NPS Form 10-900
(Oct. 1990)

OMB No. 10024-0018

1548

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Hennepin Theatre

other names/site number Hennepin Orpheum Theatre; RKO Orpheum Theatre; Orpheum Theatre

2. Location

street & number 910 Hennepin Avenue ☐ not for publication N/A

city or town Minneapolis ☐ vicinity N/A

state Minnesota code MN county Hennepin code 053 zip code 55402

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 ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Ian R. Stewart 11/20/95
Signature of certifying official/Title Ian R. Stewart Date
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer
State of Federal agency and bureau Minnesota Historical Society

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

☒ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.
☐ removed from the National Register.
☐ other, (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Edson H. Beall 1.19.96
Entered in the National Register

Hennepin Theatre
Name of Property

Hennepin County, Minnesota
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☐ private
- ☒ public-local
- ☐ public-State
- ☐ public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
- ☐ district
- ☐ site
- ☐ structure
- ☐ object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and culture: theater

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and culture: theater

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals:
Beaux Arts

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete
walls Brick
Terra Cotta
roof Concrete
other Granite
Composition (roof)

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- [X] **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- [ ] **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- [X] **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- [ ] **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is: N/A

- [ ] **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- [ ] **B** removed from its original location.
- [ ] **C** a birthplace or grave.
- [ ] **D** a cemetery.
- [ ] **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- [ ] **F** a commemorative property.
- [ ] **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture
Performing Arts

Period of Significance

1921-1945

Significant Dates

1921

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Kirchhoff, Roger (architect)
Rose, Thomas L. (architect)

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography
(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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

Name of repository:

Hennepin Theatre
Name of Property

Hennepin County, Minnesota
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

UTM References
(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.) Minneapolis South, Minn. 1967, revised 1993

	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	15	478120	4980190
2			
3			
4			

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Susan Granger and Kay Grossman

organization Gemini Research date April 15, 1995

street & number 15 E. 9th Street telephone (612) 589-3846

city or town Morris state MN zip code 56267

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items
(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name

street & number telephone

city or town state zip code

US GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE : 1993 O - 350-416 QL 3

7. DESCRIPTION

The Hennepin Theatre is located on the block bounded by Hennepin and Hawthorne Avenues and Ninth and Tenth Streets in downtown Minneapolis. Surrounding the theater are several circa 1910 two story commercial buildings, a circa 1960 motel, a circa 1960 bus depot, and several asphalt-paved parking lots.

The Hennepin Theatre is an excellent example of the Beaux Arts style which was designed by the Milwaukee firm of Kirchhoff and Rose. It was built in 1921 by the Thompson-Starrett Company of Chicago at a cost of approximately $1,017,500 and is largely intact. The theater's plan consists of two separate but connected structures--a narrow, two story lobby building facing Hennepin Avenue and a much larger seven story auditorium building facing Ninth Street. This site plan was probably devised to give the theater a facade on Hennepin Avenue, Minneapolis' popular entertainment strip, while the bulk of the building was located on the western side of the block. Separate original building permits for the foundations were issued in January and February of 1921. The permit for above-grade construction, issued February 28, 1921, lists each building by its separate street address (908-910 Hennepin and 19-27 Ninth Street) and provides each building's individual dimensions and height: the lobby portion was to measure 36 feet wide by 145 feet deep, and the auditorium and stagehouse portion was to measure 110 feet wide by 182 feet deep (Nord 1995; Miller Dunwiddie 1989).

The lobby building, facing Hennepin Avenue, has a three-bay, two-story main facade which is faced in textured light-brown brick and gray glazed architectural terra cotta, with a gray granite base. The side walls of the lobby wing are constructed of cream-colored common brick. The main entrance originally consisted of five pair of wood and glass doors set into wooden frames with leaded glass transom lights. Today the entrance is comprised of new metal and glass doors with metal-enframed transom lights. The main entrance is flanked by original cast iron poster display cases. The outer edges of the second story feature smooth, paired terra cotta pilasters with simple capitals. The inner bay is flanked by two fluted pilasters with Ionic capitals with egg and dart molding. The pilasters enframe rectangular window openings with multi-paned double casement windows with multi-paned transom lights. There is a molded blind fanlight above the central window and rectangular panels above the outer windows which are decorated with bas relief urns and floral designs. The pilasters rest on the facade's first story cornice and support an entablature at the top of the facade. This entablature has medallions at the frieze and a cornice with dentils and egg and dart molding, and supports a parapet wall. The parapet wall originally had sections of open balustrade with urn-shaped balusters. Six terra cotta vases originally rested on the balustrade above the pilasters.

