

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

## DATA SHEET

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

JUN 6 1978

DATE ENTERED

SEP 1 1978

**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

Walnut Street Theatre.

AND/OR COMMON

Same

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

416 West Walnut Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

3 &amp; 4

CITY, TOWN

Louisville

VICINITY OF

STATE

Kentucky

CODE

021

COUNTY

Jefferson

CODE

111

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
DISTRICT	PUBLIC	X OCCUPIED	AGRICULTURE MUSEUM
XBUILDING(S)	X PRIVATE	X UNOCCUPIED	COMMERCIAL PARK
STRUCTURE	BOTH	WORK IN PROGRESS	EDUCATIONAL PRIVATE RESIDENCE
SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION		ENTERTAINMENT RELIGIOUS
OBJECT	IN PROCESS	YES: RESTRICTED	GOVERNMENT SCIENTIFIC
	BEING CONSIDERED	YES: UNRESTRICTED	INDUSTRIAL TRANSPORTATION
		NO	MILITARY OTHER
			athletic club

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Kentucky Towers, Inc. c/o George Underhill

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Kentucky Towers 430 West Walnut Street

STATE

CITY, TOWN

Louisville

VICINITY OF

Kentucky

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Jefferson County Court House

STREET &amp; NUMBER

531 West Jefferson

STATE

CITY, TOWN

Louisville

Kentucky

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

## 7 DESCRIPTION

### CONDITION

EXCELLENT  
 GOOD  
 FAIR

DETERIORATED  
 RUINS  
 UNEXPOSED

### CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED

### CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED      DATE \_\_\_\_\_

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Walnut Street Theatre built in 1910 is situated on the south side of Walnut Street between Fourth and Fifth Streets in Louisville's downtown commercial district. The theatre is close to the River City Pedestrian Mall, the Cathedral of the Assumption and the Seelbach Hotel, which will soon be undergoing restoration.

The structure has a Walnut Street frontage of 82 feet and extends southwardly from Walnut 148.5 feet to an alley.

The building is composed of brick with decorative ornament in stone and colored tile or polychromatic terracotta. The building is a three-story structure of eclectic style. Classical and arts and crafts motifs are both present in the facade. The second and third stories of the facade remain unaltered. These stories are unified by five bays, consisting of stone arches which contain the windows on both floors. A large panel, with a lozenge motif decorated in colored tiles or polychrome terracotta and carved stone, divides the windows. The stone arches of the bay have a Corinthian keystone. The wall area between the bays are of terracotta colored brick. The large stone brackets of the cornice extend into the wall area between the bays, terminating in a stone panel and cartouche of classical detailing and richness. These brackets are the only decorative elements of the wall areas between the arches. The treatment of the upper stories continues around each side of the building for one bay.

The hip roof is now covered in shingles but was originally in red tile. The extended cornices is embellished by a corbel table and is supported by the previously mentioned stone brackets. Above each bay is a stone panel which is in the area of a frieze. The panels are treated as individual and self-contained units and are divided from each other by the stone brackets rather than running in a continuous frieze. The decoration of these panels is primarily geometric in what is probably polychromatic terracotta. The panels, bordered in stone consist of a central medallion of red terracotta with a green band and a white rosette in the center. The side areas of the panels are rectangular bands with one concave side abutting the center medallion. These areas are decorated in ivory terracotta squares with each alternating square segment carrying a carved leaf form. One of the most striking features of the upper stories of the building, when considering the original tile roof, is the rich interplay of textures and colors.

The first floor is divided from the upper stories by a plain stone string course. The first floor has been converted into two store fronts and an entrance to an athletic club. One store front has verticle yellow wood siding and pseudo-Georgian trim and the other has green wood siding and cedar shakes. The lower facade of the adjoining Kentucky Tower Apartments continues across the athletic club. All of these lower facade treatments are veneers which could be easily removed.

The first floor of the Walnut Street Theatre is limestone which appears to have been painted in at least some areas in recent years. Originally this story consisted of five archways which corresponded to the five bays of the upper stories. The piers of the arches

## 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES      1910      BUILDER/ARCHITECT      John Eberson?

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Walnut Street Theatre is an important architectural element in the early twentieth century development of downtown Louisville. The building also may be one of the early vaudeville houses of the famous theatre designer John Eberson. The shifts in use of the theatre from vaudeville, to legitimate stage, to film characterizes the evolution in entertainment media which the American public patronized through this century.

