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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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any 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.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
 Other names/site number: San Gabriel Civic Auditorium
 Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A
 (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

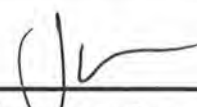
Street & number: 320 S. Mission Drive
 City or town: San Gabriel State: California County: Los Angeles
 Not For Publication: Vicinity:

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 at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide x local
 Applicable National Register Criteria:
x A ___ B x C ___ D

 _____ Signature of certifying official/Title:	State Historic Preservation Officer <u>4 June 2019</u> _____ Date
<u>California Office of Historic Preservation</u> State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	
In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.	
_____ Signature of commenting official:	_____ Date
_____ Title :	_____ State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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4. **National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:)


Signature of the Keeper

7/22/2019
Date of Action

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

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>1</u>	_____	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register _____

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 Revival

Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Brick, Concrete, Stucco

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style,

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method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The San Gabriel Mission Playhouse is located at 320 S. Mission Drive in the city of San Gabriel. The rectangular plan auditorium building is set back on the southeastern side of a triangular lot bordered by Broadway to the north, Mission Drive to the west, and Santa Anita to the east. The Playhouse is modeled after the Mission San Antonio de Padua and is an example of Spanish-Colonial-Revival architecture. The frontage of the Playhouse is approximately 400 feet with a depth of approximately 600 feet. The façade of the building is marked by an arcade, a red tile roof, and a two-story high parapet with flanking belfries. The two story, brick, concrete, and stucco structure is capped with red tile roofing, with the exception of the rear elevation which contains the scenery and staging. The Playhouse retains all aspects of integrity.

Narrative Description

The San Gabriel Mission Playhouse consists of a two-story rectangular plan auditorium building. Designed to resemble the Mission San Antonio de Padua (NR, b. 1771) near present-day Jolon, California. The Playhouse, begun in 1921, was designed by Arthur B. Benton (1858-1927), a major Southern California architect of the late 19th and 20th centuries. Because of Benton's ill-health, the Playhouse was completed in 1927 according to Benton's plans by the Los Angeles architectural firm of Dodd and Richards.

The construction of the playhouse was intended to replicate early mission architecture and building techniques. The frame of the building utilized adobe, concrete, red brick, and fire brick. The exterior of the building is plaster/stucco. Tile roofing covers the central bay of the playhouse and the side yard reliquary.

The main (south elevation) façade of the building is asymmetrical and marked by an arcade, a red tile roof, and a two-story high parapet with flanking belfries. To the rear of the main elevation, the building stretches north in a two-story form capped by a pitched red tile roof. The stage section of the building rises three stories, and each buttressed corner is capped by a heavy finial. Arched wood frame casement windows punctuate the plain stucco façade on the west and east elevation.

Four iron lamps and a polychrome terra cotta heraldic crest grace the arcade mark the primary bay and theater entrance. Molded plasterwork and decorative finials also adorn the arcade in low relief manner. Inside the arcade a vaulted ceiling embellished with polychrome designs leads the eye to molded plaster archways at the east end of the arcade. Heavy carved wood entry doors decorated with polychrome designs encased in modified quatrefoils depicting astronomical and heraldic symbols lead to the auditorium. Above the doors, arched fixed pane transoms are embellished with heavy, interlocking wood tracery.

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The asymmetrical western elevation extends from the central bay of the theater. A porticoed exterior arcade that provides access to the parking lot as well as to the ticket office, administrative office, and practice rooms (northern and eastern sides of the reliquary courtyard) is flush with the theater but set back from the entrance arcade. Extending beyond the exterior arcade is a grass covered courtyard, which is enclosed by a rectangular one-story, red-tiled roofed reliquary (104' x 8') that houses a complete collection of miniature replicas of California's Missions. The replicas were part of the original open-air theater experience when the play debuted in 1913. Construction materials include adobe and concrete. The southern end of the courtyard has a staircase that leads to an upper terrace, also accessible from the administrative offices that occupy the second floor. The terrace extends the length of the Playhouse (168' x 16'), ending at the stage section of the building. The eastern elevation of the playhouse contains a second terrace (116' x 16'), accessible from the interior of the building, which extends the length of the building, ending at the stage section. A non-original, auxiliary storage structure (date unknown) is detached from the building and located at the rear of the parking lot.

Entry to the interior of the Mission Playhouse is through the afore-mentioned arcade. Three sets of wooden carved doors open to a rectangular lobby, with the central door as the largest. The flooring in the lobby continues the schema of red brick from the arcade with handmade tiles. There is a vestibule with ornate engravings facing the entrance that contains a bust of John Steven McGroarty, author of the Mission Play. The ceiling of the main lobby is comprised of exposed wooden beams and painted plaster with a decorative motif of arrows, flowers, and geometric shapes. There are three chandeliers that hang from the ceiling and the long sides of the lobby have decorative sconces, four to a side.

The restrooms are accessible off the two ends of the lobby. The box office is accessible on the east end of the lobby, and on the west end, there is a stairway leading up to the balcony seating. The balcony seating is accessed from the two-story lobby by an internal staircase and has three seating sections with four aisles arranged in a stepped plan. Balcony access is accentuated in the lobby by an external walkway supported by heavy, rustic rafter tails and rimmed with wrought-iron railings providing views down into the lobby on three sides. The box office at the west end of the of the lobby is also accessible from the exterior arcade. Beyond the ticket window in the exterior arcade is a doorway that leads to the second story administrative offices that occupy the western elevation of the Playhouse. Three offices, once facing to the front of the playhouse and two facing out on the parking lot, lead off a central reception. Dressing rooms, storage and staging areas are accessible from the office wing.

The doors that give entrance to the theater's house duplicate the motif carried throughout the lobby. Each side of the doors has moldings framing the painted motifs. A long vestibule runs along the back of the house that is divided into three sections with four aisles. The house slopes toward the stage ensuring that "there is not a poor seat to be had" in the theater. To achieve perfect sightlines, the theater has three different seat widths. Two outer hallways that run the length of the house provide access to the box seats. The walls of the theater are adorned with ten tapestries that were donated by King Alfonso XIII of Spain for the opening in 1927. The

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tapestries represent the various heraldic/kingdoms/states of Spain and were a gift to celebrate the opening of the theater. Ten lights hang from the ceiling and are designed to resemble the lanterns on the Spanish Galleons of the 1700s. In the center of the house are four hanging chandeliers.

The ceiling is an ornate, hung plaster ceiling with disparate stylistic threads that pay homage to Aztec, Mayan, Native American, European, and South-east Asian motifs. A color theme of blue, orange, yellow, gold, and brown hues dominates the ceiling.

The proscenium is one of the most striking features of the interior of the Playhouse and boasts an intricately carved and painted Mayan design made of wood and plaster. The central feature is a Mayan face/mask that looks back at the audience. The same motif is echoed in elaborate plaster grills that flank the stage and that hold the organ pipes. Doorways on either side of the stage lead to the outer hallway for the box seats and to the stage.

The orchestra pit currently houses a 1924 Wurlitzer Organ – historic in its own right although not original to the theater. The stage has an apron that is 54' x 6' wide. The stage depth is 48.1', not accounting for back stage areas. Backstage areas include dressing rooms, restrooms, wardrobe and prop rooms, in addition to a green room.

Related features on site include a six-foot tall decorative wall, a portion of which is adobe. This wall stretches along the east property line at Santa Anita Street and curves around the corner to the west on Mission Drive.¹ The wall encloses Grapevine Park, which is served by two auxiliary buildings: the Padilla Room and the Grapevine Room. These buildings lend visual character to the Playhouse Plaza and an important transition to the historic Mission.

The **location** and **setting** of the Mission Playhouse have retained full integrity since the construction. The triangular lot includes parking for the playhouse and other venues. Additionally, there is a Masonic Lodge (Hall 793), the Community Services Building on the corner of Broadway and Mission Dr. Two community rooms (Grapevine and Padilla) enclose municipal Grapevine Park. Grapevine Park extends to the eastern elevation of the Playhouse and is enclosed with a six-foot decorative wall. The community rooms and park lend visual character to the setting of the playhouse. A relocated Victorian home and the San Gabriel Historical Museum are located at the rear of the triangular lot. The **design** playwright John McGroarty and architect Arthur Benton envisioned, which architects William Dodd and William Richard executed is retained. The façade, arcade, parapets and belfries continue to articulate the Spanish-Mission motif as intended. The Playhouse retains all significant original features on both the exterior and interior of the structure. The **workmanship** and **materials** also retain a high level of integrity. The playhouse retains its integrity of **feeling** as a cultural expression of the Indigenous, Spanish, and Anglo influences that shaped the history of Southern California. The playhouse certainly retains its **association** to John Steven McGroarty, the *Mission Play*, as well as to Arthur B. Benton and the joined architectural and theatrical recasting of the Spanish colonial legacy and Mexican history of Los Angeles.

Alterations:

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During the 1987 Whittier Narrows earthquake, the *Mission Playhouse* sustained damage to its façade. The 6.1 earthquake caused a belfry to collapse onto the roof above the theater's foyer. The theater closed for one year as the City undertook restoration of the façade. The restorations were completed according to standards for historic integrity and do not constitute an alteration. However, the materials used in the restoration differ from the original construction to place less weight on the structure itself.

Signage for the playhouse has changed over the years. An early, but not original, metal and neon sign located on top of the auditorium property was removed in approximately 1945 and replaced in 2016 with a detached, lighted monument sign. This too has since been removed and replaced with a new sign that consistently articulates the workmanship and materials of the playhouse and that more closely resembles signage captured in souvenir postcards from the play's run.ⁱⁱ

The courtyard onto which the Playhouse and the Padilla community room front contains a non-original fountain that former council member Mike Falabrina gifted to the city in 1988.

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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.)

- 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 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.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Moved from its original location
- C. Birthplace or grave
- D. Cemetery
- E. Constructed building, object, or structure
- F. Commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Performing Arts

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Architecture

Period of Significance
1927-1947

Significant Dates

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder
Benton, Arthur B. (1858-1927)
Dodd, William J. (1862-1930)
Richards, William (1871-1945)

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The San Gabriel Mission Playhouse is significant under **Criterion A in the area of Performing Arts, and Criterion C as the work of a master architect in Mission Revival style, at the local**

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level of significance. Designed by master architect Arthur Benton, the building articulates the romantic, idealized notions of early California Mission life that developed during the first decades of the 20th century and that had major impact on the evolution of local and regional architecture and upon the way in which we view of our history. Built to house John Steven McGroarty's *Mission Play*, the performances recast the colonial legacy of California as a passion play, explaining the Mexican history of Los Angeles to a national audience. Working closely with McGroarty, Benton's design for the Playhouse elevated and perpetuated the euphoric and ironic mythology of the Mission Play in architecture, thus blurring the very lines of history and heritage in the iconic Mission Revival for which Benton is best known. The period of significance is 1927-1947, from initial construction to the theater's initial reopening as a playhouse.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

CRITERION A: PERFORMING ARTS

On March 5, 1927, the newly constructed San Gabriel Mission Playhouse opened its doors on the sixteenth season of John Steven McGroarty's *Mission Play*. "With a premier of unqualified brilliance, old California as typified in the *Mission Play*, and modern California as exemplified in the new Mission Playhouse, joined in luring a great throng to San Gabriel last night."ⁱⁱⁱ Remarkably, the construction of the playhouse had the **sole** purpose of presenting a single play: *The Mission Play*. With more than 3,000 performances spanning two decades, an estimated 2.5 million visitors traveled to San Gabriel to view a modern-day "passion play" that recast the Spanish colonial legacy in California, presenting a "white-washed"^{iv} and persistent version of the Mexican history of Los Angeles within a unified narrative and experience that defined the "Spanish Fantasy Past."

