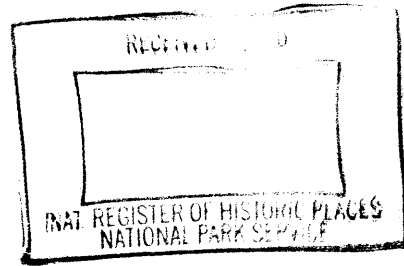


1200

(Oct. 1990)

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM**



**1. NAME OF PROPERTY**

**HISTORIC NAME:** El Raton Theater  
**OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER:** N/A

**2. LOCATION**

**STREET & NUMBER:** 115 North Second Street  
**CITY OR TOWN:** Raton  
**STATE:** New Mexico **CODE:** NM **COUNTY:** Colfax **Code:** 007

**NOT FOR PUBLICATION:** N/A  
**VICINITY:** N/A  
**ZIP CODE:** 87740

**3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 x locally. (   See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

*Kathleen Slich*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official

*27 November 2006*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

State Historic Preservation Officer

State or Federal agency and bureau

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
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
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

*for  
Edson W. Beall*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action  
*1.17.07*

---

**5. CLASSIFICATION**

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**OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY:** Private

**CATEGORY OF PROPERTY:** Building

<b>NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:</b>	<b>CONTRIBUTING</b>	<b>NONCONTRIBUTING</b>
	1	0 <b>BUILDINGS</b>
	0	0 <b>SITES</b>
	0	0 <b>STRUCTURES</b>
	0	0 <b>OBJECTS</b>
	1	0 <b>TOTAL</b>

**NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES PREVIOUSLY LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER:** 0

**NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING:** *Movie Theaters in New Mexico, 1905 to 1960*

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**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

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**HISTORIC FUNCTIONS: RECREATION AND CULTURE:** theater (movie theater)

**CURRENT FUNCTIONS: RECREATION AND CULTURE:** theater (movie theater)

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**7. DESCRIPTION**

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**ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: LATE 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS:** Late Gothic Revival

**MATERIALS: FOUNDATION:** CONCRETE

**WALLS:** BRICK

**ROOF:** ASPHALT

**OTHER:** GLASS

**NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION** (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-9).

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**8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

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**APPLICABLE NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA**

- 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.
- 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 VALUE, 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:** N/A

**AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE:** ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION; ARCHITECTURE

**PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE:** 1930-1956

**SIGNIFICANT DATES:** 1930

**SIGNIFICANT PERSON:** N/A

**CULTURAL AFFILIATION:** N/A

**ARCHITECT/BUILDER:** George M. Williamson, architect

**NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE** (see continuation sheets 8-10 through 8-12).

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**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES**

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY** (see continuation sheet 9-13).

**PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION ON FILE (NPS):** N/A

- 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:**

- State historic preservation office (*Historic Preservation Division, Office of Cultural Affairs*)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository:

---

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

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**ACREAGE OF PROPERTY:** less than one acre

**UTM REFERENCES**    Zone Easting    Northing  
                          1 13    549960    4084188 (NAD83/WGS84)

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION** Lot 20 and the north 16.5 ft of Lot 21 of Block 1 in the Original Raton Town Plat, Raton, Colfax County, New Mexico.

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION** The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the theater.

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**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

---

**NAME/TITLE:** David Kammer, Ph.D.

**ORGANIZATION:** consulting historian

**DATE:** June, 2006

**STREET & NUMBER:** 521 Aliso Dr. NE

**TELEPHONE:** (505) 266-0586

**CITY OR TOWN:** Albuquerque

**STATE:** NM

**ZIP CODE:** 87108

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**ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION**

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**CONTINUATION SHEETS**

**MAPS** (see attached *Raton , N. Mex.— Colo.* USGS quadrangle map)

**PHOTOGRAPHS** (see continuation sheet Photo-14)

**ADDITIONAL ITEMS** N/A

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**PROPERTY OWNER**

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**NAME:** Francis Eigenberg

**STREET & NUMBER:** P.O. Box 1199

**TELEPHONE:** (719) 589-1015

**CITY OR TOWN:** Alamosa

**STATE:** CO

**ZIP CODE:** 81101

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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El Raton Theater  
Raton, Colfax County, New Mexico