The Walnut Street Theatre opened on August 29, 1910 as a vaudeville house. The Courier-Journal of August 30, 1910 called it "the latest edition to Louisville's handsome play-houses is a model in every respect." The Walnut Street Theatre changed hands several times after vaudeville became less popular. For one year in 1930 it is listed as the Ritz Theatre. The theatre was changed in 1933 to the Drury Lane, which offered both quality road shows and amateur stage production. Some interior redecoration was to have been done at that time. The canopy was replaced by a more standard marquis, which covered only the central arch. In 1942, the Drury Lane became the Scoop Theatre. The Scoop Theatre, originally, showed only newsreels. There were only five such theatres which had this format in the country. A broadcasting studio was set up in one of the store areas of the building, which broadcast news into the theatre. A local cameraman was hired which allowed local events also to be shown. This was the first studio of its type in the United States. The theatre interior was also remodeled at this time. The marquis was "updated", with the addition of a large globe. The Scoop was extremely popular during the war but had to turn to showing classic films in the late 1940s. In 1952, the building was purchased by the Brown Hotel Corporation and used as a convention center and storage areas.

The attribution of an architect of the Walnut Street Theatre poses some problems at this time. An article in the Courier-Journal of May 2, 1909 reports the initial organization of the Walnut Street Land Company and the plans for the theatre. The Louisville architectural firm of McDonald and Dodd are mentioned as having "submitted plans for the new play house and bids for its construction will be opened June 23."

Kenneth McDonald and William J. Dodd were well known regional architects and many of Louisville's most respected turn of the century buildings were their design. McDonald (1852-1940) was active in Louisville from about 1878-1914. He was a partner in the firm of McDonald Bros (1887-1901) and also in partnership with J. F. Sheblessy before working with Dodd in the firm McDonald and Dodd (1908-1914). William J. Dodd received his early training in Chicago. He also had several partners in Louisville including O. C. Welhe and Mason Maury (1889-1896). McDonald and Dodd designed the Temple Adath Israel in 1905-1906 (National Register 1974), the YMCA building in 1913 (National Register 1977) and Western Colored Branch Library 1908 (National Register 1975). (For a more detailed account of McDonald and Dodd see National Register form for Western Colored Branch Library.)

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Caron Annual Directory of the City of Louisville. 1909 (through 1913).

"Drury Lane Theatre." The (Louisville) Courier-Journal, 17 September 1933.

"Drury Lane Expected to be Most Popular Theatre in City." The (Louisville) Times, 2 October 1933.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Approx. 1/4 Acre

QUADRANGLE NAME New Albany, Ind.-Ky.

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A [1] 6 [60,86,0,5] [4,2] 3,4 [20,0]

ZONE EASTING

NORTHING

C [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

B [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

ZONE

EASTING

NORTHING

D [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

E [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

F [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

G [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

H [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]

### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Block 13E

Lot 50

City of Louisville

### LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Mary Jean Kinsman

Marty Poynter Hedgepeth Research Assistants

ORGANIZATION

DATE

Landmarks Commission

April 28, 1978

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

727 West Main Street

587-3501

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Louisville

Kentucky

## 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 National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*Claude W. Melton*

TITLE

State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE *5/25/78*

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE *9-1-78*

ATTEST: *W. M. Melton*

DATE *8-18-78*

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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CONTINUATION SHEET Walnut St. Theatre ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

are vertically in line with the brackets of the cornice. Stores were incorporated into the original plan, with the central arch serving as the entrance to the theatre. A band of incised stone work was the main decorative motif around the arches. Originally a very graceful canopy extended across the lower facade just below the string course. The canopy also consisted of five arching elements. At the adjoining point of each arch was a cartouche of matching design to the ones under the brackets on the upper story. The upper edge of the canopy was decorated by a pearl mold adding to the lightness and delicacy of the design. This is no longer extant.