The origin of the *Mission Play* and subsequent Mission Playhouse are intertwined with the history of the San Gabriel Mission and the Anglo settlement of Southern California. Announcing its 1912 debut, the Los Angeles times claimed that the play, ". . . had been almost literally taken from the pages of history."^v As Historian William Deverell points out, "The ever so slight distinction between drama and history would be erased, and regional culture would canonize the play as Southern California history itself, come back to life where all assumed it had begun, under the stars at the San Gabriel Mission, that ancient engine of civilization."^{vi} Indeed, drama and history merged in the person of the playwright. John Steven McGroarty, poet, journalist, and congressman, had published a history of California in 1911.^{vii} Consensus among historians is that McGroarty may have worked on his history and the play simultaneously. However, the popular narrative for the genesis of the *Mission Play* points to Frank Miller, owner and developer of the Mission Inn in Riverside, suggesting that McGroarty was specially prepared to render the history as a drama.^{viii} A variety of cultural trends serves to locate the impetus to dramatize California's history: the experience of Oberammergau's Passion Play, the "history on parade" exemplified in *La Fiesta de Los Angeles*, and the fascination with the "Spanish Fantasy

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Past” that swept through Southern California.^{ix} According to the popular account, McGroarty requested leave from his newspaper duties, moved to the Mission Inn in Riverside, and took up residence at a writing desk.^x Later, while recounting this period in his life, McGroarty stated that the Spanish Colonial Revival architecture of the Mission Inn directly influenced his desire to hire Arthur Burnett Benton as the architect for the San Gabriel Mission Playhouse.^{xi}

From its opening in 1912 until the completion of the Mission Playhouse in 1927, performances were held six times a week in an outdoor wooden theater structure situated beside the San Gabriel Mission.^{xii} The original structure claimed to have the largest stage west of the Mississippi, though, “with its thin façade of mission architecture and roofline, looked every inch like a motion picture backlot.”^{xiii} Nonetheless, the theater accommodated as many as fifteen hundred people, which is notable given that the population of San Gabriel did not exceed two thousand until 1920.^{xiv} The cast of this epic production numbered 150, including adults, children, and animals. Actors, dancers, and musicians figured prominently in the script, including the popular “fiesta” scene, featuring a Spanish-influenced music and dance number. McGroarty imagined and Benton then programmed the permanent home of the *Mission Play* to maintain and perpetuate productions of this scale. Attendees arrived via the popular Red Car transit system, in Ford Model-T’s and other cars of the period. The proximity to the Mission, gave added weight to the subject matter of the play, and allowed people to attend the play and visit the Mission in one trip. Richard Burton, professor and author of *How to See a Play* noted that, “The entire history of California could now be seen in an afternoon.”^{xv} Journalist Elizabeth Murray noted that the trip to San Gabriel from Los Angeles constituted a small-scale pilgrimage.^{xvi} Playgoers could view “Ramona’s Home” (a real structure attributed to a fictional character that served to attract fans of Helen Hunt Jackson’s novel), shop for souvenirs at the Curio Shop, and stroll the miniature El Camino Real populated with replicas of the California Missions. So successful were these efforts that the Mission Play became a veritable destination for residents and visitors alike. It was said that if you were visiting Southern California, there were three not-to-be-missed landmarks, Mount Wilson, Catalina Island, and the *Mission Play* in San Gabriel.^{xvii}

Concurrent with the initial production of the play, McGroarty founded the *Mission Play Association*, which borrowed money and issued stock in the endeavor to manage the costs, marketing, and production of the play. Through the Association, McGroarty went to work to raise funds for the construction of a new playhouse. McGroarty believed that a new theater, whose sole purpose would be the presentation of the *Mission Play*, would preserve the play for future generations. He envisioned a grand theater with a large stage, flyhouse, and dressing rooms, suitable to accommodate the cast of 150. He also had fanciful visions of “drive-in box seats” for patrons arriving by car, and hoped that Benton’s design could accommodate permanent sets that included live grasses and trees.^{xviii} He intended that the design would preserve the replica Missions in a garden arcade along with ephemera to “instruct” patrons on the history of California and the Camino Real. He also articulated hope that Benton could design an adjoining compound for an “Indian Village” so that patrons could see the way in which the “Indians in the play....still cling to their traditions and mode of life.”^{xix} In 1923 the cornerstone for a new building was laid. However, by 1924 the *Mission Play* itself faced financial peril, starting its thirteenth season \$11,000 in debt. The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, recognizing the

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inherent value of the play, established a committee (The *Mission Play Committee* of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, chaired by W.I. Hollingsworth) to study the situation. The committee made three conclusions: First, the *Mission Play* was a profitable investment opportunity; second, a profit could be turned with a season that ran twenty weeks, and third, that the play was so important to the region that the desire for it to persist was universal.^{xx} To put their findings to action, the businessmen of the Chamber of Commerce formed a corporation: The Mission Playhouse Corporation. They intended the Playhouse construction as a non-profit endeavor, leveraged with McGroarty's donation of the copyright of the play, and all profits from the annual operations to the Chamber of Commerce, to go toward the preservation of historical landmarks in California through the California Landmarks Club – founded by Charles Lummis and Arthur Benton. In essence, it was a gift to the State, and its people, from those who contributed to its existence, a veritable list of developers and businessmen who shaped modern Los Angeles.^{xxi}

As a result of the promotion and fundraising efforts, and with an estimated construction cost of approximately \$750,000^{xxii}, the Mission Playhouse opened just in time for the sixteenth season of the *Mission Play* on March 5, 1927. “With a premier of unqualified brilliance, old California as typified in the *Mission Play*, and modern California as exemplified in the new Mission Playhouse, joined in luring a great throng to San Gabriel last night.”^{xxiii} It was a gala affair with a \$100-a-ticket showing of the *Mission Play*. McGroarty and Lyndon Ellsworth Behymer, the promoter that the Chamber of Commerce hired, attended along with the notable patrons who had stepped forward to rescue the *Mission Play*. The attendees viewed the first performance in the new Playhouse designed by Arthur Benton and completed by the firm of Dodd and Richards. Its façade was inspired by the Mission San Antonio de Padua, albeit three times larger and finished in faux adobe. The interior was sumptuously decorated with Indian designs on the ceiling, Spanish textile banners representing the various regions of Spain, and a gold-encrusted Indian's head hanging over the stage. Department store magnate, Arthur Letts, development baron Harold Janss, and other donors had contributed the gift of an Aeolian Pipe Organ to the Playhouse. Nonetheless, at the end of opening night, the attendees left an additional \$60,000 in donations to further furnish the Playhouse.^{xxiv}

In his article detailing the newly opened theater journalist Marquis Busby captured the essence of the San Gabriel Mission Playhouse. “Out at Old San Gabriel, where the past still keeps its lingering hold, a dream house has been built. Like all dream houses, it has the spaciousness and proud beauty of air castles in Spain, and yet it has all the tangibility of twentieth century America.”^{xxv} The Mission Playhouse did stand as a testament to the past, built on ground once contained within the “cactus-walled” grounds of the Mission compound, adjacent to the Old Grapevine – mother vine of grapes in California, and surrounded by adobe structures. Yet, simultaneously, the *Mission Play* and its new home, the Mission Playhouse, articulated a modern image of California to the thousands of people who traveled to watch performances.

Despite its impressive opening in the new Playhouse, the popularity of the *Mission Play* continued to decline. The year 1927 marked historic developments for show business, the first “Talkie” “The Jazz Singer” was released, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science was

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established with Douglas Fairbanks as President, and Graumen's Chinese Theater opened in Hollywood. Public entertainment tastes shifted toward the new modern medium and enthusiasm for the *Mission Play* continued to decline. To help bring revenue, the Playhouse hosted the *Mission Play*, as well as a few "stock" Broadway theater productions from 1927 to 1932. At the end of the 1932 season, and an astounding 3,198 performances, the effects of the depression in addition to a failed attempt to produce the *Mission Play* on Broadway, ended the long run of the play (there was a brief revival of the *Mission Play* in 1936 and again the 1940s).

After the play's closure in 1932, the San Gabriel *Mission Playhouse* was soon returned to the holders of the mortgage where its future was in doubt. During the ensuing decade, the Playhouse operated as a movie theater. And during the severe housing shortage of the war years the Playhouse dressing rooms were converted into apartments.

It was in the mid 1940s that a group of San Gabriel residents, headed by two local photographers, formed a citizen's committee whose goal was to see the City purchase the Playhouse. This committee drew the support of a variety of local organizations such as Kiwanis, the American Legion San Gabriel Post 142, Recreation Commission, and the Chamber of Commerce. Arguments for the purchase of the Playhouse called upon the legacy of the *Mission Play*: "Only through the acquisition by the City of San Gabriel of this property can the *Mission Play* be again presented in the building built expressly for that purpose. We in San Gabriel now have the opportunity to keep faith with the originators of this romantic tradition and to bring to life again this most beautiful story."^{xxvi} Although voters rejected the first initiative in April of 1945, it was successfully passed in August of that year at which time the City purchased the *Mission Playhouse* with a \$160,000 bond measure and renamed it the San Gabriel Civic Auditorium. Election materials promised that the Playhouse would serve as a cultural center for the city as well as provide a central location where celebrations could take place (ranging from graduations to the San Gabriel Fiesta). Tellingly, supporters argued the purchase was an important step forward in the "soon-to come Post-war era".^{xxvii}

On September 26, 2007, the City renamed the theater, reverting back to the original name, the San Gabriel *Mission Playhouse*.^{xxviii} And, in 2013, as part of the City of San Gabriel's Centennial celebrations, the Playhouse staged a "re-imagined" version of the *Mission Play*. This new version incorporated much of the original play while ensuring that modern sensibilities around the Native American experience, religious colonialism, and the Asian community, were taken into account. The play was a great success in terms of community engagement and fundraising, providing something of a 'jumping-off' point for both these areas of the Playhouse. Through a series of events and meetings, Anna Cross (*Mission Playhouse*, Director) and Jonathan Salisbury (*Mission Playhouse*, Program Coordinator) successfully raised over \$60,000 in cash and in-kind support. They achieved this through personal contact with donors and sponsors, through presentations featuring artists from the show and artifacts from the original production.

More recently, in sharp contrast to the story and spectacle of the *Mission Play*, an original drama entitled *Toypurina* was presented at the *Mission Playhouse*. It recounts the rebellion against

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Father Junipero Serro led by a Gabrieleno-Tongva woman known as Toypurina. This play was well received and critically acclaimed, and there is hope for future performances and educational/curriculum outreach opportunities for this production.

CRITERION C: WORK OF A MASTER ARCHITECT

Arthur B. Benton was born in Peoria, Illinois, in 1858, educated in Topeka, Kansas where he earned his degree in 1887, and moved to California in 1891 where he left a rich architectural legacy as one of the great masters of the Mission Revival style. This style came into fashion as Benton arrived in California. Helen Hunt Jackson's novel *Ramona* had popularized the idea of an idyllic period between the indigenous populations of California and the Spanish Colonizers. Shortly after his arrival in California, Benton, under the leadership of Charles Lummis, helped to establish the California Landmarks Club (1894) which set its conservation efforts on the crumbling Missions. The architectural style that developed used details from the Mission churches on all types of new buildings, such as homes, commercial centers, city halls, the YWCA, and theaters. Dominant features of this style include mission arches, tile roofs, gables, domes, and quatrefoil windows. Benton gained notoriety as a master of the Mission Revival Style when Frank Miller commissioned him to build the Mission Inn in Riverside, California. It was here that John Steven McGroarty took up residence as he worked on the Mission Play. Deeply inspired by the design of the Mission Inn, McGroarty commissioned Benton to design the permanent home of his Mission Play: The San Gabriel Mission Playhouse. The Playhouse stands as the last major commission of Arthur Benton, although his ill health required that the firm of Dodd and Richards complete the work.

Benton's contributions to the popularity and the very character of the Spanish Colonial Revival style are many and the influence of his designs span California and the Southwest. While the Spanish Colonial Revival style found its earliest articulation in private homes, of which Benton designed many – including the Tujunga home of John Steven McGroarty – it moved easily into the civic sphere and gave rise to the idealization and mythology of the “Spanish Towns” of California. During his career, Benton designed multiple homes (Butts, McGroarty, Wallace Homes and, notably, the Mary Andrews Clark Memorial Home [YWCA] - listed on the National Register of Historic Places), theaters (the Riverside Municipal Auditorium and the Mission Playhouse), churches (First Church of Christ Science in Riverside, Church of the Advent in Los Angeles), hotels (the Mission Inn, the Arlington Hotel in Santa Barbara, the Arrowhead Hotel, and San Marcos Hotel), and commercial centers. The period of Spanish Colonial Revival in California dove-tailed the chronology of Benton's career. In *California's Architectural Frontier*, Harold Kirker argued that there was a palpable desire at the turn of the century to identify an architectural style that was both indigenous and unique to California.^{xxix} However, David Gebhard is quick to establish that, “The Spanish Colonial Revival, from its Mission phase on, was almost totally a myth created by newcomers to the area. Few artificially created architectural myths have succeeded in retaining a firm hold for so long...”^{xxx} Benton's commission to design Frank Miller's Mission Inn firmly established him at the forefront of the style. Evident in his commissions are the characteristic elements of Spanish Colonial Revival: Mission Façades flanked by belfries; parapeted, scalloped gable ends; simple arcades; tiled roofs;

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and broad, unbroken exterior surfaces of cement stucco. It was Benton's ability to articulate the Spanish Fantasy past that made him an automatic choice to design McGroarty's Playhouse.

Benton collaborated with McGroarty resulting in a uniquely-designed theater space unlike any other due to the demands of the play and its extreme popularity. In a 1921 article published in the Los Angeles Times, McGroarty articulated his vision for the Playhouse and elucidated his collaboration with Benton. His grandiose program for the structure included drive-in seating so that patrons who arrived on the Santa Anita side of theater could enjoy "the play without leaving their cars" – defacto "private loges."^{xxxii} He envisioned gardens, an Indian Village, and shops that introduced patrons to Spanish cuisine and crafts. He acknowledged that, through collaboration, he and Benton had selected the Mission San Antonio de Padua as the model for the theater. He also acknowledged that Benton was the most acclaimed student and master of Spanish-Mission architecture.^{xxxii} This at once ambitious, euphoric, and ironic vision that McGroarty published in the Los Angeles Times concluded with the statement that, "...today in 1921 as in 1771 the Indians are again making adobe bricks at San Gabriel..."^{xxxiii} The task to execute this vision of place and prominence was now in the hands of Arthur Benton.

