

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections



1. Name

historic RUBY THEATRE

and/or common RUBY THEATER

2. Location

street & number 212 Main St, N/A not for publication

city, town Three Forks N/A vicinity of congressional district Montana First

state Montana code 030 county Gallatin code 031

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<u>N/A</u>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name William Sebena

street & number 510 South Main

city, town Three Forks N/A vicinity of state Montana

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Gallatin County Courthouse

street & number

city, town Bozeman state Montana

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town state

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

In 1916 E. C. Waddell, owner/manager of the Ruby Theatre, employed the professional services of architect Wellington Smith of Butte to design a permanent theater building for the small railroad town of Three Forks. The building of a theater of this size in a small community whose major claim to fame was that it was a departure point for the Milwaukee Railroad's summer tourist traffic to Yellowstone National Park was a considerable undertaking. Visitors could stay at the Sacajawea Hotel (listed in the National Register of Historic Places) across from the Three Forks Depot or (after 1927) travel by train to the equally famous Gallatin Gateway Inn, (also listed in the Register). From these points the visitors went by touring car up the Gallatin Canyon to the Park. But the Ruby was built by and for local residents; the tourist had little impact on plans for its construction.

The Ruby Theater is a concrete structure faced with red brick on the front facade. The building is two stories in the front with a single story auditorium extending to the rear. Two retail stores flank the entry to the theater lobby on the first floor. North of one of the commercial spaces, a door leads to a staircase to the second floor. Mrs. Ralph Wilcox, who moved to Three Forks in 1909, recalls that there were a doctor's office, a dental office and a lawyer's office on the second floor at one time.

Later the second floor was converted to two apartments. They, like the rest of the building, are now vacant. Upstairs, there is a short hallway paralleling the street. From it, an outside door on the north wall opens onto an outside stair. The inside stair also connects to this hallway. The center-loaded corridor has doorways that lead into the rooms.

The lobby of the theater opens into a corridor also parallel to the street from which two openings give access to the auditorium. Two aisles lead to the front or stage area. Of interest are the loges enclosed by low walls located at the rear of the theater. The stage is raised and framed by a proscenium arch. The theater seats 400 -- a considerable number for the town, then and now.

Compositionally the front of the building is divided into three sections in addition to the setback enclosed hallway/staircase. A metal canopy runs across the entire front of the building. The second floor has three large window units, each containing three windows set in semi-circular brick arches. The soldier bricks of the arches are buff in color, contrasting nicely with the red brick of the facade. Between and flanking these large window units are small rectangular windows having flat lintels. A larger rectangular window lights the stair landing.

In the center of the relatively plain pressed metal cornice the name "Ruby Theatre" appears in raised letters in a rectangular panel that extends above the main cornice line. Beneath the cornice there is a single row of buff colored soldier bricks. A buff colored stringer course consisting of a row of soldier bricks, two rows of horizontal bricks and a row of butt-ended bricks delineates the second floor line.

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCRS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 2

The part of the building that houses the theater lobby, the downstairs rental spaces and the upstairs apartments has a flat roof. Above the auditorium and stage area are large wooden trusses that support the gable roof over that section.

The appearance of the Ruby Theater has changed very little in 65 years. The canopy now extends over the entire front rather than just over the theater lobby entrance, and new store fronts and doorways have been installed on the first floor. Except for these minor alterations, the Ruby Theatre has retained its essential design and material integrity.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1916 **Builder/Architect** D.M. Anderson/Wellington Smith

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Ruby Theatre in Three Forks, built in 1916 to replace an earlier frame theatre building, represents the second phase of commercial construction, typical of many fledgling Montana communities and characterized by the erection of more permanent, masonry buildings. The theatre remains a very prominent structure on Three Forks' Main Street and testifies to the high aspirations embraced by this small railroad town only a few years after its founding. In addition to its entertainment offerings, the Ruby Theatre also served as the community meeting hall for many years.

The town of Three Forks owes its existence to the fact that the Chicago, St. Paul and Milwaukee Railway chose this location for a division point. The first lot sale was held on September 17, 1908 when 72 lots were sold by the Milwaukee Land Company agents. Within a week buildings were being constructed all over the townsite; a hardware store, a barber shop, a general store and a printing office were housed in tents or frame buildings with tent roofs. The town was incorporated on December 20, 1909. By 1911 the population had increased to about 2,300 people.

About this time the Empire Theatre was opened, operated by D. Russell (Slim) Byrd. A few years later the theater was known as the "Ruby Theatre," reportedly named for Ruby Langdon who became Mrs. Byrd. The Theater was then purchased by E. C. Waddell who presented such early movies as "Anna Karenina," "The Idler," and "The Girl I Left Behind Me," as well as live road shows, magicians and high school plays. The movies, all silent, were accompanied by piano players who set the mood for the scenes on the screen.

In 1916 Waddell had plans for a new theater prepared by Wellington Smith, an architect from Butte. Construction began in May, 1916; the first show in the new building was given on November 8, 1916. "Birth of a Nation" was presented in January, 1917, followed by other epics, good movies and bad movies. Lon Chaney, Marie Dressler, Rudolph Valentino, Tom Mix, The Three Stooges, and many, many others appeared on the Ruby screen. The Ruby primarily offered movies for entertainment, but travelling theatrical troupes also played there. For example, "Ole the Swede," a live show, was heavily advertised in March, 1920. Also in that year a lecture sponsored by the Non-Partisan League, a local band concert, and the Armistice Day observation were held at the Ruby.