Nothing of note is left of the original interior decor which from contemporary description was a most stunning combination of marble, mahogany and hundreds of electric lights. The lobby was originally 15 feet wide and 43 feet long. The main auditorium was decorated in buff and gold with mahogany seats. The balcony was carried by two twelve foot girders which eliminated the need of columns on the floor. The theatre seated 1200 persons. It was reportedly fireproof being constructed of reinforced concrete and steel.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Walnut St. Theatre ITEM NUMBER

8 PAGE 2

The day after the opening of the theatre the Courier-Journal (August 30, 1910) reported on the event. An interior description of the building was given as well as a review of the acts. A banquet was held after the opening performance at the Rathskellar Room of the Seelbach Hotel. (National Register 1975) and all persons who were connected with the theatre were in attendance. This included the investors from both Louisville and Hamilton, Ohio. No mention is made, however, of McDonald and Dodd but rather several references are made to John Eberson. The article states, "John Eberson of Hamilton, who designed the theatre, was the recipient of many compliments on the attractiveness of the building." Mention is also made of a "switchboard designed by John Eberson. From there all of the lights of the house are controlled as is all the fire proof scenery, which is hoisted, lowered and shifted by a patented electrical apparatus."

John Eberson (1875-1954) came to the United States from Rumania in 1901. He had received some formal training in technical engineering in Vienna but no architectural experience. He operated an electrical supply and contracting shop in St. Louis. In this capacity he met George Johnson, a St. Louis contractor-architect and a scenic designer and theatre promoter. With Johnson, Eberson became involved in theatre design and construction. In 1908 he opened an architectural office in Hamilton, Ohio. He designed a large number of vaudeville theatres across the Midwest and South and became known as "Opera House John." Though Eberson designed commercial buildings and over 500 theatres, he is best known for his atmospheric theatres of the 1920s. The Majestic Theatre of Houston, 1923; the Avalon Theatres of Chicago, 1927; and the Lowe's Theatre of Louisville, of 1928, (nominated to the National Register), are just a few examples of his atmospherics." Unfortunately, little has been recorded about his vaudeville houses.

Three persons from Hamilton, Ohio figured prominently in the formation of the Walnut Street Theatre. O. M. Bake and Ben Straus were on the Board of Directors and Thomas Ward, the general manager of the theatre, were all of Hamilton. John E. McCarthy of Hamilton, Ohio was also at the opening night's celebration. Mr. McCarthy was president of the National Vaudeville Association. Possibly these persons could have been responsible for bringing John Eberson into the theatre project after the initial announcement of the plans submitted by McDonald and Dodd. The original announcement called for the theatre to be built in six months but it actually was completed in sixteen months. The inclusion of another party into the architectural design could have possibly caused the delays. The interior of the theatre must have surely been Eberson's in concept. The marble and mahogany set off by hundreds of electric lights is highly theatrical in its effect and relates to his later theatres in the novelty of its treatment. The sophisticated electrical switchboard and electrical scenery apparatus are clearly Eberson's devises by the newspaper's account. Unfortunately nothing is left of the theatre's interior.

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**CONTINUATION SHEET** Walnut St. Theatre **ITEM NUMBER** 8 **PAGE** 3

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The possibility remains that Eberson did only the interior of the building and McDonald and Dodd executed the exterior design. The use of geometric decoration combined with classical elements is by no means inconsistent with their work of this period. The YMCA building of 1913 is characteristic of McDonald and Dodd's work in this vein. The Walnut Street Theatre is not listed among McDonald and Dodd's known works.

It seems most likely that Eberson designed the entire building which would have been consisted with his later working habits. The inclusion of shops in the theatre building is a practice he followed in his later theatres. The upper floors of the Walnut Street Theatre contained apartments. In Eberson's later theatres entire office towers were constructed over the theatre to take maximum advantage of expensive central city land. If the theatre is accepted as an early Eberson vaudeville theatre its architectural significance becomes of the upmost importance due to the lack of information about his work of this period.

The structure is important not only as an early design by John Eberson, a noted theatre architect but is important in the development of the downtown area of Louisville in the early twentieth century. The area near 4th and Walnut exhibits many structures from the early twentieth century. Thus the Walnut Street Theatre is an important building both architecturally and historically in the development of the City of Louisville.

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SEP 1 1978

CONTINUATION SHEET Walnut St. Theatre ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 2

"Drury Lane Site to become Casino." The (Louisville) Herald Post.  
1 August 1935.