The theater's entrance was originally protected by a flat, cast iron canopy with a coffered metal ceiling and display lettering along its edge. The canopy was hung just below a narrow horizontal band of plate glass windows in the lobby facade. Rising above the canopy was a vertical marquee with letters reading "Hennepin." In 1933 the canopy was replaced by a larger, more ornate horizontal marquee which covered the narrow band of plate glass windows, and a larger vertical marquee which read "Orpheum." This vertical marquee was positioned higher on the building than the original marquee and projected well above the lobby building's roofline. In 1948, a new triangular, horizontal marquee was installed, topped by a vertical marquee which also read "Orpheum."

The auditorium and stagehouse portion of the theater consists of a large Period Revival style brick building with a red ceramic tile pent eave on the Ninth Street facade. It is faced with light-brown textured brick with tan-colored mortar joints, contrasting dark-brown brick trim, and gray glazed architectural terra cotta. It has a reinforced concrete foundation and a concrete and steel-supported roof.

The massing of the auditorium and stagehouse is dominated by large square, corner brick towers which project above the roofline. The brick towers have broad surfaces with diamond-shaped brick patterning. They are topped by trios of rounded-arched windows beneath terra cotta cornices with egg and dart molding and dentils.

On the Ninth Street facade the towers flank a large, slightly projecting six-bay-wide rectangle in which brick pilasters define the bays and enframe the windows. The pilasters, which have terra cotta capitals, support an entablature with a decorated terra cotta architrave and cornice. Within the brick frieze are six square windows, three of which contain original triangular panes of glass. Above the entablature is a pent eave covered with red ceramic tiles.

Between the pilasters, six rounded-arched window openings at the second story have terra cotta jambs, keystones, and transoms. Multi-paned double casement windows and multi-paned transom lights were originally set within the openings. At the bottom of each second story window are urn-shaped balusters in an open balustrade which is supported by large paired modillions. The third story has smaller, rectangular window openings which originally had multi-paned casement sash and transom lights. A few of the window openings on the Ninth Street facade contain original multi-paned sash and the rest contain new, single pane replacement sash.

The wide rectangular terra cotta-enframed entrance opening at the center of the Ninth Street facade is filled with new, metal, paneled doors with new textured-glass transom lights. At the base of the corner towers are similar doors set into segmental arched openings with radiating voussoirs. Above the doors are terra cotta tympanums on which are affixed cast iron lamps. On the first story of the Ninth Street facade, the six-course American bonded brickwork is laid so that the stretcher courses project slightly and the header courses are recessed.

The Hawthorne Avenue facade consists of a row of six large rounded arches of brick decorated with terra cotta keystones, springing blocks, and medallions. This facade has several fire escape exits which originally led to metal stairways. Today there are new iron balustrades across these exits and the metal stairways have been removed. The brick tower at the corner of Hawthorne Avenue and Tenth Street contains many narrow rectangular window openings which have been filled with brick. These windows lit several floors of dressing rooms originally located within the tower. The Tenth Street facade of the building, which matches the Hawthorne Avenue facade, has blind rounded arches, brick corner towers, and terra cotta trim. The Hennepin Avenue side of the auditorium building is undecorated and faced with common brick.

Recent exterior renovation of the theater began in 1988-1989 when new roofs were installed on both portions of the building under the direction of Minneapolis architects Miller Dunwiddie Associates. In 1993 the theater underwent more extensive work under the direction of Minneapolis architects Hammel, Green, and Abrahamson with Knutson Construction as general contractor. The exterior renovation included cleaning, repairing, and repointing brickwork, terra cotta, and roof tiles; unboarding, repairing, and replacing windows; renovating entrances; and remodeling the horizontal and vertical marquees on the Hennepin Avenue facade. The project included expansion of the theater's technical areas to allow it to host large Broadway shows. The Tenth Street wall was moved approximately 20 feet closer to Tenth Street to expand the back of the stagehouse. A new Tenth Street facade, designed to match the original facade, was built using 7,000 bricks salvaged from the original wall and new matching terra cotta trim. A low, 5,000 square-foot dressing room addition was built onto the Hennepin Avenue side of the stagehouse, and the nearby loading dock area was expanded with a one-story entrance addition, a new concrete-paved drive, and simple iron fencing.