Far more than ambition, financial constraints limited the extent to which Benton could fully articulate the architectural program of McGroarty. True to the initial plans, an enlarged façade of the Mission San Antonio de Padua was created for the playhouse. The persistent characteristics of Spanish/Mission architecture were elegantly executed: the low, long profile of the missions gave way to the rise necessary for staging. Belfries and heavy finials accentuated the profile of the theater. Arcades and arches define the entries and interior spaces of the theater. The massing of the structure, situated in a triangular piece of land – which had been protected through purchase by an unnamed "friend" of the Mission Play^{xxxiv} – neither overshadowed the actual Mission nor cowered next to it. Rather, intermediary structures, such as the historic grapevine, curio shop, and Ramona's house provided an ambulatory transition between the Mission and the Playhouse. The outdoor reliquary housing the miniature replicas of California missions completed the pilgrimage-like experience. Although the playhouse opened to the 19th season without complete furnishings, the gift of tapestries from Spain completed the narrative that the play and playhouse sought to communicate. In 1927, the San Gabriel Mission Playhouse paid homage to the Mission San Antonio carrying forth and expanding the Franciscan Mission design of the late 18th century. While performances of the *Mission Play* no longer communicate the idealized and ironic vision of the past, the architectural program executed by Arthur Benton remains as a physical and literal iteration of the Spanish fantasy past that excluded the contemporary Spanish-speaking populations. The playhouse stands as an important and final example of Benton's articulation of Mission/Spanish Colonial revival architecture in California, which cannot be under-estimated as it literally gave place and prominence to the sustaining mythologies.

San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA
County and State

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA
County and State

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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 # 37-8A
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: California Historic Resources Inventory, County of Los Angeles, City of San Gabriel

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): 19-188836

San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property Less than 1 acre

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 34.098297 Longitude: -118.108325

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The Mission Playhouse occupies the southeastern side of a triangular piece of property bordered by Broadway St. to the North, Santa Anita St. to the East (running a SE diagonal), and Mission Dr, to the West (running a SW diagonal). The playhouse fronts to a plaza on Mission Drive with a decorative fountain (not original). It is bordered on the SE side by a decorative wall that encloses the property from Santa Anita Street and that connects the Playhouse to two auxiliary buildings, the Grapevine and Padilla Rooms, respectively. To the rear of the Playhouse is a "parking house" that is not original. The side-yard reliquary is located on the western side of the Playhouse, bordering a parking lot. The boundary of the nominated property is the immediate footprint of the theater itself.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary is the historic footprint of the Mission Playhouse building.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Senya Lubisich, Ph.D.and Kelly Salloum
organization: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
street & number: 320 S. Mission Dr.
city or town: San Gabriel state: CA zip code: 91776
e-mail slubisich@citruscollege.edu, ksalloum@missionplayhouse.org
telephone: 626-222-5240,
date: November 29, 2017

San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
Name of Property

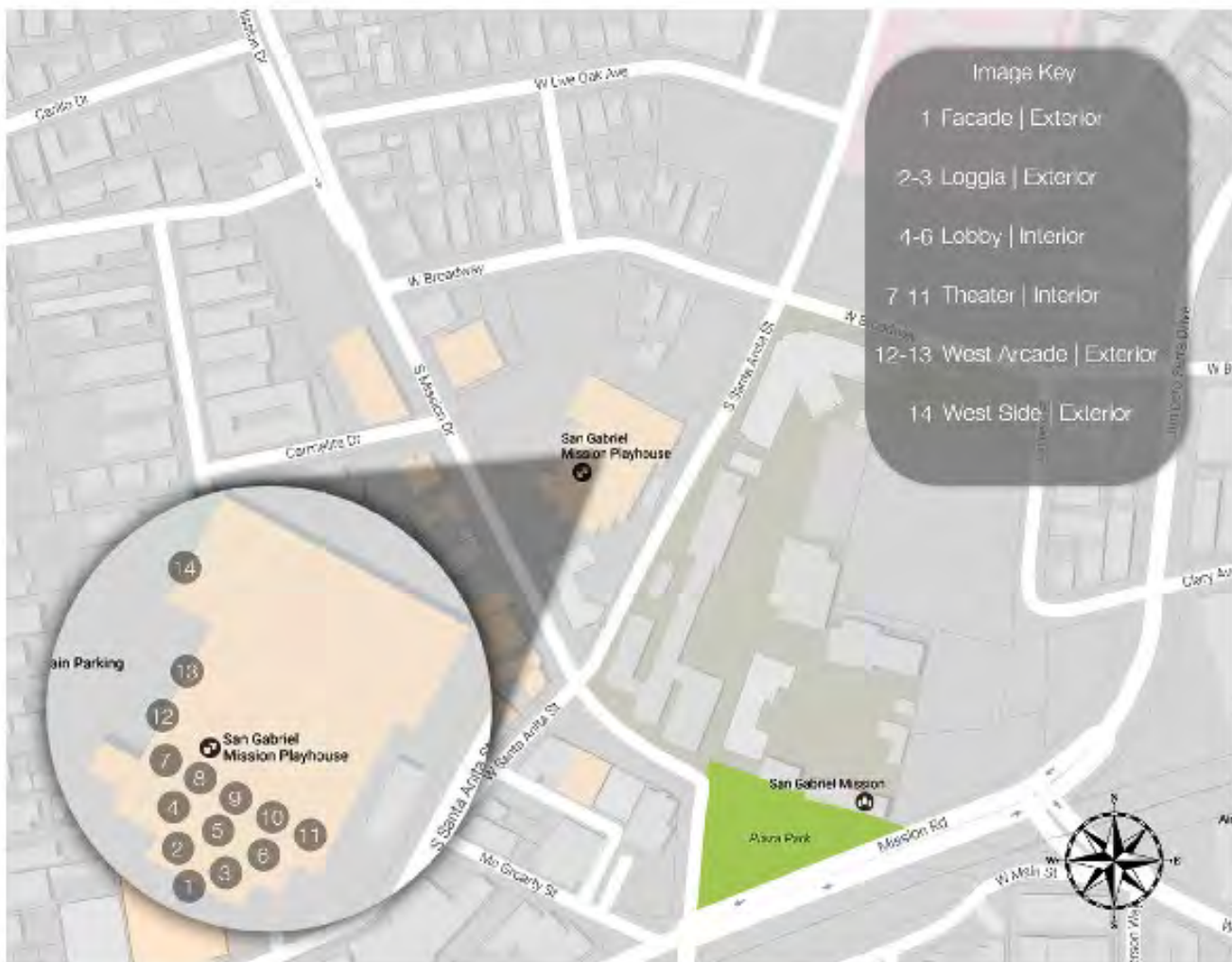
Los Angeles, CA
County and State

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Sketch Map



San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA
County and State

Location Map (Google Earth)



San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA
County and State

Photographs

Photo Log

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse

City or Vicinity: San Gabriel

County: Los Angeles County State: CA

Photographer: Antonio Montesione

Date Photographed: 2012

Description: Main/south Façade, camera facing northeast

Photo 1 of 14

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse

City or Vicinity: San Gabriel

County: Los Angeles County State: CA

Photographer: Johnny Vy

Date Photographed: 2011

Description: Loggia/entrance to theater, camera facing west

Photo 2 of 14

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse

City or Vicinity: San Gabriel

County: Los Angeles County State: CA

Photographer: Johnny Vy

Date Photographed: 2011

Description: Loggia/entrance to theater, camera facing west

Photo 3 of 14

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse

City or Vicinity: San Gabriel

County: Los Angeles County State: CA

Photographer: Johnny Vy

Date Photographed: 2011

Description: Lobby of theater, camera facing west

Photo 4 of 14

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse

City or Vicinity: San Gabriel

County: Los Angeles County State: CA

Photographer: Johnny Vy

Date Photographed: 2011

Description: Front doors of theater, Lobby, camera facing south

Photo 5 of 14

San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA
County and State

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
City or Vicinity: San Gabriel
County: Los Angeles County State: CA
Photographer: Johnny Vy
Date Photographed: 2011
Description: Front doors of theater, Lobby, camera facing south
Photo 6 of 14

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
City or Vicinity: San Gabriel
County: Los Angeles County State: CA
Photographer: Johnny Vy
Date Photographed: 2011
Description: Interior of theater, view from the balcony seats, camera facing northwest
Photo 7 of 14

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
City or Vicinity: San Gabriel
County: Los Angeles County State: CA
Photographer: Berger/Corser
Date Photographed: 1999
Description: Interior of theater, view of box seats and theater beyond, camera facing west
Photo 8 of 14

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
City or Vicinity: San Gabriel
County: Los Angeles County State: CA
Photographer: Johnny Vy
Date Photographed: 2011
Description: Interior of theater, ceiling, camera facing upward
Photo 9 of 14

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
City or Vicinity: San Gabriel
County: Los Angeles County State: CA
Photographer: Johnny Vy
Date Photographed: 2011
Description: Interior of theater, organ grid stage right, camera facing northwest

San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA
County and State

Photo 10 of 14

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse

City or Vicinity: San Gabriel

County: Los Angeles County State: CA

Photographer: Berger/Corser

Date Photographed: 1999

Description: Interior of theater, view toward back of theater toward balcony and lobby area, camera facing southeast

Photo 11 of 14

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse

City or Vicinity: San Gabriel

County: Los Angeles County State: CA

Photographer: Johnny Vy

Date Photographed: 2011

Description: Exterior west arcade, courtyard, and miniature missions, camera facing northwest

Photo 12 of 14

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse

City or Vicinity: San Gabriel

County: Los Angeles County State: CA

Photographer: Johnny Vy

Date Photographed: 2011

Description: Exterior west arcade, miniature missions, camera facing northwest

Photo 13 of 14

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse

City or Vicinity: San Gabriel

County: Los Angeles County State: CA

Photographer: Johnny Vy

Date Photographed: 2011

Description: Exterior west side of building, camera facing northeast

Photo 14 of 14

San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA
County and State

Figure Log

Figure 1 of 10

San Gabriel Mission Playhouse, San Gabriel, Los Angeles County, CA

Photographer: unknown

Date Photographed: 1927

Description: Main/south Façade, including original neon roof signage, camera facing north

Figure 2 of 10

San Gabriel Mission Playhouse, San Gabriel, Los Angeles County, CA

Photographer: unknown

Date Photographed: 1927

Description: Main/south Façade, camera facing northeast

Figure 3 of 10

San Gabriel Mission Playhouse, San Gabriel, Los Angeles County, CA

Photographer: unknown

Date Photographed: 1937

Description: Main/south Façade, camera facing north, when it was leased for showing movies by O.W. Lewis from 1932-1942, after the Mission Play closed

Figure 4 of 10

Retail building, downtown Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, CA

Photographer: G. Haven Bishop

Date Photographed: April 2, 1915

Description: Street scene on Broadway Ave, between 5th and 6th Street at night with illuminated sign advertising the Mission Play in Old San Gabriel

Courtesy of Southern California Edison Collection, The Huntington Library, San Marino, CA.

Figure 5 of 10

Mission Play program, San Gabriel, Los Angeles County, CA

Photographer: unknown

San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA
County and State

Date Photographed: March 1927

Description: Program Cover for the Mission Play, 16th Season, opening of the new San Gabriel Mission Playhouse, March 1927

Figure 6 of 10

Advertisement Flyer, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, CA

Date: circa 1913

Description: Advertisement Flyer for the Mission Play

Figure 7 of 10

Los Angeles Sunday Times newspaper article, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, CA

Date: March 6, 1927

Description: Article covering the opening of the Mission Playhouse, Courtesy of Glendale Public Library, Special Collections

Figure 8 of 10

Tourist map of California

Published by A.M. Robertson, San Francisco, copyright 1927

Artist: Jo (Jacinto) N. Mora

Description : Map altered to show section featuring the Mission Play in San Gabriel

Figure 9 of 10

Orange crate label, San Marino Growers Packing Association, San Marino, CA

Date: 1923

Description: Orange crate label featuring the Mission Play, for national distribution
Courtesy of Jay T. Last Collection, The Huntington Library, San Marino, CA

Figure 10 of 10

Works Progress Administration map, San Gabriel District, Los Angeles County, CA

Date: 1936

Description: Historic map of San Gabriel Mission District featuring historic buildings (the Mission Playhouse would have been considered a "new" building at this time, thus not included on the map of historic buildings)

San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA
County and State

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

ⁱ Description prepared by Diane Plava, Los Angeles County Community Development Commission, 11/8/1985.

^{i.i} Mission Play Exhibit, San Gabriel Historical Association Museum

ⁱⁱⁱ "Opening of Mission Play a Brilliant Affair", Shallert, Edwin, Los Angeles Times, March 6, 1927, p. 3.

^{iv} This term is taken from William Deverell's book titled, "Whitewashed Adobe".

^v "Franciscan Glory-Story: "American Oberammergau" of John S. McGroarty", Los Angeles Times, April 28, 1912, III-1.

^{vi} Deverell, William, White Washed Adobe, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), p. 209.

^{vii} McGroarty, John Steven, California : Its History and Romance, (Los Angeles: Grafton, 1911).

^{viii} Deverell, William, White Washed Adobe, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), p. 211.

^{ix} A phrase attributed to Carey McWilliams in Deverell, White Washed Adobe, p. 28, 264. The phrase is also articulated in tourism literature. See "Southern California Through the Camera" published by the Los Angeles "All Year Club" in the 1920s.

^x McGroarty's biographer offers alternatives to the traditional narrative and timetable of the play's creation. Mary Eleanor Craggs, "The Career of John Steven McGroarty", M.A. Thesis, Catholic University of America, San Rafael, California, 1958. Elizabeth Murray gives a very dramatic rendering of the play's origin that falls between the regional lore and the historical consensus: "A Sketch of Play's Creation and History", Elizabeth Murray, *West Coast Magazine*, volume 12, 1912. See also, William Deverell, White Washed Adobe.