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### Description

Located in the heart of Raton's downtown commercial district, El Raton Theater is a two-story building with a concrete foundation, brick walls and a mixed flat and gambrel roof. The façade is symmetrical and is topped by a crenellated parapet flanked by small towers and employs a variety of details including blind arcades, decorative brackets, oriels for lighting effects, and polychromatic finishes suggestive of a Late Gothic Revival style castle. Paired wood casement windows with small-light fixed transoms line the second story office and apartment spaces, and a large marquee topped by a vertical "El Raton" neon sign extends over the sidewalk. Two commercial spaces flank a deeply recessed entry broken into two sections by two sets of paired modern commercial doors located behind a free-standing ticket booth. A concession counter added after the construction of the theater lines the wall separating the lobby from the auditorium, and a stairway at the north side of the lobby leads to a second story lounge with restrooms as well as a balcony that once seated 135, but is no longer used. Accessible from the lobby from a discrete stairway on the south side is the manager's office and two spaces that formerly functioned as apartments. The auditorium seats 385 and faces the stage set within a proscenium that recreates a medieval castle with atmospheric back-lighting. The castle-like details of the façade and accompanying atmospherics of the auditorium are singular among New Mexico motion picture theaters. With few alterations, El Raton Theater retains a high degree of integrity as to location and setting, design, materials, workmanship and feeling.

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Reflecting the narrowing valley below Raton Pass in which the city of Raton is located, Second Street, the main commercial street, parallels the extensive railroad yards located one block to the east. As the town grew, the early line of commercial buildings facing the railroad yards was augmented by the development of Second Street. By the 1920s, when Second Street became the alignment of U.S. 85 prior to the completion of Interstate 25, it had surpassed First Street as Raton's main street. The community's first modern theater, the Schuler, appeared along Second Street followed in 1930 by El Raton Theater. While the buildings along Second Street display various stylistic designs reflective of changing popular tastes, none offer as striking and memorable a façade as does the fanciful castle-like El Raton Theater designed by George M. Williamson.

The recent break in the block's historic street wall with the replacement of the building immediately south of El Raton Theater exposes a side wall of the building (Photo 1). It reveals the contrast between the red bricks facing the side wall and the tan, brown and blonde bricks of the façade punctuated by white concrete decorative details. It also reveals the varied roofline of the theater in which a flat roof extends over the front and rear sections of the building and a gambrel roof defined by a brick parapet overlies the auditorium (Photo 1).

The façade, referred to at the time of its construction as representing a "Medieval Spanish castle," is symmetrical (*Raton Daily Range* 1/12/30 3). Two second-story apartments flanking the manager's office located above the commercial spaces on the ground floor extend slightly forward beyond the central portion marking the deeply recessed entry to the lobby. The parapet further reflects this plan with a significant step-down over the

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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El Raton Theater  
Raton, Colfax County, New Mexico

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middle section. Crenelles line the entire parapet and are punctuated with towers with a molded brick coping (Photo 1). The upper façade of the second story is lined with a series of large white concrete brackets flanking small ornamental blind arcades topping smaller brackets located over the eight-light wood casement windows denoting the location of the office. Two similar windows with fixed transoms front each of the former apartments. All of the windows have brick lintels and concrete sills. Punctuating the base of the second-story façade are four oriel-like brick projections with sloped concrete hoods that house small lights located in niches covered by red glass. When the theater opened the *Raton Daily Range* described them as simulating “the effect of the old watch fires burning to give light to the sentry upon the walls.”

The ground floor of the two-part commercial building is also symmetrical. Two commercial spaces with fixed windows topped by small-light lead glass transoms and slightly recessed wood-framed commercial doors flank the recessed entry to the theater (Photo 3). A three-faced marquee with decorative tubular neon extends over the sidewalk and is supported by steel bars extending from the upper façade. A vertical sign with “El Raton” outlined in neon rests on the marquee with the upper part of the sign attached to the parapet with steel bars. Small spotlights located on the top of the marquee also illuminate the sign. While some of the neon tubing and trim has been lost over the years, the basic composition of the sign and the marquee remain (Figure 7-1).

