater
Powell County, Montana

Page 1

7. Narrative Description, continued

The remaining two-thirds of the facade contains five bays, delineated by applied architrave trim placed above and below. The trim defines two panels, one above the other within a flat wall surface of glazed brick. The lower, vertical panel is two stories in height; the first story of each panel contains a rectangular recessed display area topped with a projecting cornice that incorporates a light fixture. An oval stained glass window with a terra cotta frame is located above the display panel at the second story level. (These windows illuminate the interior ramp to the balcony.) Short, horizontal panels, containing terra cotta garlands, are located above the vertical bottom panels; the entablature of the entrance pavilion extends across the entire front of the building above these short horizontal panels.

The entablature incorporates a wide cornice with a dentilated trim course, a flat frieze decorated with terra cotta medallions, and a architrave trim at the top. The roof parapet projects above this. The parapet contains five horizontal panels outlined by architrave trim, centered over the panels below the entablature. Each panel contains a centrally placed, wall-hung, globe light fixture. The front-facing mansard roof, covered with red clay tiles rises behind the parapet. Six terra cotta urns affixed to the top of the parapet stand out against the red tile of the roof.

The rear and exposed side elevations are constructed of red brick laid in running bond with a grey mortar. The south (side) elevation contains a one-story enclosure that shelters the stair to the basement. This enclosure contains a single-entry door in the west elevation and a pair of wood doors in the south elevation. This elevation also contains the fire escape exit for the balcony level.

On the west (rear) elevation, a one-story projection with a flat roof occupies the north two-thirds of the wall. The west side of this element contains three, evenly spaced window-openings, each with a six-light hopper window. A ventilation stack for the basement boiler is located just south of this projection; it extends along the entire height of the elevation and past the edge of the roof. A double door opening located south of the ventilation stack contains a new set of steel doors (installed in 1996).

The north wall of the building is largely obscured by the adjacent building.

Interior

The interior of the building can be divided into three distinct areas. The front of the building contains the foyer with an enclosed ticket booth, the main lobby and concessions area, restrooms and the ramp to the mezzanine and balcony seating. The large central space contains the auditorium with main floor and balcony seating. The west segment contains the stage on the main floor, the fly loft above the stage and the boiler room in the basement below. As stated above, dressing rooms are located in the projecting one-story structural element on the first floor behind the stage.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7

Rialto Theater
Powell County, Montana

Page 2

The foyer has a ceramic mosaic tile floor: the word "RIALTO" is integrated into the tile at the threshold to the lobby. The foyer walls have four-foot-high marble wainscoting. The plaster walls above the wainscoting feature a painted (and gilded) border pattern. Painted egg and dart molding finishes the walls at the plaster ceiling. The ceiling features a wide painted border around the perimeter, and an original glass chandelier. The ticket booth has marble walls to about three feet, with glass above. The elaborate roof of the ticket booth has recessed panels and a projecting cornice.

The main lobby, which contains the concessions area, has a vinyl tile floor with a stepped wooden base, painted plaster walls with a painted wainscot, and a painted crown molding at the ceiling. The painted plaster ceiling has original decorative stencil patterning and pendant light fixtures. Due to water damage, the part of the lobby ceiling and west wall has been sheetrocked and painted. The original, glass-paneled marquee, which hung outside the building, is suspended over the concessions counter in the north corner of the lobby. Four arched openings lead from the lobby to the main-floor auditorium. A carpeted ramp along the east wall of the lobby leads to the mezzanine and the balcony seating area. The ramp is partially illuminated by the oval exterior windows. The wall above the landing at the end of the first pitch of the ramp, contains a painted landscape mural.

The auditorium also retains its historic-era materials and finishes. Like the lobby and concessions area, the painted plaster walls and ceiling retain the original stencils and pendant light fixtures. Elaborate gilt moldings on the theater walls frame large blocks of silk tapestry. The original radiators and wall sconces line the outside walls of the auditorium. Decorative grills in the ceiling and on the walls cover the air returns of the passive ventilation system.