^{xi} "New and Larger Theater for the Mission Play," Los Angeles Times, February 20, 1921.

^{xii} "Mission Play's Novel Home: New Theater Building Rapidly at San Gabriel", Los Angeles Times, February 25, 1912, p. II-11.

^{xiii} Deverell, William, White Washed Adobe, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), p. 215.

^{xiv} Population data: <http://www.laalmanac.com/population/po26.htm>; The city of San Gabriel incorporated in 1913.

^{xv} Quoted in a 1915 Mission Play playbill, copy, Huntington Library.

^{xvi} Elizabeth Murray, "A Sketch of Play's Creation and History", *West Coast Magazine*, volume 12, 1912.

^{xvii} During a span of 20 years, 2.5 million people attended some 3,000 performances of the play This figure is widely reported in playhouse programs, the Los Angeles Times, and literature pertaining to the play. The playhouse also figures in Joseph "Jo" Mora, California Tourism maps

^{xviii} "New and Larger Theater for the Mission Play", John Steven McGroarty, Los Angeles Times, February 20, 1921, p. V1

^{xix} Ibid.

^{xx} Deverell, p. 232.

San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
Name of Property

Los Angeles, CA
County and State

^{xxi} Ibid. To assist in raising funds, the Mission Play Corporation sold stock options. Board member and businessman, George I. Cochran stated that his purchase of preferred stock was, "not a subscription but a loan..." which appeared to be a common belief among notable investors.^{xxi} Henry E. Huntington and D.L. Doheny contributed \$10,000 each, the Retail Merchants Association gave \$6,000, Harry Chandler, George Cochran, Samuel Rindge, W.I. Hollingsworth, Henry Robinson, Title Insurance Corporation, and Eli Clark pledged \$5,000. And Frank Miller, owner of the Mission Inn in Riverside contributed \$3,000. As a result, the support for the *Mission Play* and Playhouse drew from Southern California's elite.^{xxi} Despite their patronage, the Corporation hired Lyndon Ellsworth Behymer, a promoter with a long history in Los Angeles show business to manage the *Mission Play* and Playhouse construction.

^{xxii} Approximately 10 million dollars today.

^{xxiii} "Opening of Mission Play a Brilliant Affair", Shallert, Edwin, Los Angeles Times, March 6, 1927, p. 3.

^{xxiv} Deverell, pp. 244-245.

^{xxv} "New Mission Play Theater Opens Doors in San Gabriel", Busby, Marquis, Los Angeles Times, March 6, 1927, p. C-17.

^{xxvi} "A Cultural Future That Awaits San Gabriel", pamphlet, San Gabriel Mission Playhouse

^{xxvii} Ibid.

^{xxviii} Connie Rothstein Collection of California Missions, the Mission Play and Southern California, Huntington Library, Box 28.

^{xxix} Harold Kirker, California's Architectural Frontier, p. 120

^{xxx} David Gebhard, The Spanish Colonial Revival in Southern California, 1895-1930, Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, p. 131.

^{xxxi} "New and Larger Theater for the Mission Play", John Steven McGroarty, Los Angeles Times, February 20, 1921, p. V1

^{xxxii} Ibid.

^{xxxiii} Ibid.

^{xxxiv} Ibid.









LADIES



AISLE 3 & 4

NO SMOKING - REFRESHMENTS
IN AUDITORIUM



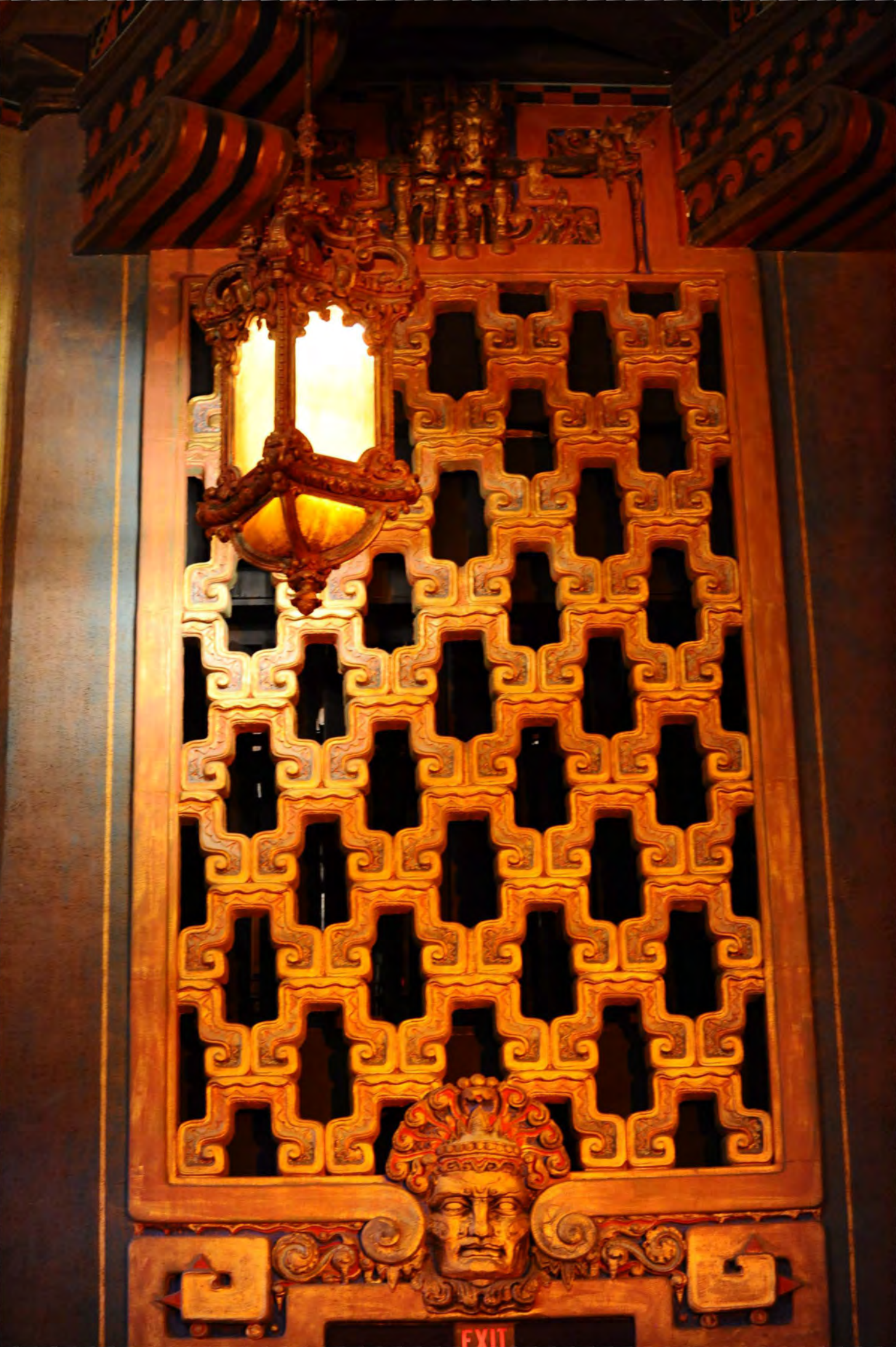












EXIT





ART GALLERY

THE ART SHOW





National Register of Historic Places
Memo to File

Correspondence

The Correspondence consists of communications from (and possibly to) the nominating authority, notes from the staff of the National Register of Historic Places, and/or other material the National Register of Historic Places received associated with the property.

Correspondence may also include information from other sources, drafts of the nomination, letters of support or objection, memorandums, and ephemera which document the efforts to recognize the property.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Resubmission

Property Name: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse

Multiple Name:

State & County: CALIFORNIA, Los Angeles

Date Received: 6/5/2019 Date of Pending List: Date of 16th Day: Date of 45th Day: 7/22/2019 Date of Weekly List:

Reference number: RS100002674

Nominator:

Reason For Review:

Accept Return Reject 7/22/2019 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments: The San Gabriel Mission Playhouse is locally significant and meets National Register Criteria A and C in the areas of (Performing) Art and Architecture. Designed by noted California architect Arthur B. Benton in close coordination with playwright John Steven McGroarty, the theater represents a dynamic local expression of Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival-style design. Sharing common aesthetics with the atmospheric movie theaters of the period, the building is richly detailed with stylized Spanish and Mexican cultural motifs. The theater was built solely to provide a permanent home to McGroarty's *Mission Play*, a dramatic retelling and re-imagining of the early Colonial era history of southern California. The long-running play was a significant reflection of the historic patterns of period artistic and entertainment efforts that sought to reconnect to the Spanish legacy of the region beyond just (or in addition to) the preservation of the remaining local historic mission buildings.

Recommendation/ Criteria: Accept NR Criteria A and C

Reviewer: Paul Lusignan

Discipline: Historian

Telephone: (202)354-2229

Date: 07/22/2019

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.

San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
San Gabriel, Los Angeles County, California
National Register of Historic Places

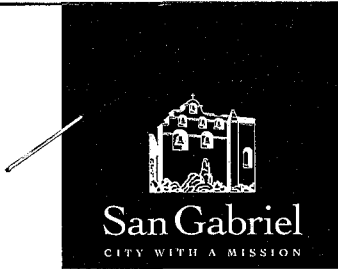
San Gabriel Mission Playhouse is a two-story, rectangular plan auditorium building designed to resemble the Mission San Antonio de Padua. Construction began in 1921 and was completed in 1927. The 400 foot wide primary façade features an arcade, red tile roof, and two story parapet with flanking belfries. Iron lamps, a terra cotta heraldic crest, molded plaster work, and decorative finials adorn the arcade, which is topped with a vaulted ceiling. Walls are stucco and the roof is terra cotta tile. The building is 600 feet deep. Three sets of carved wooden doors open into a rectangular lobby. The main house features a balcony and box seats. The walls are adorned with ten tapestries donated by King Alfonso XIII of Spain for the 1927 opening. The proscenium features an intricately carved and painted Mayan design, and the orchestra pit houses a 1924 Wurlitzer organ, not original to the theater.

The property is eligible under Criteria A and C, with a period of significance of 1927-1947. The property is eligible under Criterion A in the area of Performing Arts, due to the building's association with the Mission Play, the theatrical phenomenon for which the building was constructed, and its role in San Gabriel stage theatrical history, until it was converted to a movie theater in 1947. The property is also eligible under Criterion C as a locally significant example of Mission Revival architecture, the work of master architect Arthur Benton. Arthur Benton's "Mission Play" drew 2.5 million visitors to San Gabriel, with over 3000 performances. This building was originally constructed as a performance space for the Mission Play alone, although it saw later use as a playhouse for other performances after the phenomenal popularity of John Steven McGroarty's play waned.

The property is nominated by the property owner. Two letters of support have been received.

Staff supports the nomination as written and recommends that the State Historical Resources Commission determine the San Gabriel Mission Playhouse eligible under Criteria A and C, at the local level of significance, with a period of significance of 1927-1947. Staff recommends the State Historic Preservation Officer approve the nomination for forwarding to the National Park Service for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

William Burg
State Historian II
April 23, 2018



Phone: 626.308.2800

Fax: 626.458.2830

City Hall: 425 South Mission Drive, San Gabriel, California

Mail: P.O. Box 130, San Gabriel, California 91778-0130

Web: SanGabrielCity.com

February 23, 2017

Julianne Polanco

State Historic Preservation Officer

Office of Historic Preservation

1725 23rd Street, Suite 100

Sacramento, CA 95816-7100

**SUBJECT: NOMINATION OF THE SAN GABRIEL MISSION PLAYHOUSE
TO THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

Dear Ms. Polanco:

I write in support of the San Gabriel Mission Playhouse's nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, and encourage the State Historical Resources Commission to approve it.

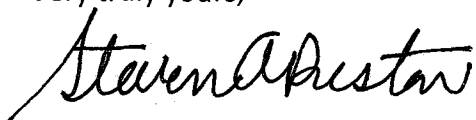
The San Gabriel Mission Playhouse is more than a building. Revered as the heart and core of historic San Gabriel, the Playhouse anchors a historic district that surrounds the Mission San Gabriel Arcángel, once the most prosperous of the 21 California missions. It is a property filled with remarkable craftsmanship, artistry and historic associations. Built to house performances of the legendary Mission Play, seen by more than 2 million people over its 30-year run, the Playhouse marks the collaboration of renowned architect Arthur Burnett Benton and California poet laureate John Steven McGroarty. Their design, a splendid re-creation in heightened scale of the façade of the Mission San Antonio de Padua in Monterey County, became an immediate destination as patrons flocked to see the spectacular three-hour pageant. As a representation of California's telling of its history through the lens of the 1920s, it remains a compelling structure with a unique tie to the history of the region and state.

Saved from demolition by the citizens of San Gabriel in 1946, the Playhouse's major character-defining features remain intact, and the spectacularly maintained interior – replete with elaborate murals --continues to amaze and delight visitors. As the anchor of a revitalizing historic neighborhood, the community supports the preservation and protection of this elegant

remnant of California's fascination with its mission past, and the City – through both policy and fundraising measures – intends to support the ongoing conservation of this historic property.

The City of San Gabriel without hesitation supports this nomination, and urges the State to recommend designation to the Register. Should we be able to provide any information or assistance in that regard, please contact me at (626) 308-2805, or at spreston@sgch.org.