The recessed entry consists of two sections (Photo 3). The exterior section is framed by corbel-like details set into two red brick pilasters flanking the entry and leads to a free-standing ticket booth with three fixed windows reflecting its shape and a door to the booth at the rear. Wood-frame picture boxes face the sidewalk and flank the entry. The walls of the outer entry were formerly fixed windows facing into the two flanking commercial spaces. Behind the ticket booth two pairs of metal-framed commercial doors open into the tiled enclosed section of the recessed entry where additional picture boxes punctuated with vertical mirrors attached to paired pilasters line a pebble-dash stucco wall. Tubular neon lines the ceiling, and two pairs of wood doors offer access to the lobby.

A concession stand added during the period of significance fills the back wall of the two-story lobby, and a broad turning stairway at the north side leads to a second-story lounge with restrooms and seating in alcoves. A mural depicting a southwestern landscape is located on the wall of the lobby immediately above the entry doors and is visible from the open staircase. The movie house’s interior was painted by Julius Schnorr, a Pueblo, Colorado-based artist who had studied under John Singer Sargent and had decorated the interior of the Colorado County Courthouse, Colorado and other public buildings in Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico and Utah. Access to the now-closed balcony and projection booth is from the second-story lounge. A separate stairway from the south side of the lobby leads to a central hallway with an original skylight that offers access to the manager’s office and two vacant apartments facing on Second Street. Formerly occupied by theater employees, the apartment spaces contain Murphy Beds.

Entry to the auditorium is from two curtained arched doors flanking the concession stand. Formerly the auditorium had star-like lights in the ceiling that have been replaced with acoustical tile with spotlights.

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El Raton Theater  
Raton, Colfax County, New Mexico

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Additional ceiling lighting includes two original art deco fixtures suspended from the ceiling below the balcony near the rear of the auditorium. These large, cross-shaped fixtures consist of yellow and blue colored lights within multi-sided glass plates. The auditorium faces a stage with a modest thrust that is framed with a castle-like proscenium reiterating the style of the façade (Figure 7-2). A replica of the coat-of-arms of Don Diego de Vargas is located at the arch of the proscenium. Red footlights lining the front of the stage and purple lights located in back of the parapet of the castle create an atmosphere suggestive of twilight in a medieval setting. The stage curtain consists of red brocade and is hand-operated. Set within the castle's framing of the stage are two fire escapes flanking the stage and also leading to mechanical units located behind the stage.

With few alterations to its exterior and interior, El Raton Theater is a superb example of a medieval-inspired theater. The detailing of the façade with its varied materials and the mirroring of the design with the details of the interior imbue the building with an exotic, other-worldly feeling that many theaters of the 1920s and early 1930s sought to create.

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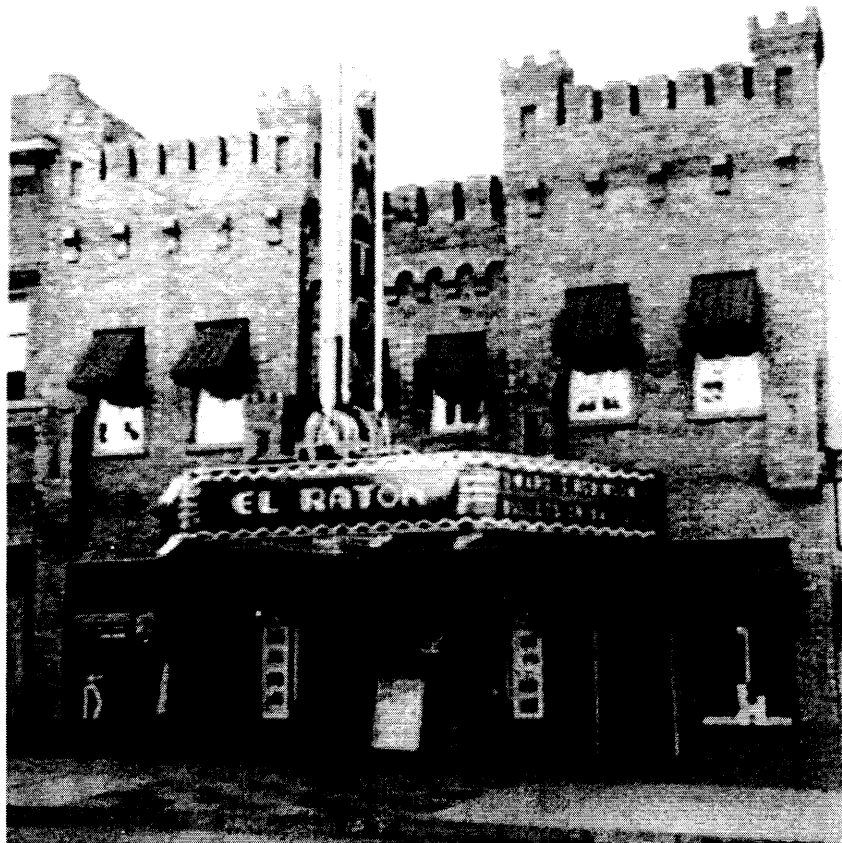
# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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El Raton Theater  
Raton, Colfax County, New Mexico