The stage in the front of the auditorium has a wooden floor. A projection screen is suspended from the ceiling at the rear of the stage. The velvet stage curtains and swags are original. The fly loft contains the original hand-painted backdrops (manufactured by the Twin Cities Scenic Studios). The original orchestra pit remains directly in front of the stage, separated from the seating area by a half wall covered with beadboard and topped with a brass railing. The ceiling above the stage area contains the original, decorative grill work that covers the air return. Rows of seats (the majority of which are original to the theater) ascend on a gentle grade to the rear wall of the auditorium which contains an enclosed projection booth. Two carpeted aisles divide the seating into three sections.

The balcony area contains wall and ceiling details similar to those of the lower portion of the auditorium. The original ceiling light fixtures and vent covers remain, as well as the wall covering on the rear wall of the building. Gilded decorative moldings frame silk wall coverings. Pilasters with detailed capitals painted gold typify the walls of this level.

The area behind the auditorium, at the rear of the theater, contains the stage and dressing rooms. The dressing rooms are divided from the stage by a narrow enclosed corridor. The walls of the west wall of the corridor as well as the interior walls of the two dressing rooms and an associated toilet/washroom are finished with vertical beadboard. The interior finishing materials are original to the building.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

Applicable National Register Criteria: A and C

Areas of Significance: Social History, Architecture, Entertainment

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

Period(s) of Significance: 1921-1947

Significant Person(s): N/A

Significant Dates: 1921, 1938

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Arnold and Van Hausen (architects)

Narrative Statement of Significance**Summary**

The Rialto Theater is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under criteria A and C. Since its construction in 1921, the Rialto Theater has been a focal point for local theatrical performances and a center for entertainment within the greater community of Deer Lodge. In addition, the building embodies the characteristics of the Beaux-Arts style of architecture.

Expanded

"What you hear and what you see will linger in your memory like a beautiful dream," read the headline banner for the March 2, 1921 edition of the Powell County Press, announcing the grand opening of the Rialto Theater. That evening a full house watched "Ralph Dunbar's magnificent production of Robin Hood."¹ As the curtain rose, the audience beheld bright costumes and spectacular scenery; music from the Cremona Theater Organ, built especially for the Rialto, filled the room. The following day, the front page article in the *Silver State* detailed the attractions of the new theater: the stage, "which is of ample size to accommodate the average road show;" the dressing rooms "at the back of the stage . . . are modern in every respect;" the chairs, " . . . made by Heywood and Wakefield, one of the largest manufacturers of furniture in the country . . . the leather is of the best and with air cushion they are considered the finest to be found in any theater;" the lighting system, with fixtures from the Independent Electric Company that are "unique and pleasing to the eye;" the Cremona Theater organ "built especially for this theater and . . . equipped to produce music which is of quality and variety necessary in a modern high-class moving picture theater and vaudeville house;" and, the "beautiful (back-drop) scenery made by the Twin Cities Scenic studio of Minneapolis, who have some of the best artists in the northwest."²

See continuation page 3

¹ *The Silver State*, Deer Lodge, Montana, March 2, 1921.

² *The Silver State*, March 3, 1921 edition.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7, 8

Rialto Theater
Powell County, Montana

Page 3

Modifications

The Rialto Theater has been modified little. The only major change to the facade is the replacement of the original wooden doors leading to the ticket foyer (which were used only during the cold-weather months), with the permanent aluminum frame doors and transom in the 1950s. Overall, the Rialto Theater possesses all seven aspects of integrity; materials, workmanship and design, location, setting, feeling and association.

8. Statement of Significance, continued

Most importantly, the *Silver State* article indicated the tenor of the times, which reflected faith in the continued growth and prosperity of the city of Deer Lodge:

Deer Lodge is proud of its new theater and it congratulates Jens Hansen, the manager and owner for his enterprise in having such a magnificent building erected for the pleasure of the citizens of this pretty and thriving city. It also congratulates him on his faith in the future of the town. This large investment shows that he and his backers have confidence that the city will continue to grow and prosper and that it demands just such a show house as he has erected.