The piano players were no longer needed to make the music after the "talkies" came in, but the movies continued to forge a communications link between the isolated town in Montana and the world, both real and imaginary, beyond. With few changes either externally or internally, the Ruby Theater continued to serve the people of Three Forks for about 60 years.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Frances Denning, Growing Pains, Publ. by School District J-24, Three Forks, Montana, 1975.
Three Forks Herald (Newspaper), Nov. 9, 1916; 1920; Sept. 9, 1977
Three Forks News (Newspaper), April 20, May 18, May 25, Oct. 19, 1916
Lyle Williams and Mrs. Ralph Wilcox, residents of Three Forks; personal communications

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 0.17 acres

Quadrangle name Three Forks, Montana

Quadrangle scale 1:62500

UMT References

A

12	4	5	7	2	0	0	5	0	8	2	1	0	0
Zone	Easting			Northing									

B

Zone	Easting			Northing									

C

Zone	Easting			Northing									

D

Zone	Easting			Northing									

E

Zone	Easting			Northing									

F

Zone	Easting			Northing									

G

Zone	Easting			Northing									

H

Zone	Easting			Northing									

Verbal boundary description and justification

Original Plat, Three Forks, Block 16, Lots 5 & 6
T1N, R1E, Section 25

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title John N. DeHaas, Jr., Architect

organization Montana State University

date April 4, 1981

street & number 1021 South Tracy

telephone (406)586-2276

city or town Bozeman

state Montana 59715

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Marcello Sherfy

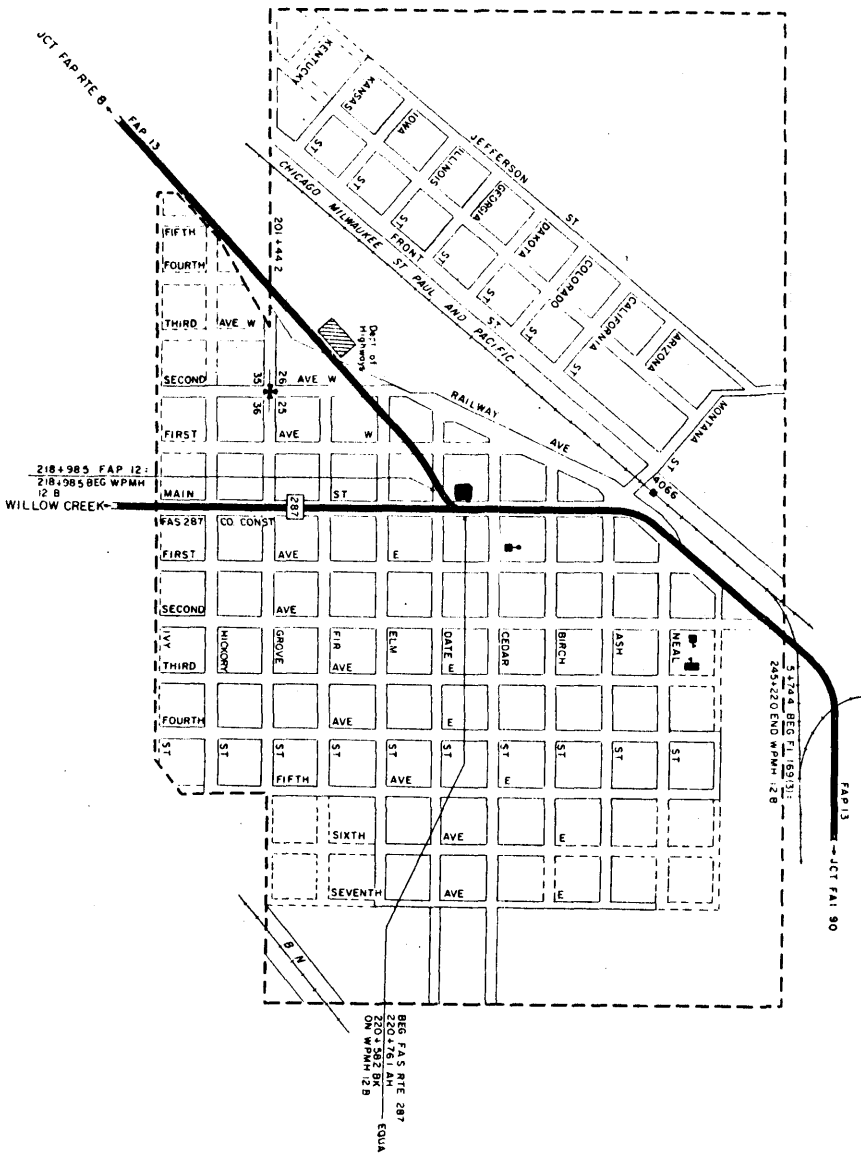
title

Deputy SHPO

date

3-10-82

RUBY THEATRE
 212 Main Street
 Three Forks, Montana
 Gallatin County



- PROPOSED ROAD
- GRADED AND OPENED ROAD
- GRAVEL OR STONE ROAD
- LOW TYPE BITUMINOUS ROAD
- PAVED ROAD
- DIVIDED ROAD - TRAFFIC FLOW
- FEDERAL AID INTERSTATE SYSTEM
- FEDERAL AID PRIMARY SYSTEM

- FAS 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
- ELEVATION

LEGEND

T 2 N O R I E

CITY PLAT
THREE FORKS
 GALLATIN COUNTY
 MONTANA
 1970 CENSUS 1,188
 SCALE IN FEET
 0 600 1200

REVISED DEC 31, 1976

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