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Figure 7-1: El Raton Theater, c.1936





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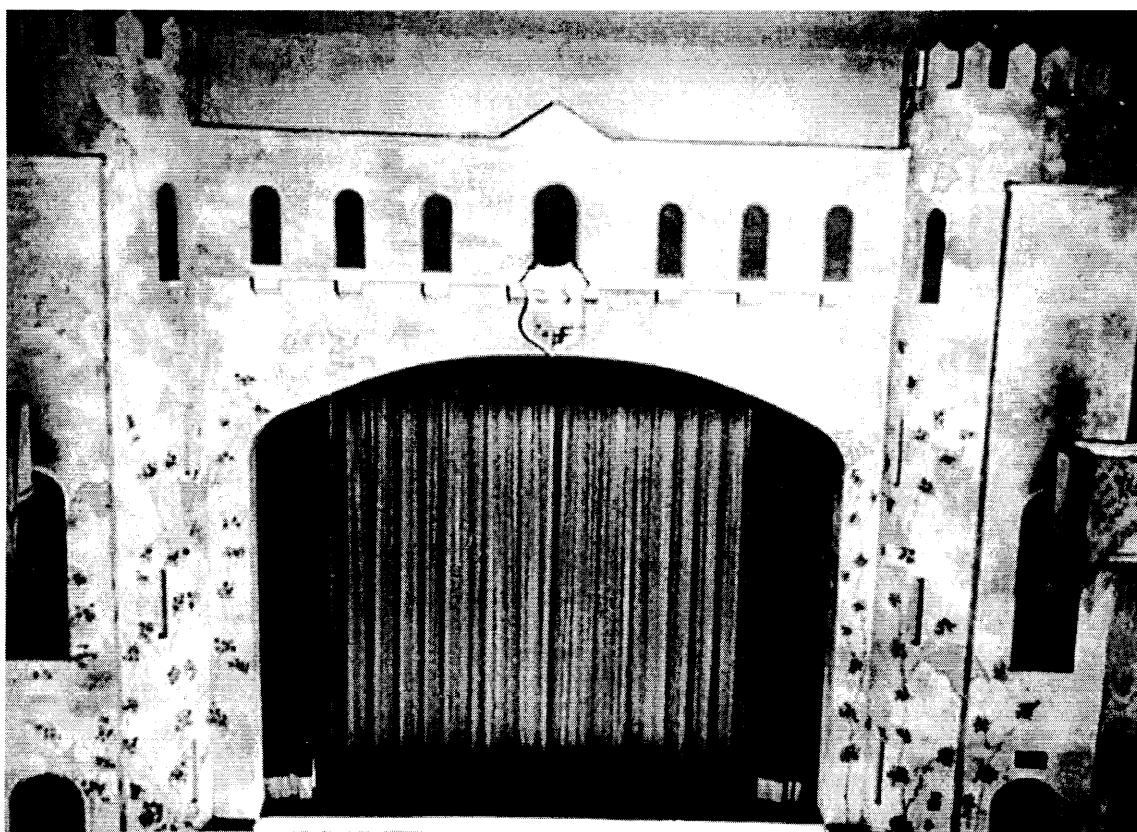
# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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El Raton Theater  
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**Figure 7-2: Proscenium and Stage, c.1936**



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El Raton Theater  
Raton, Colfax County, New Mexico

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## Statement of Significance