Jens Hansen Sr., owner/operator of the Rialto, came to the United States from his native Denmark. There is conflicting information regarding exactly when he arrived in Montana. A document prepared by Bernice Hansen Mannix Zosel (daughter of Jens Hansen Sr.) indicates that he arrived in 1898, and initially was engaged in the blacksmithing trade. However, the 1921 edition of the *Silver State* states that Hansen came to Deer Lodge in 1910 from North Dakota, where he had been "engaged in the moving picture business." By the time that the Rialto opened, Hansen had operated at least two other theaters in Deer Lodge; the first was in the previously existing Higgins block, and the second, the Orpheum, he constructed himself.

Construction of a theater of the scale of the Rialto required resources that were beyond Hansen's private means. Hansen formed a partnership with banker Peter Pauley, named the Rialto Theater Corporation. Pauley served as president of the corporation and Hansen served as the vice-president and general manager.

The principals in the Rialto Theater Corporation hired a Butte architectural firm, Arnold and Van Hausen, to design the Rialto. Arnold and Van Hausen designed the theater in the Beaux-Arts style. The Beaux-Arts style, originating in France's *Ecole de Beaux-Arts*, was popular between 1895 and 1920. Application of this style of architecture to theaters in particular, extended into the 1930s in ever more exaggerated decorative forms.³ This eclectic architectural style incorporates elements of classical architecture. In general, it is typified by light-colored masonry walls, with rich surface decoration (on both the

³ Carole Rifkind, *A Field Guide to American Architecture* (New York: New American Library, 1980), pp. 217-220.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Rialto Theater
Powell County, Montana

Page 4

interior and exterior surfaces), using garlands, floral patterns or shields, and pilasters or columns usually paired with Ionic or Corinthian capitals. Mansard roofs, roof or window balustrades of wrought iron, and the use of elaborate moldings, dentils and/or modillions at the cornice are also typical. The facade of the Rialto features glazed brick, Corinthian columns, terra cotta garlands, and a mansard roof with a wrought iron balustrade.

Of the principals in the firm of Arnold and Van Hausen, Walter Arnold is the best known within the state. In a 1949 letter written to the Montana Board of Examiners, Arnold identifies himself as being born in London, England, and receiving his architectural training at London Polytechnic and Kings College. Between 1908 (when he arrived in the United States), and 1915, when he settled in Butte, Arnold worked for architectural firms in Seattle, San Diego and Tacoma. It is likely that Arnold's previous experience in Europe as well as in the larger cities of the West, would have exposed him to a variety of design styles, including Beaux-Arts.

There is no evidence that the firm of Arnold and Van Hausen specialized in this style of building or in the design of theaters in general, although Arnold designed numerous commercial buildings throughout the western part of the state. However, the selection of the Beaux-Arts style for the Rialto appears to reflect a generally accepted application of the style to civic and commercial buildings, particularly to "movie palaces." Maggie Valentine, in her discussion of the development of movie theater architecture, offers the following explanation for the application of ornate architectural styles to movie theaters:

The appearance of feature-length films, which told an artistically edited story, coincided with the development of "feature" motion picture theatres--the "moving picture theater" and early palaces that celebrated the theatre form through conscious design and architectural distinction. Movies in the 1910s and 1920s were silent adventures and romances, seldom very realistic and often set in an imaginary, exotic locale. Movie palaces were equally exotic and romantic in mood so as not the break the spell until the patron left the building. Customer amenities, such as nurseries, lounges, ushers, and elaborate gathering spots, reinforced this pampering. Architects of this period employed then-popular historicist styles, stretching these styles to their limits in unheard-of romantic fantasies . . .³

It should be noted that the Rialto was constructed at the time when vaudeville was declining in popularity and moving pictures was increasing in appeal with the American public. When it opened in 1921, the Rialto could accommodate both forms of entertainment. The theater was equipped with then state-of-the-art projection equipment and an organ to provide background music for silent movies. It also possessed a stage, scenery backdrops, orchestra pit and dressing rooms for live performances. Clearly, the Rialto Theater Corporation was covering all entertainment bases with the construction of

³ Maggie Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk. An Architectural History of the Movie Theatre* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 6.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Rialto Theater
Powell County, Montana

Page 5

a multi-purpose theater. Furthermore, in addition to theatrical productions and the showing of motion pictures, the Rialto served as the venue for the production of high school plays and band concerts.