"Drury Lane to Become Newsreel Theatre." The (Louisville) Courier-Journal,  
18 January 1942.

"Drury Lane to Close." The (Louisville) Courier-Journal, 8 January 1934.

"Drury Lane with New Stock Company." The (Louisville) Courier-Journal.  
20 February 1938.

Jefferson County (Kentucky) Deed Book 4484, p. 58 (1972); Book 1768, p. 120  
(1940); Book 797, p. 225 (1913); Book 699, p. 41 and 73 (1909); Book 633,  
p. 35 (1905).

"Leased Ground for Proposed New Theatre." The (Louisville) Courier-Journal,  
2 May 1909.

Martin, Boyd. "Drury Lane Theatre." The (Louisville) Courier-Journal,  
3 October 1933.

Quenroe, Elroy. John Eberson in Richmond Virginia: Architect for the  
Twenties. Master's Thesis. University of Virginia, March 1975.

"Scoop Changes Management." The (Louisville) Courier-Journal, 1949 June 5.

"Scoop Theatre." The (Louisville) Courier-Journal, 13 September 1942.

"Scoop Theatre Sold to Brown Hotel." The (Louisville) Times, 11 November 1952.

"Walnut Street Theatre." advertisement, The (Louisville) Courier-Journal,  
28 August 1910.

"Walnut Street Theatre Opens its Doors." The (Louisville) Courier-Journal,  
30 August 1910.

Withey, Henry and Elise Rathburn Withey. Biographical Dictionary of American  
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DATE ENTERED	SEP 1 1978

Walnut Street Theatre

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER

PAGE

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ADDENDUM

The Walnut Street Theatre was built in 1910 and is believed to have been designed by John Eberson, architect of numerous vaudeville theatres in the South and Midwest. The building remains a significant structure in the downtown area and reflects the architectural development of the city's business and commercial section in the early twentieth century. Today, the theatre remains in close proximity to the Cathedral of the Assumption and the Seelbach Hotel, both of which are listed on the National Register.

Although altered several times since its construction, the theatre facade still possesses a substantial degree of its original fabric and architectural integrity. Based on information currently available, it would appear that the siding, wood shingles, and the pseudo-Georgian entrance have merely been appended to the five-bay, limestone facade of the first floor. Thus it would be possible to remove these modern attachments and reveal the first floor in its original state. Although plans have not yet been finalized, owners of a downtown cafeteria have recently expressed an interest in renovating the first floor for use as a restaurant and restoring the facade to its original appearance.

None of the original interior decor remains with the exception of the theatre ceiling which is now covered by modern acoustical boards. However, the elaborately designed ceiling adorned with plaster relief lion heads is preserved behind the newer ceiling.

Both the second and third floors are currently occupied, one by an athletic club and the other as office space. These upper floors were never designed to be associated with the theatre but, instead, were to serve as apartments. Consequently, although altered, most of the building space remains in use with plans to again utilize the first floor and return the facade to its original condition.



Walnut Street Theatre  
420 West Walnut JUN 6 1978  
Louisville, Jefferson, Kentucky  
Sanborn Map Co. (1972)  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
Map 1. Sanborn Map.

SEP 1 1978

SCALE, 1" = 60'

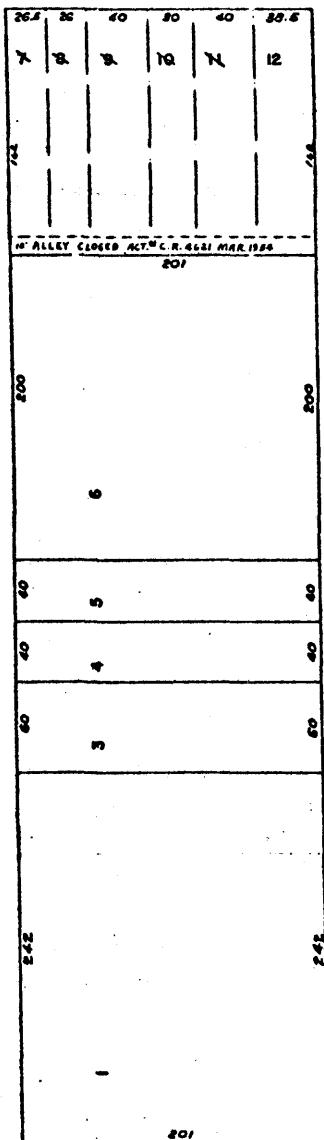
**THOS. F. BURKE  
JEFFERSON COUNTY TAX COMM'R**  
**R. J. TAPPEHORN - CHIEF DRAFTSMAN**  
**DRAWN. 8-26-39 F/**