El Raton Theater, designed by George M. Williamson, has been a fixture in Raton's downtown since it was constructed in 1930. Located along the community's main commercial street, the building with its Late Gothic Revival style façade and the corresponding atmospherics of its interior is unique among New Mexico's theaters. Undertaken by Thomas F. Murphy and Dr. L.A. Hubbard, who had joined together in the late 1920s to form a local entertainment business operating theaters, the construction of El Raton Theater represented their efforts to own a modern theater rather than simply to lease theaters. In the following years Murphy acquired other theaters in surrounding communities and became an officer in Gibraltar Enterprises, a network of independent theater owners. A striking landmark in downtown Raton that has served as a community gathering place for entertainment for over 75 years, El Raton Theater is significant under Criteria A and C, meeting the eligibility requirements of the *Movie Theaters in New Mexico, 1905 to 1960* Multiple Property Documentation Form.

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## Context

First known as Willow Springs, a forage and water stop along the Mountain Branch of the Santa Fe Trail, the town of Raton developed as the southern district headquarters for the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Company when it entered the Territory of New Mexico in 1879. Located along a transcontinental railroad and surrounded by small coal-mining communities, Raton quickly attracted entertainers and, by 1882 with the construction of the Raton Opera House or the Old Rink, located on Second Street, provided stages for traveling performers. Over the next three decades other theater venues followed. Most notable was Hugo Seaberg's Garden Coliseum, an immense wood theater with a seating capacity of 5,000 that burned in 1911.

With the advent of motion pictures, pioneer theaters showing silent films also appeared. By 1915, the Lyric, Grand and Princess Theaters offered the community a variety of entertainment including silent movies. At the Lyric a three-person orchestra provided accompaniment for silent movies while the Grand catered to diverse events including stage shows as well as boxing and wrestling matches. It was in 1915, however, that Raton saw a notable addition to its theatrical buildings with the construction of the Shuler Theater. Designed by I.H. & W.M. Rapp of Trinidad, Colorado and named after Dr. J.J. Shuler, a longtime mayor of Raton, the new building constructed by the City of Raton sought to emulate the great opera houses of Europe. Its interior included opera boxes and details that were a "rough approximation of the 18<sup>th</sup> century ornate rococo style" (Shuler 1).

By the 1920s, Dr. L.A. Hubbard, a physician at Raton's Miner's Hospital, and J. J. Errington, a Raton-based mortician had formed a partnership operating local theaters and had leased the Shuler Theater from the city, offering both live performances and movies. In the late 1920s, they hired Thomas Murphy, who had grown up in Raton, to manage the Shuler. In 1929 Murphy introduced sound movies to Raton when he screened "The Fox Movietone Follies" on August 7<sup>th</sup> at the theater. While many marginal theaters unable to afford sound systems closed, the advent of sound prompted the construction of new sound-equipped theaters even as the

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El Raton Theater  
Raton, Colfax County, New Mexico

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nation's economy began to fall into the Great Depression. By 1929, Murphy and Hubbard had entered into a partnership and decided that Raton would be able to support a modern motion picture theater.

To design their theater they hired George M. Williamson of Albuquerque. A local associate of Trost and Trost Architects of El Paso, he had also worked as an associate architect for Carl Boller when he designed Albuquerque's Kimo Theater in 1926-27 (Pratt 115). Well into his career, Williamson had undertaken projects embracing a variety of styles and was, no doubt, aware of the broad range of eclectic revival styles then popular in theater design. His plans for El Raton Theater reveal his ability to work with design elements of the Late Gothic Revival style yet to place such a building sensitively within the context of Raton's downtown streetscape. With a uniquely detailed upper façade initially signaled to motorists by its marquee, El Raton Theater nevertheless shares a common massing and scale with the other historic buildings along the block to the north. Further reinforcing the unity of the block are the contributions the facades of the stores flanking the theater's recessed entry make to the street wall.

Undertaking construction of the theater was the Ramage Construction Company of Raton, one of many local businesses with whom Murphy and Hubbard contracted to complete the project. As work moved ahead during the winter of 1929, Murphy sought to build the interest of the community by staging a contest to name the new theater. He stipulated that the name "must be in Spanish in keeping with the design of the theater, which is of the mediaeval Spanish castle type and is furnished and decorated in keeping with this design" and limited the name to one or two words of no more than eight letters (*Raton Daily Range* 1/21/30 7). The architect proposed a few amenities for the theater, including a smoking room and a "cry room" to be located on the balcony.