Following construction, the corporation continued to update and make improvements to the theater--especially with regard to projection technology. The first "talking" picture was shown in the Rialto on May 15, 1929. With the coming of the talkies, the original organ was sold and replaced with the "vitaphone." For the first sixteen years of operation, the Rialto had little competition. However, in 1937, the owners of Yellowstone Amusement company from Missoula reopened Hansen's old Orpheum Theater. In an effort to attract (or keep) customers, the corporation "redecorated" the Rialto in 1938. They installed new projection equipment and new seats in the auditorium, redecorated the walls of the auditorium with the silk tapestries, and installed a new marquis. Years later, Mr. Hansen updated his theater with "Cinema scope" and stereophonic sound projection equipment.⁴

Jens Hansen continued to operate the Rialto Theater until his death in 1959, after which time his son Jens Hansen Jr. managed the theater. The Rialto remained in the Hansen family until 1995, when it was purchased by the non-profit Rialto Community Theater, Inc. Since the theater's opening performance over seven decades ago, the residents of Deer Lodge and surrounding rural areas have continued to enjoy performances at the Rialto.

⁴ Interview with Jim Gilbert, November 11, 1995

9. Major Bibliographic References

Gilbert, Jim, Interview with Anna Rosenberg November 6, 1995

Rifkind, Carole. A Field Guide to American Architecture. New York: New American Library, 1980.

The Silver State, Deer Lodge, Montana.

Valentine, Maggie. The Show Starts on the Sidewalk. An Architectural History of the Movie Theater, Staring S. Charles Lee. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994.

Zosel, Bernice Hansen Mannix. Undated manuscript on file at HRA.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- X State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other -- Specify Repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property: Less than one acre

Table with 4 columns: UTM References, Zone, Easting, Northing. Values: A 12, 366582, 5139790

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the property corresponds to: the north 25 feet of the east 26 feet of Lot 12; the north 13 feet of the west 104 feet of Lot 12; the south 6 feet of the north 19 feet of the west 104 feet of Lot 12; all of Lot 13; and, the south half of Lot 14; all in Block 19 of the Deer Lodge Original Townsite.

Boundary Justification

This boundary corresponds to the city lot(s) and block occupied by the building.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title:
organization: Historical Research Associates, Inc. date: July, 1997
street & number: P.O. Box 7086 telephone: (406) 721-1958
city or town: Missoula state: MT zip code: 59807-7086