Very truly yours,



STEVEN A. PRESTON, FAICP
City Manager
City of San Gabriel

Copies: State Historic Resources Commission
 City Council
 San Gabriel Historical Association
 Linda Dishman, Executive Director, Los Angeles Conservancy
 Susan N. Mossman, Executive Director, Pasadena Heritage



SAN GABRIEL HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

546 WEST BROADWAY, SAN GABRIEL, CA 91776

March 1, 2017

Julianne Polanco

State Historic Preservation Officer
Office of Historic Preservation
1725 23rd Street, Suite 100
Sacramento, CA 95816-7100

**SUBJECT: NOMINATION OF THE SAN GABRIEL MISSION PLAYHOUSE
TO THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

Dear Ms. Polanco:

The San Gabriel Historical Association is dedicated to preserving the historical richness of the City of San Gabriel. We run a small museum adjacent to the Mission Playhouse which contains historical artifacts and the Bovard-Wilson-Hayes house, donated from the estate of Mary Ruth Hayes.


The San Gabriel Historical Association is also involved in preservation efforts in our community. Therefore, I write in support of the San Gabriel Mission Playhouse's nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, and encourage the State Historical Resources Commission to approve it.

Built in 1927, and designed by Arthur Burnett Benton, the San Gabriel Mission Playhouse plays an important role in early California history. It was created for the presentation of John Steven McGroarty's epic Mission Play, a colorful 3-hour pageant play that told the story of the founding of the California Missions. With a cast of 150 actors, singers, dancers and musicians, it ran for more than 3000 performances reaching over 2.5 million people.

Today, the theater remains a vibrant, cultural space hosting over 80 events per year to more than 80,000 patrons. Located in the heart of a historic neighborhood, it embraces its role as a focal point for the arts, for the people of San Gabriel Valley and far beyond.

To be placed on the National Register of Historic Places would bestow upon this beloved theater the recognition it so rightly deserves.

Sincerely,



Cristina Alvarado
President, San Gabriel Historical Association



**DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

Lisa Ann L. Mangat, Director

Julianne Polanco, State Historic Preservation Officer
1725 23rd Street, Suite 100, Sacramento, CA 95816-7100
Telephone: (916) 445-7000 FAX: (916) 445-7053
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June 7, 2018

J. Paul Loether
Deputy Keeper and Chief, National Register and National Historic Landmark Program
National Register of Historic Places
Mail Stop 7228
1849 C St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Subject: **San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
San Gabriel, Los Angeles County, California
National Register of Historic Places**

Dear Mr. Loether:

The enclosed disk contains the true and correct copy of nomination for the San Gabriel Mission Playhouse to the National Register of Historic Places. This property is located in San Gabriel, Los Angeles County, California. On May 17, 2018, the State Historical Resources Commission unanimously found the property eligible for the National Register under Criteria A and C at the local level of significance, with a period of significance of 1927-1947.

The property is nominated on behalf of the property owner. Two letters of support were received.

If you have any questions regarding this nomination, please contact William Burg of my staff at 916-445-7004.

Sincerely,

Julianne Polanco
State Historic Preservation Officer

Enclosures



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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any 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.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
Other names/site number: San Gabriel Civic Auditorium
Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 320 S. Mission Drive
City or town: San Gabriel State: California County: Los Angeles
Not For Publication: Vicinity:

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 at the following level(s) of significance:

national statewide x local
Applicable National Register Criteria:
x A B x C D

State Historic Preservation Officer <u>7 June 2018</u>	
Signature of certifying official/Title: <u>California Office of Historic Preservation</u>	Date
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	
In my opinion, the property <u>meets</u> <u>does not meet</u> the National Register criteria.	
Signature of commenting official:	Date
Title :	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government



4. **National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register

other (explain:) Note that the property was determined eligible for listing on the National Register in 1985 per a local review performed by the Los Angeles County Community Development Agency

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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

Returned

Summary Paragraph

The San Gabriel Mission Playhouse is located at 320 S. Mission Drive in the city of San Gabriel. It is a prominent feature of the locally designated historic district, along with the San Gabriel Mission and Grapevine Park. The rectangular plan auditorium building is located within a triangular area bordered by Broadway to the north, Mission Drive to the west, and Santa Anita to the east. The Playhouse is modeled after the Mission San Antonio de Padua and is an example of Spanish-Colonial-Revival architecture. The frontage of the Playhouse is approximately 400 feet with a depth of approximately 600 feet. The façade of the building is marked by an arcade, a red tile roof, and a two-story high parapet with flanking belfries. Alterations to the interior of the Playhouse have been minimal and in keeping with the needs of its theatrical use, including the removal of seats in the main house to accommodate a new sound board, replacement of carpeting in the main house and balcony, and updates to venue amenities. Exterior modifications as well have been minor, with removal and replacement of a non-original, detached neon sign. Restoration to the façade following the Whittier Narrows earthquake followed preservation protocol.

Narrative Description

The San Gabriel Mission Playhouse consists of a two-story rectangular plan auditorium building. Designed to resemble the Mission San Antonio de Padua (NR, b. 1771) near present-day Jolon, California. The Playhouse, begun in 1921, was designed by Arthur B. Benton (1858-1927), a major Southern California architect of the late 19th and 20th centuries. Because of Benton's ill-health, the Playhouse was completed in 1927 according to Benton's plans by the Los Angeles architectural firm of Dodd and Richards.

The main (south elevation) façade of the building is marked by an arcade, a red tile roof, and a two-story high parapet with flanking belfries. Four iron lamps and a polychrome terra cotta heraldic crest grace the arcade. Molded plasterwork and decorative finials also adorn the arcade. Inside the arcade a vaulted ceiling embellished with polychrome designs leads the eye to molded plaster archways at the east end of the arcade. Heavy carved wood entry doors decorated with polychrome designs encased in modified quatrefoils depicting astronomical and heraldic symbols lead to the auditorium. Above the doors, arched fixed pane transoms are embellished with heavy, interlocking wood tracery.

To the rear of the main elevation, the building stretches north in a two-story form capped by a pitched red tile roof. The stage section of the building rises three stories, and each buttressed corner is capped by a heavy finial. Arched wood frame casement windows punctuate the plain stucco façade on the west and east elevation.

A grass-covered courtyard located along the west elevation is enclosed by a rectangular one-story, red-tiled roofed reliquary, housing a collection of miniature replicas of all of California's Missions. Asphalt-covered surface parking is found to the west of the auditorium and in the rear

of the structure. On the east side, a lawn area landscaped with trees stretches from the façade to the enclosing wall, which is located adjacent to the sidewalk on Santa Anita Street.

Related features on site include a six-foot tall decorative wall, a portion of which is adobe. This wall stretches along the east property line at Santa Anita Street and curves around the corner to the west on Mission Drive.¹

Entry to the interior of the Mission Playhouse is through the afore-mentioned arcade. Three sets of wooden carved doors open to a rectangular lobby, with the central door as the largest. The flooring in the lobby continues the red brick from the arcade. There is a vestibule with ornate engravings facing the entrance that contains a bust of John Steven McGroarty, author of the Mission Play. The restrooms are accessible off the two ends of the lobby. The box office is accessible on the east end of the lobby, and on the west end, there is a stairway leading up to the balcony seating. The balcony seating is accessed from the two-story lobby by an internal staircases and has three seating sections with four aisles arranged in a stepped plan. Balcony access is accentuated in the lobby by an external walkway supported by heavy, rustic rafter tails and rimmed with wrought-iron railings providing views down into the lobby on three sides.

The ceiling of the lobby is comprised of exposed wooden beams and painted plaster with a decorative motif of arrows, flowers, and geometric shapes. There are three chandeliers that hang from the ceiling and the long sides of the lobby have decorative sconces, four to a side.

The doors that give entrance to the theater house duplicate the motif carried throughout the lobby. Each side of the doors has moldings framing the painted motifs. A long vestibule runs along the back of the house that is divided into three sections with four aisles. The house slopes toward the stage ensuring that “there is not a poor seat to be had” in the theater. To achieve perfect sightlines, the theater has three different seat widths. Two outer hallways that run the length of the house provide access to the box seats. The walls of the theater are adorned with ten tapestries that were donated by King Alfonso XIII of Spain for the opening in 1927. The tapestries represent the various heraldic/kingdoms/states of Spain and were a gift to celebrate the opening of the theater. Ten lights hang from the ceiling and are designed to resemble the lanterns on the Spanish Galleons of the 1700s. In the center of the house are four hanging chandeliers.

The ceiling is an ornate, hung plaster ceiling with disparate stylistic threads that pay homage to Aztec, Mayan, Native American, European, and South-east Asian motifs. A color theme of blue, orange, yellow, gold, and brown hues dominates the ceiling.

The proscenium is one of the most striking features of the interior of the Playhouse and boasts an intricately carved and painted Mayan design. The central feature is a Mayan face/mask that looks back at the audience. The same motif is echoed in elaborate plaster grills that flank the stage and that hold the organ pipes. Doorways on either side of the stage lead to the outer hallway for the box seats and to the stage.

The orchestra pit currently houses a 1924 Wurlitzer Organ – historic in its own right although not original to the theater. The stage has an apron that is 54’x 6’ wide. The stage depth is 48.1’, not

accounting for back stage areas. Backstage areas include dressing rooms, restrooms, wardrobe and prop rooms, in addition to a green room.

The **location** and **setting** of the Mission Playhouse have retained full integrity since the construction. In 2004, the City of San Gabriel designated the area surrounding the Mission Playhouse and including the San Gabriel Mission as the Historic Mission District. Historic elements, such as the curio-shop, grapevine, and surrounding businesses and homes continue to define the character of the neighborhood and the setting of the Playhouse. The **design** playwright John McGroarty and architect Arthur Benton envisioned, which architects William Dodd and William Richard executed is retained. The façade, arcade, parapets and belfries continue to articulate the Spanish-Mission motif as intended. The Playhouse retains all significant original features on both the exterior and interior of the structure. The **workmanship** and **materials** also retain a high level of integrity. The playhouse retains its integrity of **feeling** as a cultural expression of the Indigenous, Spanish, and Anglo influences that shaped the history of Southern California. The playhouse certainly retains its **association** to John Steven McGroarty, the *Mission Play*, as well as to Arthur B. Benton and the joined architectural and theatrical recasting of the Spanish colonial legacy and Mexican history of Los Angeles.

Alterations:

During the 1987 Whittier Narrows earthquake, the *Mission Playhouse* sustained damage to its façade. The 6.1 earthquake caused a balcony to collapse onto the roof above the theater's foyer. The theater closed for one year as the City undertook restoration of the façade. The restorations were completed according to standards for historic integrity and do not constitute an alteration. However, the materials used in the restoration differ from the original construction to place less weight on the structure itself.

Signage for the playhouse has changed over the years. An early, but not original, metal and neon sign located on top of the auditorium property was removed in approximately 1945 and replaced with a detached, lighted monument sign. This too has since been removed and replaced by a new sign that consistently articulates the workmanship and materials of the playhouse and that more closely resembles signage captured in souvenir postcards from the play's run.ⁱⁱ

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.)

- 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 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.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Moved from its original location
- C. Birthplace or grave
- D. Cemetery
- E. Unconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. Commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Performing Arts
Architecture

Period of Significance

1927-1947

Significant Dates

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Benton, Arthur B. (1858-1927)

Dodd, William J. (1862-1930)

Richards, William (1871-1945)

Returned

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The San Gabriel Mission Playhouse is significant under **Criterion A in the area of Performing Arts, and Criterion C as the work of a master architect in Mission Revival style, at the local level of significance.** Designed by master architect Arthur Benton, the building articulates the romantic, idealized notions of early California Mission life that developed during the first decades of the 20th century and that had major impact on the evolution of local and regional architecture and upon the way in which we view of our history. Built to house John Steven

McGroarty's *Mission Play*, the performances recast the colonial legacy of California as a passion play, explaining the Mexican history of Los Angeles to a national audience. Working closely with McGroarty, Benton's design for the Playhouse elevated and perpetuated the euphoric and ironic mythology of the Mission Play in architecture, thus blurring the very lines of history and heritage in the iconic Mission Revival for which Benton is best known. The period of significance is 1927-1947, from initial construction to the theater's initial reopening as a playhouse.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

CRITERION A: PERFORMING ARTS

On March 5, 1927, the newly constructed San Gabriel Mission Playhouse opened its doors on the sixteenth season of John Steven McGroarty's *Mission Play*. "With a premier of unqualified brilliance, old California as typified in the *Mission Play*, and modern California as exemplified in the new Mission Playhouse, joined in luring a great throng to San Gabriel last night."ⁱⁱⁱ

Remarkably, the construction of the playhouse had the **sole** purpose of presenting a single play: *The Mission Play*. With more than 3,000 performances spanning two decades, an estimated 2.5 million visitors traveled to San Gabriel to view a modern-day "passion play" that recast the Spanish colonial legacy in California, presenting a "white-washed"^{iv} and persistent version of the Mexican history of Los Angeles within a unified narrative and experience that defined the "Spanish Fantasy Past."

The origin of the *Mission Play* and subsequent Mission Playhouse are intertwined with the history of the San Gabriel Mission and the Anglo settlement of Southern California.