As the theater moved toward completion, other articles appeared describing the new theater. Some emphasized the romantic nature of the exterior, equating the red lights located in the oriels of the façade as watch fires for sentries located in the parapet's towers. Others described the interior with its castle-like proscenium, starry ceiling, and painted walls depicting Spanish scenes. One noted that "one has only to close his eyes to see a beautiful flaming señorita in her gorgeous lace mantilla occupying the balcony while an ardent señor in the garden sings love songs in the starlight" (*Raton Evening Gazette* 4/21/30 1). Offering a more historical perspective, one writer linked the theater's design to the story of Spanish conquest in the Southwest, briefly tracing the re-conquest of 1692 led by Don Diego De Vargas whose coat-of-arms was replicated at the arch of the proscenium (*Raton Evening Gazette* 4/18/30 3).

The theater opened on Easter Sunday, April 20, 1930 to capacity crowds, showing "Song of the West," a pioneer color film offering both singing and dancing. Merchants celebrated the event by placing notices in the Raton newspaper congratulating Murphy and Hubbard for their effort to give the community such an outstanding theater. Murphy and Hubbard, in turn, bought a full-page advertisement, referring to the theaters as "Our Contribution to Raton," and promising patrons that "you will fairly revel in the beauty of the theater that is going to bring added prestige to Raton" (*Raton Evening Gazette* 4/18/30 5).

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El Raton Theater  
Raton, Colfax County, New Mexico

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By the mid-1930s, Thomas Murphy had become a director of Gibraltar Enterprises, a corporation of independent theater owners in the Rocky Mountain States discussed in *Movie Theaters in New Mexico, 1905 to 1960*. Seeking to gain leverage in obtaining and distributing films independent of the studio system, the company represented about twenty-five theaters, and in 1935, under Murphy's leadership, included the Mission Theater in Clayton, New Mexico, renaming it the Luna Theater. Through the 1950s, he continued to operate El Raton Theater. Working to cultivate the theater's association with the community, Murphy hosted annual "coal camp" Christmas events, working with the Elks Club to bring children from the surrounding mining towns to Raton and treating them to a movie and gifts of candy (Eigenberg).

While the ownership of some of the remaining older theaters in New Mexico changed when larger outside theater corporations acquired, remodeled, and, in some cases, subsequently closed them, El Raton Theater has remained a family-owned theater since its construction. The theater remains a landmark in downtown Raton and is the only remaining motion picture theater located there. The current owner, the daughter of Thomas Murphy, is proud of her family's long association with cinema entertainment in Raton and views this nomination and preservation of the property as a means of continuing that tradition.

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National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 13

El Raton Theater  
Raton, Colfax County, New Mexico

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### Bibliography

Conway, Jay T. "A Brief Community History of Raton, New Mexico." Raton: Raton Centennial Committee, Reprinted in 1991 from the original 1931 document.

"A History of the Shuler Theater." Shuler Theater Website at <http://www.shulertheater.com/history.htm>.

Eigenberg, Francis. Interview with David Kammer, October 5, 2005. Ms. Eigenberg is the daughter of Thomas Murphy and the owner of El Raton Theater.

Pratt, Boyd, ed. "Directory of Historic New Mexico Architects." Unpublished manuscript, October, 1988.

*Raton Daily Range*. Various issues 1930.

*Raton Evening Gazette*. Various issues, 1930. (On April 8, 1930 the *Raton Daily Range* became the *Raton Evening Gazette*.)

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section Photo Page 14

El Raton Theater  
Raton, Colfax County, New Mexico

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### Photographic Log

*Information pertaining to all photographs unless otherwise noted:*

#### **El Raton Theater**

Raton, Colfax County, New Mexico

Photographer: David Kammer

Date: October, 2005.

Location of negatives: New Mexico State Historic Preservation Office

Photo 1 of 3

Theater and streetscape

Camera facing northeast

Photo 2 of 3

Front (west) façade

Camera facing northeast

Photo 3 of 3

Entry and south storefront

Camera facing southeast