Additional Documentation

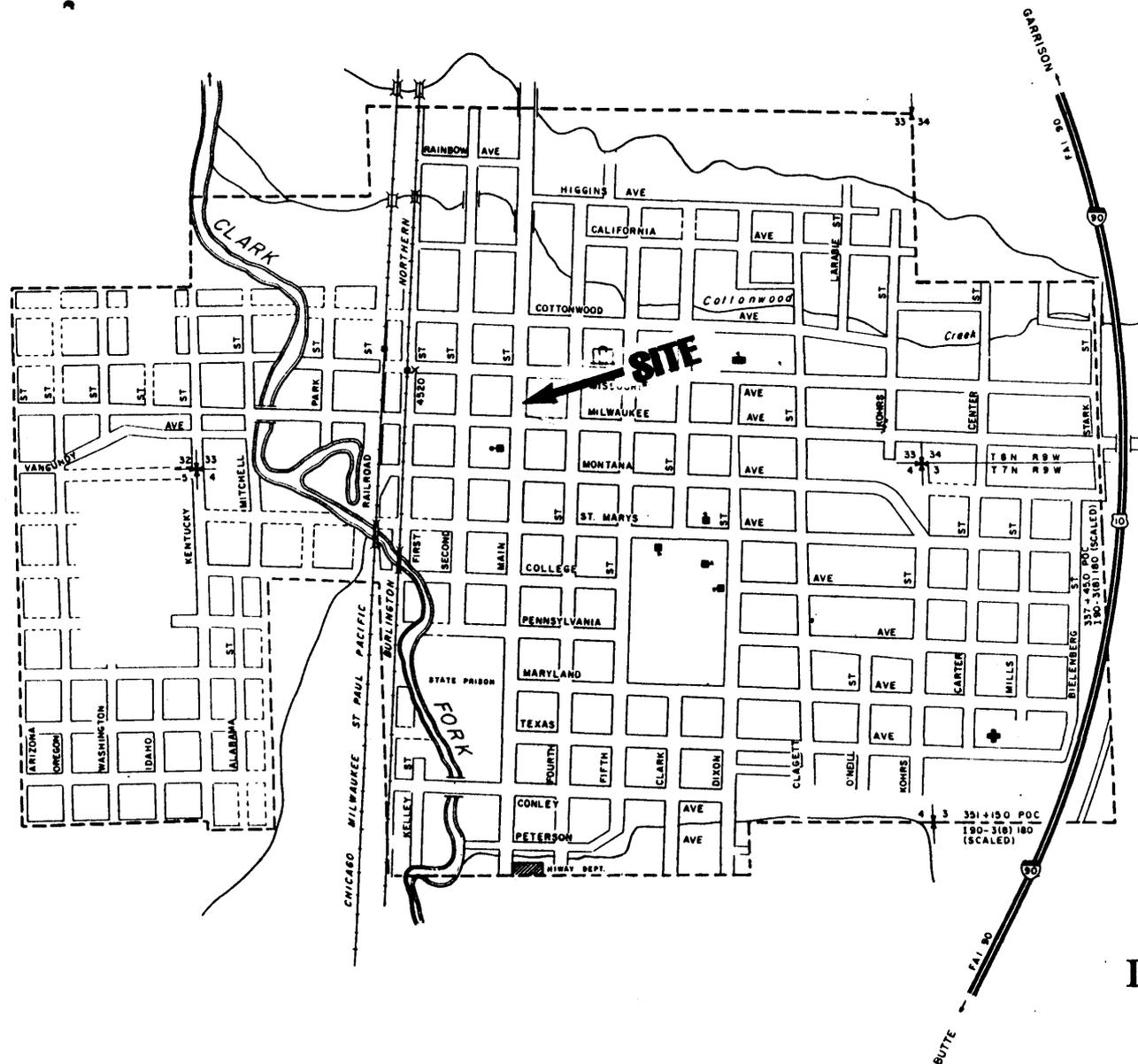
Please see attached USGS map, plat of Deer Lodge townsite, and 15 photographs

Property Owner

name/title: Rialto Community Theater, Inc.
street & number: P.O. Box 47 telephone: (406) 846-1880
city or town: Deer Lodge state: MT zip code: 59722

LEGEND

-  PROPOSED ROAD
-  GRADED AND DRAINED ROAD
-  GRAVEL OR STONE ROAD
-  LOW TYPE BITUMINOUS ROAD
-  PAVED ROAD
-  DIVIDED ROAD - TRAFFIC FLOW
-  FEDERAL AID INTERSTATE SYSTEM
-  FEDERAL AID PRIMARY SYSTEM
-  FEDERAL AID SECONDARY SYSTEM
-  INTERSTATE ROUTE MARKER
-  U.S. NUMBERED ROUTE MARKER
-  STATE ROUTE MARKER
-  OTHER ROUTE MARKER
-  CORPORATE BOUNDARY LINE
-  NON-EXISTENT DEDICATED STREET
-  CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT
-  URBAN EXTENSION BOUNDARY
-  RAILROAD AND STATION
-  POST OFFICE
-  COURT HOUSE
-  ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
-  HIGH SCHOOL
-  HOSPITAL
-  ELEVATION



CITY PLAT
DEER LODGE
 POWELL COUNTY
 MONTANA

1970 CENSUS 4,306

SCALE IN FEET



RIALTO THEATER

Copies of this map are available for a nominal cost at the Montana Department of Highways—Helena, Montana 59601

REVISED DEC 31, 1976