Announcing its 1912 debut, the Los Angeles times claimed that the play, ". . . had been almost literally taken from the pages of history."^v As Historian William Deverell points out, "The ever so slight distinction between drama and history would be erased, and regional culture would canonize the play as Southern California history itself, come back to life where all assumed it had begun, under the stars at the San Gabriel Mission, that ancient engine of civilization."^{vi}

Indeed, drama and history merged in the person of the playwright. John Steven McGroarty, poet, journalist, and congressman, had published a history of California in 1911.^{vii} Consensus among historians is that McGroarty may have worked on his history and the play simultaneously.

However, the popular narrative for the genesis of the *Mission Play* points to Frank Miller, owner and developer of the Mission Inn in Riverside, suggesting that McGroarty was specially prepared to render the history as a drama.^{viii} A variety of cultural trends serves to locate the impetus to dramatize California's history: the experience of Oberammergau's Passion Play, the "history on parade" exemplified in *La Fiesta de Los Angeles*, and the fascination with the "Spanish Fantasy Past" that swept through Southern California.^{ix} According to the popular account, McGroarty requested leave from his newspaper duties, moved to the Mission Inn in Riverside, and took up residence at a writing desk.^x Later, while recounting this period in his life, McGroarty stated that the Spanish Colonial Revival architecture of the Mission Inn directly influenced his desire to hire Arthur Burnett Benton as the architect for the San Gabriel Mission Playhouse.^{xi}

From its opening in 1912 until the completion of the Mission Playhouse in 1927, performances were held six times a week in an outdoor wooden theater structure situated beside the San Gabriel Mission.^{xiii} The original structure claimed to have the largest stage west of the Mississippi, though, “with its thin façade of mission architecture and roofline, looked every inch like a motion picture backlot.”^{xiii} Nonetheless, the theater accommodated as many as fifteen hundred people, which is notable given that the population of San Gabriel did not exceed two thousand until 1920.^{xiv} The cast of this epic production numbered 150, including adults, children, and animals. Actors, dancers, and musicians figured prominently in the script, including the popular “fiesta” scene, featuring a Spanish-influenced music and dance number. McGroarty imagined and Benton then programmed the permanent home of the *Mission Play* to maintain and perpetuate productions of this scale. Attendees arrived via the popular Red Car transit system, in Ford Model-T’s and other cars of the period. The proximity to the Mission, gave added weight to the subject matter of the play, and allowed people to attend the play and visit the Mission in one trip. Richard Burton, professor and author of *How to See a Play* noted that, “The entire history of California could now be seen in an afternoon.”^{xv} Journalist Elizabeth Murray noted that the trip to San Gabriel from Los Angeles constituted a small-scale pilgrimage.^{xvi} Playgoers could view “Ramona’s Home” (a real structure attributed to a fictional character that served to attract fans of Helen Hunt Jackson’s novel), shop for souvenirs at the Curio Shop, and stroll the miniature El Camino Real populated with replicas of the California Missions. So successful were these efforts that the Mission Play became a veritable destination for residents and visitors alike. It was said that if you were visiting Southern California, there were three not-to-be-missed landmarks, Mount Wilson, Catalina Island, and the *Mission Play* in San Gabriel.^{xvii}

Concurrent with the initial production of the play, McGroarty founded the *Mission Play Association*, which borrowed money and issued stock in the endeavor to manage the costs, marketing, and production of the play. Through the Association, McGroarty went to work to raise funds for the construction of a new playhouse. McGroarty believed that a new theater, whose sole purpose would be the presentation of the *Mission Play*, would preserve the play for future generations. He envisioned a grand theater with a large stage, flyhouse, and dressing rooms, suitable to accommodate the cast of 150. He also had fanciful visions of “drive-in box seats” for patrons arriving by car, and hoped that Benton’s design could accommodate permanent sets that included live grasses and trees.^{xviii} He intended that the design would preserve the replica Missions in a garden arcade along with ephemera to “instruct” patrons on the history of California and the Camino Real. He also articulated hope that Benton could design an adjoining compound for an “Indian Village” so that patrons could see the way in which the “Indians in the play....still cling to their traditions and mode of life.”^{xix} In 1923 the cornerstone for a new building was laid. However, by 1924 the *Mission Play* itself faced financial peril, starting its thirteenth season \$11,000 in debt. The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, recognizing the inherent value of the play, established a committee (The *Mission Play Committee* of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, chaired by W.I. Hollingsworth) to study the situation. The committee made three conclusions: First, the *Mission Play* was a profitable investment opportunity; second, a profit could be turned with a season that ran twenty weeks, and third, that the play was so important to the region that the desire for it to persist was universal.^{xx} To put their findings to action, the businessmen of the Chamber of Commerce formed a corporation: The Mission Playhouse Corporation. They intended the Playhouse construction as a non-profit endeavor, leveraged with McGroarty’s donation of the copyright of the play, and all profits from

the annual operations to the Chamber of Commerce, to go toward the preservation of historical landmarks in California through the California Landmarks Club – founded by Charles Lummis and Arthur Benton. In essence, it was a gift to the State, and its people, from those who contributed to its existence, a veritable list of developers and businessmen who shaped modern Los Angeles.^{xxi}

As a result of the promotion and fundraising efforts, and with an estimated construction cost of approximately \$750,000^{xxii}, the Mission Playhouse opened just in time for the sixteenth season of the *Mission Play* on March 5, 1927. “With a premier of unqualified brilliance, old California as typified in the *Mission Play*, and modern California as exemplified in the new Mission Playhouse, joined in luring a great throng to San Gabriel last night.”^{xxiii} It was a gala affair with a \$100-a-ticket showing of the *Mission Play*. McGroarty and Lyndon Ellsworth Behymer, the promoter that the Chamber of Commerce hired, attended along with the notable patrons who had stepped forward to rescue the *Mission Play*. The attendees viewed the first performance in the new Playhouse designed by Arthur Benton and completed by the firm of Dodd and Richards. Its façade was inspired by the Mission San Antonio de Padua, albeit three times larger and finished in faux adobe. The interior was sumptuously decorated with Indian designs on the ceiling, Spanish textile banners representing the various regions of Spain, and a gold-encrusted Indian’s head hanging over the stage. Department store magnate, Arthur Letts, development baron Harold Janss, and other donors had contributed the gift of an Aeolian Pipe Organ to the Playhouse. Nonetheless, at the end of opening night, the attendees left an additional \$60,000 in donations to further furnish the Playhouse.^{xxiv}

In his article detailing the newly opened theater, journalist Marquis Busby captured the essence of the San Gabriel Mission Playhouse. “Out at Old San Gabriel, where the past still keeps its lingering hold, a dream house has been built. Like all dream houses, it has the spaciousness and proud beauty of air castles in Spain, and yet it has all the tangibility of twentieth century America.”^{xxv} The Mission Playhouse did stand as a testament to the past, built on ground once contained within the “cactus-walled” grounds of the Mission compound, adjacent to the Old Grapevine – mother vine of grapes in California, and surrounded by adobe structures. Yet, simultaneously, the *Mission Play* and its new home, the Mission Playhouse, articulated a modern image of California to the thousands of people who traveled to watch performances.

Despite its impressive opening in the new Playhouse, the popularity of the *Mission Play* continued to decline. The year 1927 marked historic developments for show business, the first “Talkie” “The Jazz Singer” was released, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science was established with Douglas Fairbanks as President, and Grauman’s Chinese Theater opened in Hollywood. Public entertainment tastes shifted toward the new modern medium and enthusiasm for the *Mission Play* continued to decline. To help bring revenue, the Playhouse hosted the *Mission Play*, as well as a few “stock” Broadway theater productions from 1927 to 1932. At the end of the 1932 season, and an astounding 3,198 performances, the effects of the depression in addition to a failed attempt to produce the *Mission Play* on Broadway, ended the long run of the play (there was a brief revival of the *Mission Play* in 1936 and again the 1940s).

After the play’s closure in 1932, the San Gabriel *Mission Playhouse* was soon returned to the holders of the mortgage where its future was in doubt. During the ensuing decade, the Playhouse

operated as a movie theater. And during the severe housing shortage of the war years the Playhouse dressing rooms were converted into apartments.

It was in the mid 1940s that a group of San Gabriel residents, headed by two local photographers, formed a citizen's committee whose goal was to see the City purchase the Playhouse. This committee drew the support of a variety of local organizations such as Kiwanis, the American Legion San Gabriel Post 142, Recreation Commission, and the Chamber of Commerce. Arguments for the purchase of the Playhouse called upon the legacy of the Mission Play: "Only through the acquisition by the City of San Gabriel of this property can the Mission Play be again presented in the building built expressly for that purpose. We in San Gabriel now have the opportunity to keep faith with the originators of this romantic tradition and to bring to life again this most beautiful story."^{xxvi} Although voters rejected the first initiative in April of 1945, it was successfully passed in August of that year at which time the City purchased the Mission Playhouse with a \$160,000 bond measure and renamed it the San Gabriel Civic Auditorium. Election materials promised that the Playhouse would serve as a cultural center for the city as well as provide a central location where celebrations could take place (ranging from graduations to the San Gabriel Fiesta). Tellingly, supporters argued the purchase was an important step forward in the "soon-to come Post-war era".^{xxvii}

On September 26, 2007, the City renamed the theater, reverting back to the original name, the San Gabriel Mission Playhouse.^{xxviii} And, in 2013, as part of the City of San Gabriel's Centennial celebrations, the Playhouse staged a "re-imagined" version of the *Mission Play*. This new version incorporated much of the original play while ensuring that modern sensibilities around the Native American experience, religious colonialism, and the Asian community, were taken into account. The play was a great success in terms of community engagement and fundraising, providing something of a 'jumping-off' point for both these areas of the Playhouse. Through a series of events and meetings, Anna Cross (Mission Playhouse, Director) and Jonathan Salisbury (Mission Playhouse, Program Coordinator) successfully raised over \$60,000 in cash and in-kind support. They achieved this through personal contact with donors and sponsors, through presentations featuring artists from the show and artifacts from the original production.

More recently, in sharp contrast to the story and spectacle of the *Mission Play*, an original drama entitled *Toypurina* was presented at the Mission Playhouse. It recounts the rebellion against Father Junipero Serro led by a Gabrieleno-Tongva woman known as *Toypurina*. This play was well received and critically acclaimed, and there is hope for future performances and educational/curriculum outreach opportunities for this production.

CRITERION C: WORK OF A MASTER ARCHITECT

Arthur B. Benton was born in Peoria, Illinois, in 1858, educated in Topeka, Kansas where he earned his degree in 1887, and moved to California in 1891 where he left a rich architectural legacy as one of the great masters of the Mission Revival style. This style came into fashion as Benton arrived in California. Helen Hunt Jackson's novel *Ramona* had popularized the idea of an idyllic period between the indigenous populations of California and the Spanish Colonizers. Shortly after his arrival in California, Benton, under the leadership of Charles Lummis, helped to

establish the California Landmarks Club (1894) which set its conservation efforts on the crumbling Missions. The architectural style that developed used details from the Mission churches on all types of new buildings, such as homes, commercial centers, city halls, the YWCA, and theaters. Dominant features of this style include mission arches, tile roofs, gables, domes, and quatrefoil windows. Benton gained notoriety as a master of the Mission Revival Style when Frank Miller commissioned him to build the Mission Inn in Riverside, California. It was here that John Steven McGroarty took up residence as he worked on the Mission Play. Deeply inspired by the design of the Mission Inn, McGroarty commissioned Benton to design the permanent home of his Mission Play: The San Gabriel Mission Playhouse. The Playhouse stands as the last major commission of Arthur Benton, although his ill health required that the firm of Dodd and Richards complete the work.

Benton's contributions to the popularity and the very character of the Spanish Colonial Revival style are many and the influence of his designs span California and the Southwest. While the Spanish Colonial Revival style found its earliest articulation in private homes, of which Benton designed many – including the Tujunga home of John Steven McGroarty – it moved easily into the civic sphere and gave rise to the idealization and mythology of the “Spanish Towns” of California. During his career, Benton designed multiple homes (Butts, McGroarty, Wallace Homes and, notably, the Mary Andrews Clark Memorial Home [YWCA] - listed on the National Register of Historic Places), theaters (the Riverside Municipal Auditorium and the Mission Playhouse), churches (First Church of Christ Science in Riverside, Church of the Advent in Los Angeles), hotels (the Mission Inn, the Arlington Hotel in Santa Barbara, the Arrowhead Hotel, and San Marcos Hotel), and commercial centers. The period of Spanish Colonial Revival in California dove-tailed the chronology of Benton's career. In *California's Architectural Frontier*, Harold Kirker argued that there was a palpable desire at the turn of the century to identify an architectural style that was both indigenous and unique to California.^{xxix} However, David Gebhard is quick to establish that, “The Spanish Colonial Revival, from its Mission phase on, was almost totally a myth created by newcomers to the area. Few artificially created architectural myths have succeeded in retaining a firm hold for so long...”^{xxx} Benton's commission to design Frank Miller's Mission Inn firmly established him at the forefront of the style. Evident in his commissions are the characteristic elements of Spanish Colonial Revival: Mission Façades flanked by belfries; parapeted, scalloped gable ends; simple arcades; tiled roofs; and broad, unbroken exterior surfaces of cement stucco. It was Benton's ability to articulate the Spanish Fantasy past that made him an automatic choice to design McGroarty's Playhouse.