The interior of the theater is ornate. The vestibule within the Hennepin Avenue entrance originally had a marble floor, a plaster coffered ceiling, terra cotta walls, and a centrally-located ticket booth (Miller Dunwiddie 1989). Today, the Tenth Street wall of the vestibule is faced with multi-colored, glazed architectural terra cotta and has three rounded arches

enframed by ornate pilasters with Ionic capitals. The pilasters support a frieze which has three panels decorated with mythical animals, garlands, and urns. This wall was uncovered in 1993 and inspired the renovation of the rest of the vestibule. A set of new multi-paned double-leaf doors with multi-paned transom lights separates the vestibule from the lobby.

The outer and inner lobbies were originally separated by mahogany and glass doors but now comprise a continuous, long, wide hallway that leads toward the multi-level foyer immediately outside of the auditorium (Miller Dunwiddie 1989). The outer lobby has six ornate, elliptically-arched terra cotta panels with Pompey-inspired bas relief griffins, garlands, and terra cotta pilasters which were rediscovered and renovated in 1993. There are ornate plaster circles in the ceiling with lights hanging from the center of each. At the top of the side walls are ornate plaster entablatures which support the ceiling's elliptical arches. The inner lobby, which originally contained the manager's office, is more reserved in design and is decorated with recessed plaster forms which are outlined with ornate molding and flanked by pilasters. At the top of the walls are entablatures with dentils. The lobbies originally had terrazzo floors, brass lighting fixtures, flocked wall paper, and leaded and etched glass. The walls, ceilings, door frames, lights, and other detailing have been renovated in a manner sensitive to the original theater's design.

The three-level foyer is a 17-foot-wide corridor which curves around the auditorium and moves patrons from the inner lobby to the auditorium doors and from the auditorium to the exit vestibules of the Ninth Street facade. The foyer has plaster-covered walls and ornate detailing. The two upper levels of the foyer are successively less ornate than the main floor (Miller Dunwiddie 1989). Stairways, restrooms, and entrances to various levels of auditorium seating are located off the foyer.

The auditorium is wide and shallow with gracefully curved seating which brings the audience close to the stage. It is known for its clear sight lines and excellent acoustics. The auditorium has a curving balcony which is steeply raked and has a number of entrances at several levels. Flanking the balcony are four boxes on either side of the stage. The auditorium has plaster-covered walls with ornamental molding which traces and embellishes elegant arches, enframes door openings, and decorates the facades of the balcony and boxes with garlands, entablatures, pilasters, and medallions. At the top of the room is a large ornate dome whose curved ceiling was covered with 30,000 4-inch-squares of aluminum leaf during the 1993 renovation. The auditorium was originally painted in shades of rose and cream and decorated with gilt.

The performance area is marked by a 54-foot-wide, 29-foot-tall, elliptically-arched proscenium. Flanking the proscenium are two arches which originally contained grilled openings for the Hennepin's Wurlitzer organ. The organ has been removed and the openings are now covered with curtains. The stage originally had a brightly-painted fireproof asbestos curtain. The stage was originally 35 feet deep, but was extended approximately 20 feet toward Tenth Street in 1993. The wings are now 20 feet and 26 feet wide, and the gridiron, from which scenery is suspended with a counterweight system, is located 65 feet above the stage floor. There was originally a large steel cage backstage in which to keep performing animals.

The theater originally had several elevators and a drive-in loading ramp to accommodate touring productions. The basement originally contained property rooms, the coal-fired furnace, an electric generating plant, and an elaborate artesian well air conditioning system.

The interior of the theater has been painted and redecorated several times throughout its history. In 1988-1989 mechanical systems were repaired and replaced and portions of the interior were repaired, repainted, and recarpeted (Nord 1995). During the 1993 renovation, the auditorium seating was partly renovated and partly replaced so that the theater now accommodates 2,650 people in comparison to its original 2,928 seats. The stage curtains and rigging were replaced and the orchestra pit was expanded. A new chandelier was hung from the auditorium's dome. In the vestibule, walls and the ceiling were renovated and a new ticket office was added. A concession stand was added to the lobby. Throughout the building, terrazzo floors, hardware, lighting fixtures, and doors were repaired or replaced, some with parts salvaged from other vintage theaters. Original moldings, friezes, frescoes, and other decorative elements were uncovered behind wallpaper and paneling and were renovated. Missing plasterwork was recreated by studying original photographs and matching existing pieces. The theater's original rest rooms, dressing rooms, set-building and storage facilities, offices, mechanical systems, and other technical facilities were remodeled.