## WALNUT

ST. 60

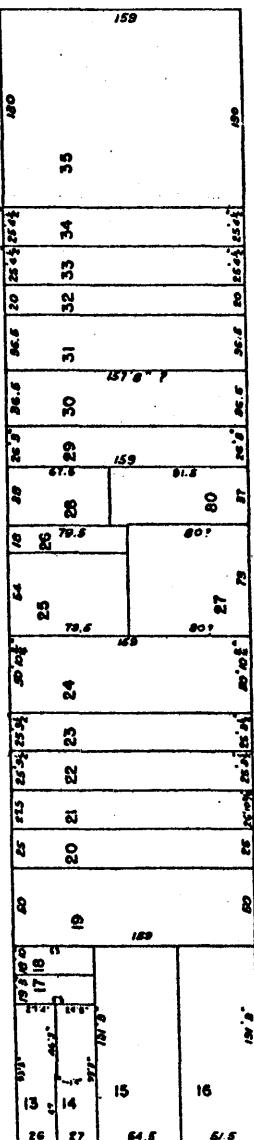
ST. 60

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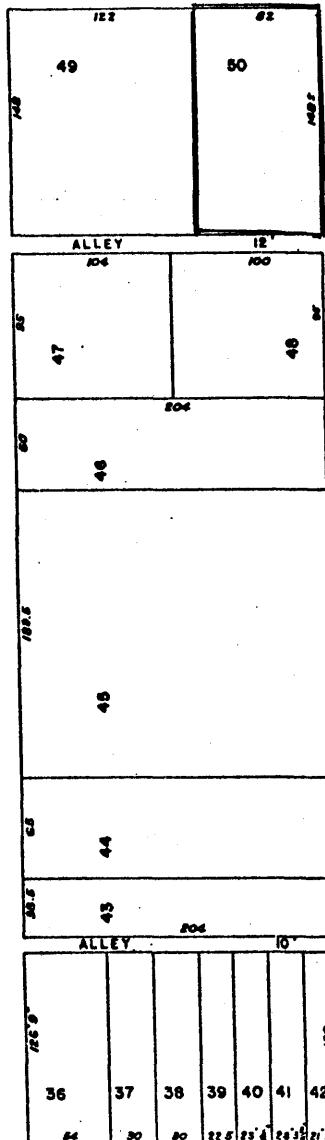
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PLACE 60'



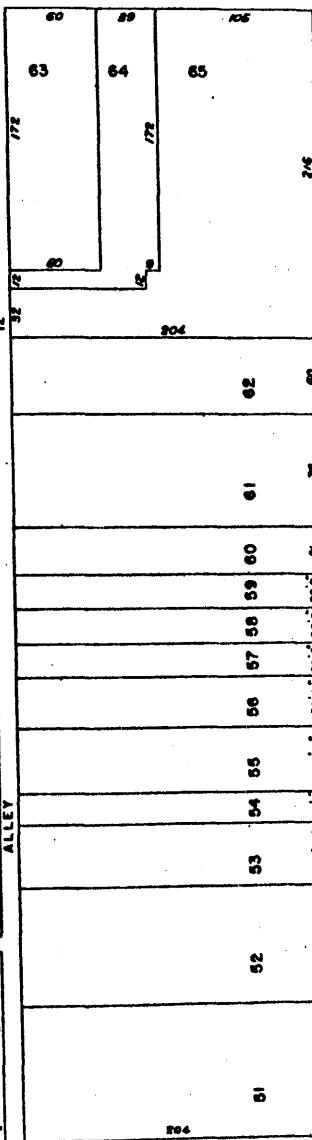
60

• SAE 8-5/1938



## CHESTNUT

ST.



ST. 60.

Walnut Street Theatre  
420 West Walnut  
Louisville, Jefferson, Kentucky  
Real Estate Atlas  
Jefferson County, Kentucky (1968)  
Miami, Florida  
Map 2.

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