Benton collaborated with McGroarty resulting in a uniquely-designed theater space unlike any other due to the demands of the play and its extreme popularity. In a 1921 article published in the Los Angeles Times, McGroarty articulated his vision for the Playhouse and elucidated his collaboration with Benton. His grandiose program for the structure included drive-in seating so that patrons who arrived on the Santa Anita side of theater could enjoy “the play without leaving their cars” – defacto “private loges.”^{xxxi} He envisioned gardens, an Indian Village, and shops that introduced patrons to Spanish cuisine and crafts. He acknowledged that, through collaboration, he and Benton had selected the Mission San Antonio de Padua as the model for the theater. He also acknowledged that Benton was the most acclaimed student and master of Spanish-Mission architecture.^{xxxii} This at once ambitious, euphoric, and ironic vision that McGroarty published in the Los Angeles Times concluded with the statement that, “...today in 1921 as in 1771 the

Indians are again making adobe bricks at San Gabriel...^{xxxiii} The task to execute this vision of place and prominence was now in the hands of Arthur Benton.

Far more than ambition, financial constraints limited the extent to which Benton could fully articulate the architectural program of McGroarty. True to the initial plans, an enlarged façade of the Mission San Antonio de Padua was created for the playhouse. The persistent characteristics of Spanish/Mission architecture were elegantly executed: the low, long profile of the missions gave way to the rise necessary for staging. Belfries and heavy finials accentuated the profile of the theater. Arcades and arches define the entries and interior spaces of the theater. The massing of the structure, situated in a triangular piece of land – which had been protected through purchase by an unnamed “friend” of the Mission Play^{xxxiv} – neither overshadowed the actual Mission nor covered next to it. Rather, intermediary structures, such as the historic grapevine, curio shop, and Ramona’s house provided an ambulatory transition between the Mission and the Playhouse. The outdoor reliquary housing the miniature replicas of California missions completed the pilgrimage-like experience. Although the playhouse opened to the 19th season without complete furnishings, the gift of tapestries from Spain completed the narrative that the play and playhouse sought to communicate. In 1927, the San Gabriel Mission Playhouse paid homage to the Mission San Antonio carrying forth and expanding the Franciscan Mission design of the late 18th century. While performances of the *Mission Play* no longer communicate the idealized and ironic vision of the past, the architectural program executed by Arthur Benton remains as a physical and literal iteration of the Spanish fantasy past that excluded the contemporary Spanish-speaking populations. The playhouse stands as an important and final example of Benton’s articulation of Mission Spanish Colonial revival architecture in California, which cannot be under-estimated as it literally gave place and prominence to the sustaining mythologies.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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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 # 37-8A
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: California Historic Resources Inventory, County of Los Angeles, City of San Gabriel

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): 19-188836

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property Less than 1 acre

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 34.097964 Longitude: -118.108445

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The Mission Playhouse occupies a triangular piece of property bordered by Broadway St. to the North, Santa Anita St. to the East (running a SE diagonal), and Mission Dr, to the West (running a SW diagonal). A parking lot occupies the space to the west of the Playhouse.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The property was selected for its proximity to the San Gabriel Mission and other historic properties, the railroad, and original location of the Mission Play theater. These are the historic and current boundaries of the property.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Senya Lubisich, Ph.D. and Kelly Salloum
organization: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
street & number: 320 S. Mission Dr.
city or town: San Gabriel state: CA zip code: 91776
e-mail: slubisich@citruscollege.edu, ksalloum@missionplayhouse.org
telephone: 626-222-5240
date: November 29, 2017

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

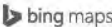
Sketch Map



Location Map (Bing Maps)

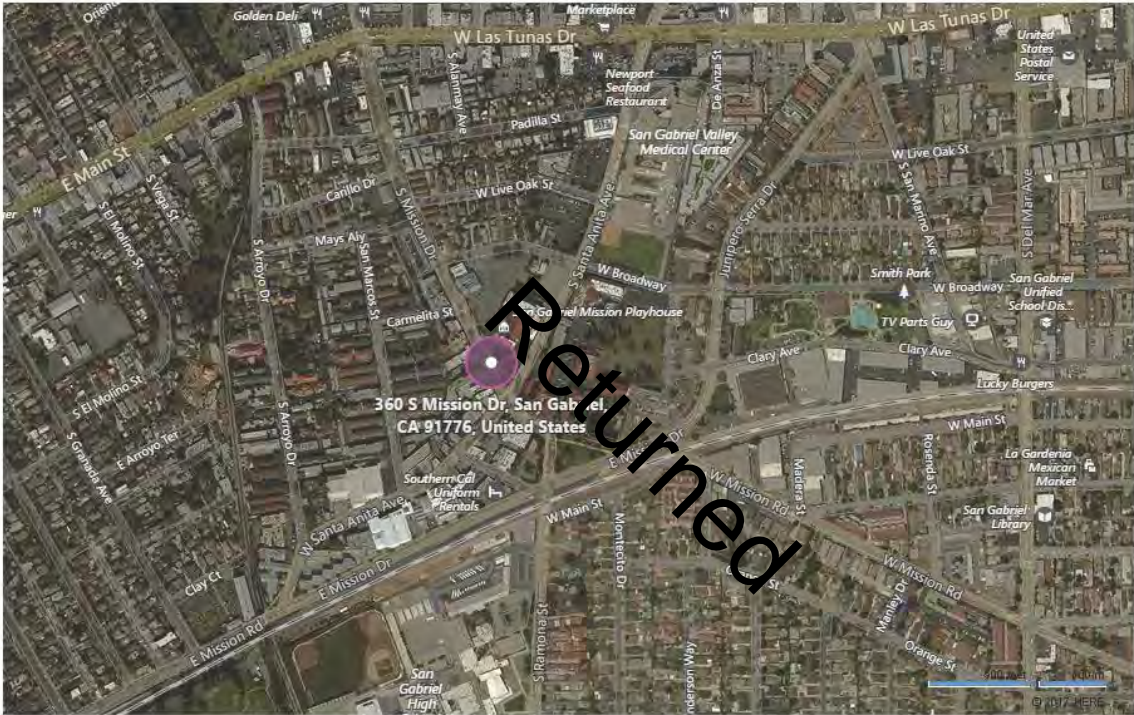
2/12/2017

Bing Maps - Directions, trip planning, traffic cameras & more



360 S Mission Dr, San Gabriel, CA 91776, United States

34.097818, -118.108743



Photographs

Photo Log

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse

City or Vicinity: San Gabriel

County: Los Angeles County State: CA

Photographer: Antonio Montesione

Date Photographed: 2012

Description: Main/south Façade, camera facing northeast

Photo 1 of 14

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse

City or Vicinity: San Gabriel

County: Los Angeles County State: CA

Photographer: Johnny Vy

Date Photographed: 2011

Description: Loggia/entrance to theater, camera facing west

Photo 2 of 14

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse

City or Vicinity: San Gabriel

County: Los Angeles County State: CA

Photographer: Johnny Vy

Date Photographed: 2011

Description: Loggia/entrance to theater, camera facing west

Photo 3 of 14

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse

City or Vicinity: San Gabriel

County: Los Angeles County State: CA

Photographer: Johnny Vy

Date Photographed: 2011

Description: Lobby of theater, camera facing west

Photo 4 of 14

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse

City or Vicinity: San Gabriel

County: Los Angeles County State: CA

Photographer: Johnny Vy

Date Photographed: 2011

Description: Front doors of theater, Lobby, camera facing south

Photo 5 of 14

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse

Returned

City or Vicinity: San Gabriel
County: Los Angeles County State: CA
Photographer: Johnny Vy
Date Photographed: 2011
Description: Front doors of theater, Lobby, camera facing south
Photo 6 of 14

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
City or Vicinity: San Gabriel
County: Los Angeles County State: CA
Photographer: Johnny Vy
Date Photographed: 2011
Description: Interior of theater, view from the balcony seats, camera facing northwest
Photo 7 of 14

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
City or Vicinity: San Gabriel
County: Los Angeles County State: CA
Photographer: Berger/Corser
Date Photographed: 1999
Description: Interior of theater, view of box seats and theater beyond, camera facing west
Photo 8 of 14

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
City or Vicinity: San Gabriel
County: Los Angeles County State: CA
Photographer: Johnny Vy
Date Photographed: 2011
Description: Interior of theater, ceiling, camera facing upward
Photo 9 of 14

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
City or Vicinity: San Gabriel
County: Los Angeles County State: CA
Photographer: Johnny Vy
Date Photographed: 2011
Description: Interior of theater, organ grid stage right, camera facing northwest
Photo 10 of 14

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
City or Vicinity: San Gabriel

County: Los Angeles County State: CA
Photographer: Berger/Corser
Date Photographed: 1999
Description: Interior of theater, view toward back of theater toward balcony and lobby area, camera facing southeast
Photo 11 of 14

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
City or Vicinity: San Gabriel
County: Los Angeles County State: CA
Photographer: Johnny Vy
Date Photographed: 2011
Description: Exterior west arcade, courtyard, and miniature missions, camera facing northwest
Photo 12 of 14

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
City or Vicinity: San Gabriel
County: Los Angeles County State: CA
Photographer: Johnny Vy
Date Photographed: 2011
Description: Exterior west arcade, miniature missions, camera facing northwest
Photo 13 of 14

Name of Property: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
City or Vicinity: San Gabriel
County: Los Angeles County State: CA
Photographer: Johnny Vy
Date Photographed: 2011
Description: Exterior west side of building, camera facing northeast
Photo 14 of 14

Figure Log



Figure 1 of 10

San Gabriel Mission Playhouse, San Gabriel, Los Angeles County, CA

Photographer: unknown

Date Photographed: 1927

Description: Main/south Façade, including original neon roof signage, camera facing north



Figure 2 of 10

San Gabriel Mission Playhouse, San Gabriel, Los Angeles County, CA

Photographer: unknown

Date Photographed: 1927

Description: Main/south Façade, camera facing northeast



Figure 3 of 10

San Gabriel Mission Playhouse, San Gabriel, Los Angeles County, CA

Photographer: unknown

Date Photographed: 1937

Description: Main/south Façade, camera facing north, when it was leased for showing movies by O.W. Lewis from 1932-1942, after the Mission Play closed

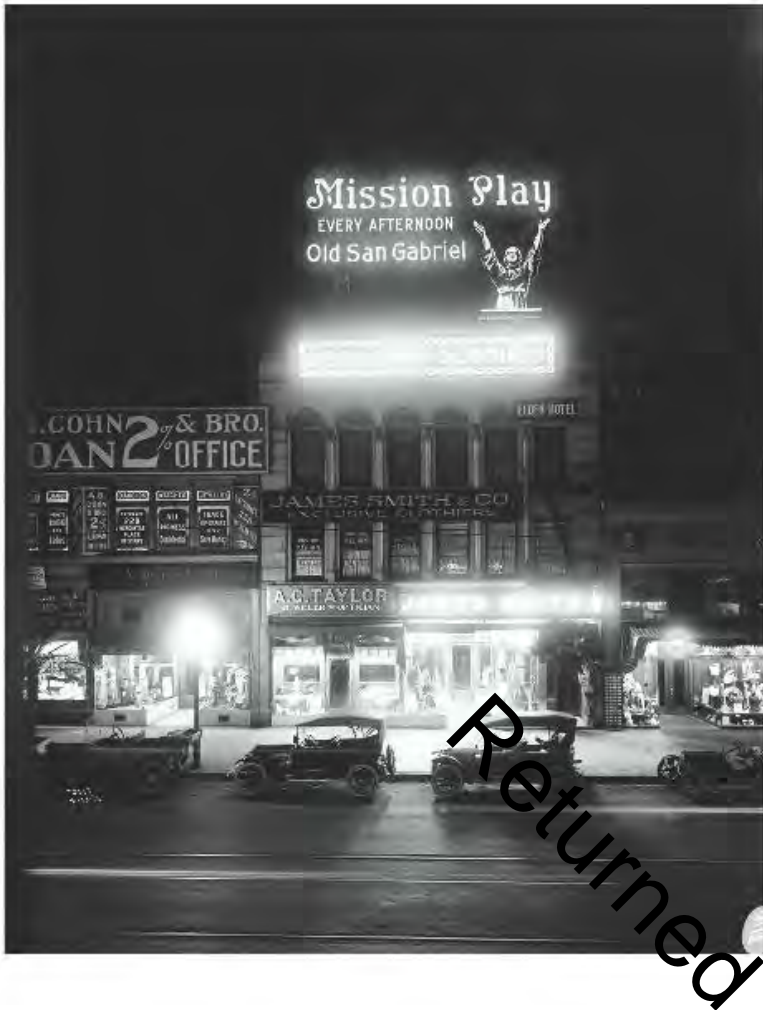


Figure 4 of 10

Retail building, downtown Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, CA

Photographer: G. Haven Bishop

Date Photographed: April 2, 1915

Description: Street scene on Broadway Ave, between 5th and 6th Street at night with illuminated sign advertising the Mission Play in Old San Gabriel

Courtesy of Southern California Edison Collection, The Huntington Library, San Marino, CA.