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Architect/Builder, continued:

Thompson-Starrett Company (builder)

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Hennepin Theatre is eligible for the National Register under Criterion C in the area of Architecture and under Criterion A in the area of Performing Arts. The theater is architecturally significant as an excellent example of its property type and as the largest and one of the most ornate theaters of its vintage surviving in the Twin Cities. It is historically significant for its associations with the history of vaudeville, the performing arts, and popular culture in Minneapolis and for its associations with the Orpheum circuit, one of the country's two leading vaudeville circuits. The property is significant within the statewide historic context entitled "Urban Centers, 1870-1940" and within the City of Minneapolis' historic context entitled "Culture, Fine, and Applied Arts, 1883-Present."

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Hennepin Theatre, built in 1921, is an excellent and basically intact example of the large, ornate vaudeville houses which were constructed in major U.S. cities between 1900 and the 1920s. With its palatial auditorium and ornate lobby, the Hennepin typifies the extravagance with which vaudeville theaters were designed and constructed. Vaudeville owners and managers believed that theatergoers would repeat their experience often if their ticket bought a visit to fantasy, beauty, and luxury, along with the show. The facades of these theaters, many of which were Beaux Arts in style, were often colorful and heavily ornamented to stand out from neighboring commercial buildings. Like stage sets themselves, the theater interiors were carefully designed theatrical showpieces with terra cotta and plaster often used in place of the more expensive marble and other stone which they were fashioned to resemble. The interiors were lavish, with large lobbies, marble stairs, carpeted corridors, pilasters and columns, statues, richly decorated boxes, sculpted wall ornaments, and ornate framed mirrors. Color schemes were often gold, cream, and pale blue (Snyder 1989, 88-89, 97-98). Vaudeville houses of the early 1920s served as models for the movie theaters built only a few years later, many of which were even more fantastic in design (Naylor 1981).

With an original capacity of 2,928 patrons, the Hennepin Theatre was advertised as the "biggest vaudeville theater west of New York" (Minneapolis Journal 1921). During the first two decades of the 20th century, a

2,000-seat theater was considered a moderately-sized house and an optimum size to maximize profits while preserving a sensation of direct contact between the audience and the performers. The Palace Theatre in New York City, considered to be that city's finest vaudeville house when it was built in 1912-1913, had 1,736 seats (Snyder 1989, 88). Keith's Royal Theater, built in New York in 1918, had 2,070 seats. While it may have been the largest vaudeville house in the region for a time, the Hennepin's seating was surpassed the next year by Cleveland's luxurious Palace Theatre, a Keith-Albee vaudeville house which opened in 1922 with 3,680 seats and was promoted as the greatest of all vaudeville theaters.

The Hennepin Theatre was designed by the Milwaukee partnership of Kirchhoff and Rose. The firm was established about 1896 by Charles Kirchhoff (1856-1915) and Thomas Leslie Rose (1868-1935). Roger C. Kirchhoff (1890-1976), Charles' son, joined the firm shortly after Charles Kirchhoff's death in 1915. Thomas Rose was also succeeded by his son. In 1931 Kirchhoff and Rose was the oldest architectural firm in continuous existence in Milwaukee (Gregory 1931, 501; Nord 1995).

Charles Kirchhoff had been the son of a German immigrant cabinetmaker who settled in Milwaukee prior to the Civil War. He studied architecture in Boston and New York before returning to Milwaukee in the 1880s. From approximately 1885 to 1896, Kirchhoff maintained an independent architectural practice. During this time he designed the Alhambra Theater in Milwaukee which was built in 1890. He died in 1915. Roger C. Kirchhoff studied architecture at the University of Illinois where he graduated in 1913. He practiced in New York City until joining the firm circa 1916. He worked at Kirchhoff and Rose until 1937. Thomas Rose was born in New York City, the son of English-trained sculptor James M. Rose. Rose received his professional training in the Chicago office of architect James J. Egan and attended the Chicago Art Institute. He practiced in Milwaukee beginning in 1883 with Henry Starbuck until Starbuck retired, and then joined Kirchhoff circa 1896 (Gregory 1931, 233-234, 501-502).

During their first 40 years, the firm designed a number of buildings in Milwaukee including the Marquette University Dental School, Mount Olivet Lutheran Church, St. John's Episcopal Church, and several banks and commercial buildings. They specialized in the design of theaters and commercial buildings, and won several commissions from the Orpheum circuit. The firm designed the Majestic Theatre and office building (1907), the Palace Theatre (1915), the Garden Theatre (1921), and the Riverside Theatre and office building (1929)--all in Milwaukee--as well as the Palace Theatre (1913) in New York City, the Seventh Street Orpheum (1904) and the Hennepin Theatre in Minneapolis (1921), the Princess Theatre (1909) in Chicago, and the Orpheum Theatre (1910) in Winnipeg.

The Hennepin Theatre is also significant as one of only a handful of grand theater showplaces which remain in what was once Minneapolis' theater district. Many of the city's earliest halls and theaters had been clustered along Washington Avenue, close to the Mississippi River, beginning in the 1850s. These included Harrison Hall (1864) at Washington and Nicollet Avenues (razed), the Academy of Music (1872) at Hennepin and Washington Avenues (razed), the Casino Music Hall at 220 Washington Avenue (razed), and Orchestrion Hall (1889) at 210 Washington Avenue South (razed). The opening of West Hotel at Fifth Street and Hennepin Avenue in 1884 helped draw entertainment businesses southward from Washington Avenue along Hennepin until Hennepin Avenue became the city's premier entertainment strip (Millet 1992, 114).

Theaters built along Hennepin Avenue included the Hennepin Avenue Theater (legitimate) (1887), the People's Theatre (legitimate) (1887) and its replacement the Bijou Opera House (1890), the Metropolitan Opera House (legitimate) (1894), the Seventh Street Orpheum (vaudeville) (1904), the New Garrick (vaudeville) (1907), the Crystal (motion picture) (1909), the Sam S. Shubert (legitimate) (1910), the New Palace (vaudeville) (1914), the Strand (1915), the Pantages (vaudeville) (1916), the State (vaudeville) (1921), and the Hennepin Theatre (vaudeville) (1921). Of these theaters, only the Sam S. Shubert, the Pantages, the State, and the Hennepin are still standing.

Today the Hennepin Theatre is also the largest surviving theater of its vintage in the Twin Cities. Comparable extant vaudeville and legitimate theaters in Minneapolis are the State (1921) which originally had 2,400 seats, the Sam S. Shubert (1910) which had 1,511 seats, and the Pantages (1916, later the Mann) which had 1,099 seats. Comparable extant theaters in St. Paul are the Sam S. Shubert (1910, later the World, now the Fitzgerald) which originally had 1,255 seats and the New Palace (1916, later the St. Paul Orpheum) which had 2,300 seats. Other large Twin Cities theaters which have been razed include Minneapolis' Seventh Street Orpheum (1904) with a capacity of 1,800, the New Palace (1914) which was Minneapolis' largest vaudeville house with 2,000 seats when it opened in 1914, and the Minnesota (later Radio City) Theater (1928) a vaudeville and movie house which had 4,056 seats.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF VAUDEVILLE IN MINNEAPOLIS

Vaudeville, which developed in the 1860s and 1870s in New York City, was usually comprised of music, singing, dancing, and comedic skits performed in a series of short, independent acts. It differed in focus and audience from legitimate theater, in which a single full-length drama was usually performed, and its tickets were far less expensive.

Vaudeville drew its inspiration from other forms of popular theater such as melodrama, minstrel shows, burlesque, and variety acts, but was less risque then the infamous variety shows and burlesque. It developed as many of the sexual inuendos and coarse jokes were removed from burlesque to make it more acceptable to middle class, family-oriented audiences, and as patrons were no longer served liquor and cigars during the show (Snyder 1989, 12). Early vaudeville producers such as Keith and Albee trained audiences to quietly watch performances rather than cheering and booing, attracted women and children into the audience, and culled undesirable patrons from the theaters (Snyder 1989, 32-33). Instead of burlesque's can-can dancers, so-called respectable vaudeville featured jugglers, acrobats, buffoons, clowns, comedians, animal acts, singers, dancers, and actors in melodramatic and slapstick sketches. Vaudeville acts were chosen and retained for their maximum audience draw (Snyder 1989, 107-129). Many shows included acts of ethnic comedy which appealed to the country's immigrant population. Silent movies were added to the shows by the 1910s. Vaudeville also helped popularize ragtime, bringing it from the urban "underworld" and African American culture into mainstream popular culture in the 1890s through the 1920s (Snyder 1989, 135-136).

Vaudeville became especially popular around the turn of the century when it gained tremendous, broad popular appeal. Around 1900 many wage earners enjoyed increased disposable income and leisure time with which they explored new forms of entertainment (Steiner, 1933, 8-10). Many people attended vaudeville shows weekly. At the turn of the century the construction of vaudeville theaters to accommodate traveling road shows mushroomed nationwide. These grand and glittering showplaces were designed to attract and impress audiences with their size, dramatic architecture, and opulent furnishings (Allis and Hagen 1993, 10).

Although there was wide variation in vaudeville styles and types through the years, vaudeville houses were often distinguished as either "small-time" or "big-time" houses. Small-time houses were aimed at the working class and had less expensive tickets. Both types of theaters had several shows daily. Big-time houses, like the Hennepin Theatre, were aimed at the middle class and featured more talented and higher-paid performers. Big-time theaters often booked and promoted with great fanfare individual stars such as W. C. Fields, Jack Benny, Edgar Bergen, Jimmy Cagney, Eddie Cantor, the Marx Brothers, and dancer Ruth St. Denis. Many American actors who later became film and television stars began their careers in vaudeville. In 1919, near the peak of vaudeville's success, there was work for an estimated 8,000-9,000 performers nationwide (Snyder 1989, 46). Despite an image more virtuous than variety and burlesque, vaudeville still continued to push at the limits of established society. "By the teens and early twenties, vaudeville was often concerned with the culture that was replacing Victorianism: sensual, expressive, individualist, and slightly cynical" (Snyder 1989, 151).

Around the turn of the century, the vaudeville market nationwide was dominated by several large national chains or circuits including the Keith-Albee circuit and the Orpheum circuit. The Keith-Albee circuit, established in New York City in 1893 by B. F. Keith and Edward F. Albee, became a booking and production monopoly which was the largest and most influential of about 22 vaudeville circuits which were operating in the U.S. in the 1920s (Snyder 1989, 37). Keith-Albee eventually dominated the industry in the eastern United States.

Keith-Albee's major competition in the West, including Minneapolis, was the Orpheum circuit, which was established in 1899 in California by Morris Meyerfield, owner of San Francisco's Orpheum Theatre, and Martin Lehman, owner of a vaudeville house in Los Angeles. By 1905, booking out of Chicago, the Orpheum circuit controlled 17 houses between Chicago and the West Coast. Martin Beck, who was originally a house manager in one of the West Coast theaters, married Meyerfield's daughter and succeeded his father-in-law as president of the circuit in 1920. By 1923, two years after the circuit built the Hennepin Theatre in Minneapolis, the Orpheum company led by Beck was booking a circuit of more than 250 theaters in the western U.S. from offices in New York.

In addition to booking and producing shows, vaudeville circuits built their own theaters, or arranged for them to be built with local capital and then leased them. Circuits like the Orpheum linked performers with individual theater managers and owners, booking acts in a prearranged route from city to city. Because circuits could guarantee steady work for performers, they attracted major stars. For theater managers and owners, circuits guaranteed that a particular act would show up for the performance for which it was booked. Circuits like the Orpheum and Keith-Albee exercised powerful control over performers' fees, theater receipts, and wages and labor conditions, and strongly resisted the formation of actors' and stagehands' unions.

The Orpheum circuit had entered the Minneapolis market by 1904 when the 1,800 seat Seventh Street Orpheum Theatre was built at 25 Seventh Street South (razed between 1930 and 1945). The Hennepin Theatre, built by the circuit in 1921, soon superceded the Seventh Street Orpheum and became the major theater of the Orpheum circuit in Minneapolis. In St. Paul, the Orpheum circuit opened the St. Paul Orpheum in 1906 (razed). In May of 1922 the circuit expanded in St. Paul by leasing the 2,300-seat New Palace Theater which had been completed in 1916 (extant). The Orpheum circuit's competition in Minneapolis came from leading vaudeville houses such as the Unique (1904), the New Garrick (1907, later the Century), the Gayety (1909), the Miles (1909), the Princess (pre-1910), the New Palace (1914), the Pantages (1916, later the Mann), and the ornate State Theatre (1921), and large vaudeville and movie theaters such as the Minnesota (later Radio City) Theatre (1928).

Most were located downtown. Of these Minneapolis theaters, only the State and the Pantages are still standing.

The Hennepin Theatre, Minneapolis' largest vaudeville house, opened on October 16, 1921, about 15 months after the Orpheum circuit commissioned Kirchhoff and Rose for its design. The theater opened with the Marx brothers, who shared the billing with Servais Leroy's celebrated mystic act, "Sawing a Woman in Half." The program was comprised of eight or nine acts and was accompanied by the Hennepin Theatre's own orchestra, under the direction of Albert Rudd. The best seat in the house was 47 cents, and children could see the show for 9 cents. (In contrast, tickets to the Shubert Theater, a legitimate theater located two blocks away, ranged from 50 cents to $2.50 in 1920.) The Hennepin presented vaudeville shows at 1:30, 3:45, 6:30 and 8:45 p.m. "Feature photoplays" were shown at 12 noon, 2:45, 5:00, 7:45 and 10 p.m. daily. During its first week in business, the Hennepin played to 70,000 people. Just as the theater opened, the Orpheum circuit began to distribute written programs to its audiences, a practice which had previously been restricted to legitimate theater (The Orpheum 1979). The circuit also tried to increase the patronage of women by offering a playroom and daycare services for children at the theater (Allis and Hagen 1993, 11).

For nearly a decade, vaudeville flourished at the Hennepin. George Jessel, Jack Benny, Fanny Brice, George Burns and Gracie Allen, and many others appeared on its stage (The Orpheum 1979). In the late 1920s, however vaudeville began to decline with the arrival of sound motion pictures. Silent motion pictures had been introduced to American audiences just before the turn of the century and were popularized between 1900 and 1910. The first motion picture theaters were built around 1910. Vaudeville houses then began to combine movies with vaudeville, or were converted into houses which showed movies exclusively. By 1927 when the first talking motion picture was produced, movies were a huge success.

As the vaudeville market began to contract, the Orpheum and Keith-Albee circuits merged in 1928. About two years later the merged company combined with the Radio Corporation of America to form Radio-Keith-Orpheum, known as RKO. RKO was one of five companies which dominated U.S. film distribution in 1930. The Hennepin Theatre was thereafter known as the Hennepin Orpheum and the RKO Orpheum, and began to show more movies.

During the Depression, RKO tried to retain audiences by lowering ticket prices and by offering free admission to children in exchange for food and used clothing to be given to the needy. The RKO Orpheum also provided ticket-sales jobs to the unemployed to help them make contacts with patrons who might offer them permanent jobs (Allis and Hagen 1993, 12).

In 1933 the RKO Orpheum was acquired by the Singer Chain, another national theater group. A new sound system was installed in 1933 for the showing of the film "Little Women" starring Katherine Hepburn. The system was said to be unexcelled in the Northwest and similar to one at Radio City in New York (Allis and Hagen 1993, 12). The movie industry, at first hit by the Depression, had begun to recover by 1934. The years 1934-1960, in fact, were marked by rapid growth and incredible profits. Hollywood drew stars away from live theater, and movies assumed the role that vaudeville had enjoyed in American popular culture. The movies' most lucrative years were 1940-1946 when newsreels brought reports of foreign battlefields to the home front during World War II. In 1946, the peak year of sales nationwide, over 4 billion movie tickets were sold (Valerio and Friedman 1982, 35).

The RKO Orpheum was a "first run" movie theater. In the 1940s and 1950s, film producers often opened their films in Minneapolis with live promotions. For example, a marching band saluted John Wayne's "Flying Leathernecks," and there was a square dancing performance in the street to promote Bob Hope's "Alias Jesse James." Film stars touring first run theaters like the RKO Orpheum made appearances at selected showings (The Orpheum 1979). In 1953 a wide, 25-foot-by-55-foot movie screen was installed in the theater to present "Miracle Mirror Cinemascope" with stereophonic sound. It was the first screen of its type in Minneapolis (Allis and Hagen 1993, 12).

Concerts by big bands were also featured at the RKO Orpheum, replacing vaudeville as a source of live entertainment. In the late 1930s through the 1940s, well known bands such as Tommy Dorsey, Count Basie, and Benny Goodman performed once a month for a week's run with three performances daily (The Orpheum 1979). During the 1940s the theater also hosted touring productions of Broadway shows. In 1949 a last full-scale attempt was made to bring vaudeville back to the RKO Orpheum. It was abandoned after seven months, unable to compete with movies, radio broadcasts, and the coming of television (The Orpheum 1979).

For ten years the RKO Orpheum showed films until 1959 when Ted Mann purchased the theater from RKO and the theater again hosted touring Broadway productions through 1965. Mann sold the Orpheum to General Cinema Corporation in 1970. It was purchased by singer Bob Dylan and his brother David Zimmerman in 1984, and was sold to the City of Minneapolis in 1988. Beginning in 1988 the Orpheum presented rock concerts, films, and touring shows. It reopened after its recent renovation on January 14, 1994.

In conclusion, the Hennepin Theatre is architecturally significant as an excellent example of its property type, as a rare survivor of the theaters which once comprised downtown Minneapolis' entertainment district, and as the largest theater of its vintage in the Twin Cities. It is historically significant for its associations with the role of vaudeville in the history

of commercial theater and popular culture in Minneapolis, and for its associations with the Orpheum circuit, one of the leading purveyors of vaudeville in the country.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

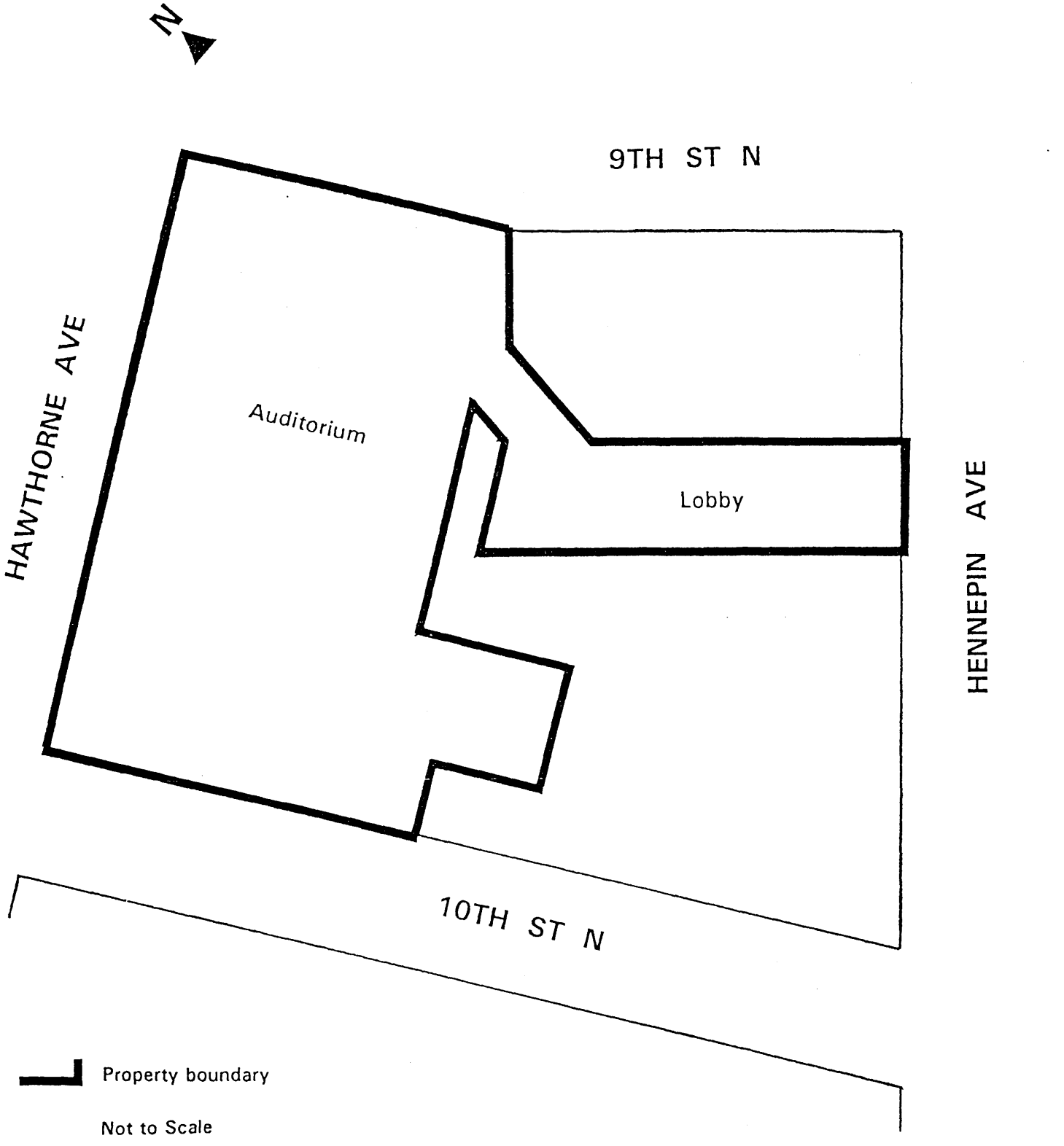
Verbal Boundary Description:

Lots 2-3, Auditor's Subdivision 126, City of Minneapolis, Hennepin County.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary of the nominated property includes the parcel historically associated with the Hennepin Theatre.

Hennepin Theatre
Minneapolis, Hennepin County



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