Figure 5 of 10

Mission Play program, San Gabriel, Los Angeles County, CA

Photographer: unknown

Date Photographed: March 1927

Description: Program Cover for the Mission Play, 16th Season, opening of the new San Gabriel Mission Playhouse, March 1927



Figure 6 of 10
 Advertisement Flyer, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, CA
 Date: circa 1913
 Description: Advertisement Flyer for the Mission Play



Figure 7 of 10
 Los Angeles Sunday Times newspaper article, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, CA
 Date: March 6, 1927
 Description: Article covering the opening of the Mission Playhouse, Courtesy of Glendale Public Library, Special Collections



Figure 8 of 10

Tourist map of California

Published by A.M. Robertson, San Francisco, copyright 1927

Artist: Jo (Jacinto) N. Mora

Description : Map altered to show section featuring the Mission Play in San Gabriel



Figure 9 of 10

Orange crate label, San Marino Growers Packing Association, San Marino, CA

Date: 1923

Description: Orange crate label featuring the Mission Play, for national distribution

Courtesy of Jay T. Last Collection, The Huntington Library, San Marino, CA

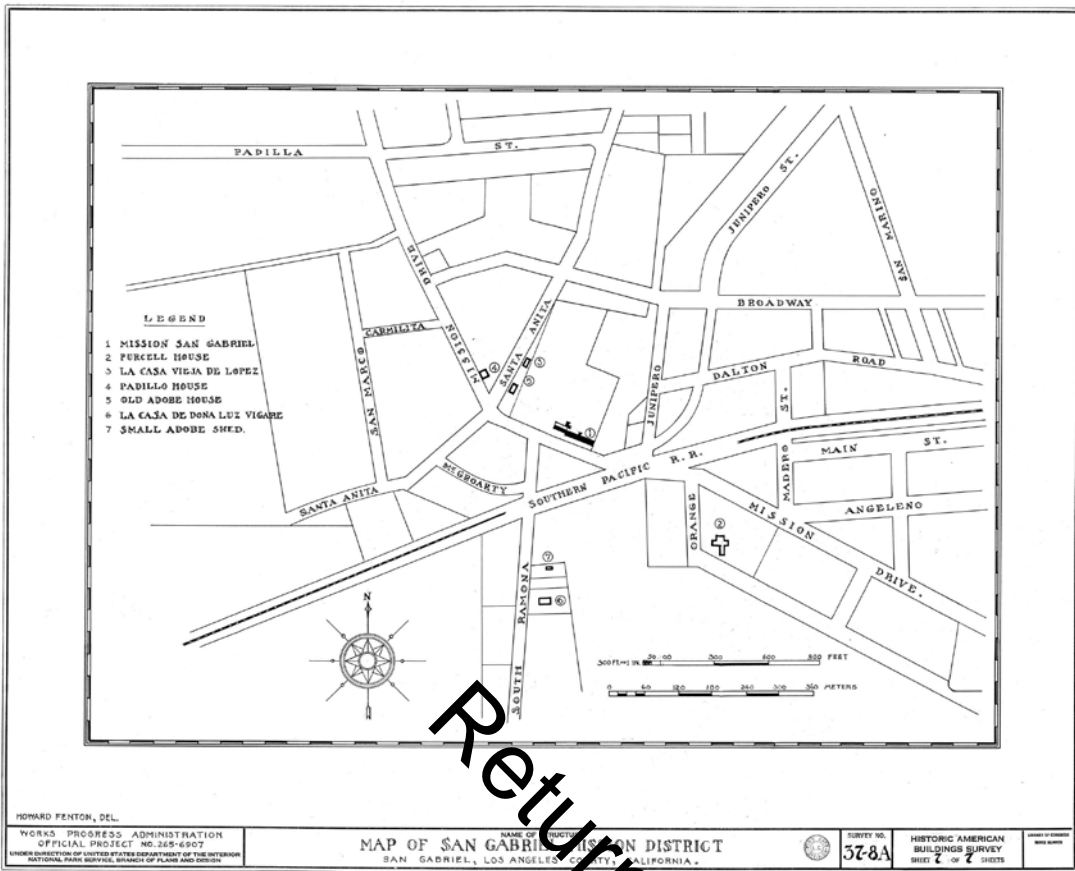


Figure 10 of 10
Works Progress Administration map, San Gabriel District, Los Angeles County, CA
Date: 1936

Description: Historic map of San Gabriel Mission District featuring historic buildings (the Mission Playhouse would have been considered a "new" building at this time, thus not included on the map of historic buildings)

to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

ⁱ Description prepared by Diane Plava, Los Angeles County Community Development Commission, 11/8/1985.

^{i.i} Mission Play Exhibit, San Gabriel Historical Association Museum

ⁱⁱⁱ "Opening of Mission Play a Brilliant Affair", Shallert, Edwin, Los Angeles Times, March 6, 1927, p. 3.

^{iv} This term is taken from William Deverell's book titled, "Whitewashed Adobe".

^v "Franciscan Glory-Story: "American Oberammergau" of John S. McGroarty", Los Angeles Times, April 28, 1912, III-1.

^{vi} Deverell, William, White Washed Adobe, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), p. 209.

^{vii} McGroarty, John Steven, California : Its History and Romance, (Los Angeles: Grafton, 1911).

^{viii} Deverell, William, White Washed Adobe, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), p. 211.

^{ix} A phrase attributed to Carey McWilliams in Deverell, White Washed Adobe, p. 28, 264. The phrase is also articulated in tourism literature. See "Southern California Through the Camera" published by the Los Angeles "All Year Club" in the 1920s.

^x McGroarty's biographer offers alternatives to the traditional narrative and timetable of the play's creation. Mary Eleanor Craggs, "The Career of John Steven McGroarty", M.A. Thesis, Catholic University of America, San Rafael, California, 1958. Elizabeth Murray gives a very dramatic rendering of the play's origin that falls between the regional lore and the historical consensus: "A Sketch of Play's Creation and History", Elizabeth Murray, *West Coast Magazine*, volume 12, 1912. See also, William Deverell, White Washed Adobe.

^{xi} "New and Larger Theater for the Mission Play" Los Angeles Times, February 20, 1921.

^{xii} "Mission Play's Novel Home: New Theater Building Rapidly at San Gabriel", Los Angeles Times, February 25, 1912, p. II-11.

^{xiii} Deverell, William, White Washed Adobe, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), p. 215.

^{xiv} Population data: <http://www.laalmanac.com/population/pop26.htm>; The city of San Gabriel incorporated in 1913.

^{xv} Quoted in a 1915 Mission Play playbill, copy, Huntington Library.

^{xvi} Elizabeth Murray, "A Sketch of Play's Creation and History", *West Coast Magazine*, volume 12, 1912.

^{xvii} During a span of 20 years, 2.5 million people attended some 3,000 performances of the play This figure is widely reported in playhouse programs, the Los Angeles Times, and literature pertaining to the play. The playhouse also figures in Joseph "Jo" Mora, California Tourism maps

^{xviii} "New and Larger Theater for the Mission Play", John Steven McGroarty, Los Angeles Times, February 20, 1921, p. V1

^{xix} Ibid.

^{xx} Deverell, p. 232.

^{xxi} Ibid. To assist in raising funds, the Mission Play Corporation sold stock options. Board member and businessman, George I. Cochran stated that his purchase of preferred stock was, "not a subscription but a loan..." which appeared to be a common belief among notable investors.^{xxi} Henry E. Huntington and D.L. Doheny contributed \$10,000 each, the Retail Merchants Association gave \$6,000, Harry Chandler, George Cochran, Samuel Rindge, W.I. Hollingsworth, Henry Robinson, Title Insurance Corporation, and Eli Clark pledged \$5,000. And Frank Miller, owner of the Mission Inn in Riverside contributed \$3,000. As a result, the support for the *Mission Play* and Playhouse drew from Southern California's elite.^{xxi} Despite their patronage, the Corporation hired Lyndon Ellsworth Behymer, a promoter with a long history in Los Angeles show business to manage the *Mission Play* and Playhouse construction.

^{xxii} Approximately 10 million dollars today.

^{xxiii} "Opening of Mission Play a Brilliant Affair", Shallert, Edwin, Los Angeles Times, March 6, 1927, p. 3.

^{xxiv} Deverell, pp. 244-245.

^{xxv} "New Mission Play Theater Opens Doors in San Gabriel", Busby, Marquis, Los Angeles Times, March 6, 1927, p. C-17.

^{xxvi} "A Cultural Future That Awaits San Gabriel", pamphlet, San Gabriel Mission Playhouse

xxvii Ibid.

xxviii Connie Rothstein Collection of California Missions, the Mission Play and Southern California, Huntington Library, Box 28.

xxix Harold Kirker, California's Architectural Frontier, p. 120

xxx David Gebhard, The Spanish Colonial Revival in Southern California, 1895-1930, Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, p. 131.

xxxi "New and Larger Theater for the Mission Play", John Steven McGroarty, Los Angeles Times, February 20, 1921, p. V1

xxxii Ibid.

xxxiii Ibid.

xxxiv Ibid.

Returned

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Nomination

Property Name: San Gabriel Mission Playhouse

Multiple Name:

State & County: CALIFORNIA, Los Angeles

Date Received: 6/8/2018 Date of Pending List: 7/9/2018 Date of 16th Day: 7/24/2018 Date of 45th Day: 7/23/2018 Date of Weekly List:

Reference number: SG100002674


Nominator: State

Reason For Review:

Accept Return Reject 7/23/2018 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments: The current nomination is being returned for technical and substantive revisions related to the documentation. Reconsideration will be completed upon modification of the items noted below and resubmission of the required materials to the National Park Service. The current nomination while clearly outlining an important eligible property is not consistent with current National Register guidance and standards.

Recommendation/ Criteria RETURN

Reviewer Paul Lusignan 

Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2229

Date 7/23/2018

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : YES see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.

SAN GABRIEL MISSION PLAYHOUSE

Los Angeles County, CALIFORNIA

National Register of Historic Places - Return Comments:

The current nomination is being returned for technical and substantive revisions related to the documentation. Reconsideration will be completed upon modification of the items noted below and resubmission of the required materials to the National Park Service. The current nomination while clearly outlining an important eligible property is not consistent with current National Register guidance and standards.

Verbal Boundary Description

The current verbal boundary description as noted in the nomination is inaccurate. Given the current boundary narrative the nominated area would constitute the entire triangular block between Broadway, South Mission and Santa Anita. In addition to the Playhouse, however, this block contains multiple additional buildings and structures, including a masonic lodge (Hall 793, a local recreation center, the San Gabriel Historic Museum and most notably the Grapevine Room/Adult Recreation Center immediately to the south of the Playhouse's main entry. The nomination needs to be revised to either, describe and assess these additional resources (and any other minor resources), or refine the verbal boundary to a more precise location including just those resources directly related to the Playhouse. The more precise verbal boundary description can be/should be augmented with a scaled map.

The existence of these neighboring buildings should be acknowledged in the narrative description, regardless of their inclusion or exclusion from the nominated boundaries. (As currently written, the Playhouse description could have the building siting in a vacant lot. In particular, the Grapevine building's location plays a pivotal role in the visual character of the Playhouse setting and its orientation to the historic Mission. This resource also appears to share the six-foot decorative wall along Santa Anita Street. The portion of this wall that is associated with the Playhouse needs to be clarified.) See additional discussions in the Description Section below.

Format

The entire nomination should be placed onto appropriate NR Nomination form continuation sheets, or headers provided for each page.

National Park Service Certification

The National Park Service Certification block (Section 4) should be left blank, and is for NPS use only. Information related to previous evaluations should be provided at the end of the Section 9 Bibliographic References under *Previous documentation on file*.

Description

The description section as written provides a minimal discussion of the Mission Playhouse resources. While it documents the most salient features of the dynamic design, it really does not describe the full extent of the rather large building and its attendant features. Revision of the description section should be considered to provide a more detailed discussion of the nominated property. For example, while mentioning the existence of the side-yard reliquary, there is no actual description of the architectural character of that element except to note its red-tiled roof. What is the construction material? How is it

connected to the main structure? How deep is it? How do the main façades differ in fenestration/openings, etc.?

Is the courtyard and fountain to the front of the main Playhouse entry included in the nominated boundaries? Is it historic? The main entry façade appears to include more than just the central arcade, as there seems to be additional entries and extensions to the west and perhaps to the east. Likewise there are low aisles or flat-roofed corridors/arcades running along the side elevations of the building that are not noted in any detail. Finally, there appear to be several additions or build-outs to the rear of the theater with no descriptive discussion. All of these elements may be rather utilitarian in comparison to the dramatic entry and interior, but they should at least be noted, dated if possible, and described to the extent necessary.

In general, we believe that the San Gabriel Mission Playhouse property is clearly worthy of National Register status. With consideration of these comments and correction or revisions to the current nomination as appropriate, we will be glad to review a resubmitted documentation package.

If you have questions regarding these comments, or want to discuss certain aspects of the documentation further, please contact our office directly at the number or e-mail listed below.

Paul R. Lusignan, Historian
(202) 354-2229 Paul_lusignan@nps.gov

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul R. Lusignan", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.



**DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

Lisa Ann L. Mangat, Director

Julianne Polanco, State Historic Preservation Officer
1725 23rd Street, Suite 100, Sacramento, CA 95816-7100
Telephone: (916) 445-7000 FAX: (916) 445-7053
calshpo.ohp@parks.ca.gov www.ohp.parks.ca.gov



June 4, 2019

Joy Beasley
Keeper of the National Register
National Register of Historic Places
1849 C St., NW
Room 3316
Washington, D.C. 20240

Subject: **San Gabriel Mission Playhouse
San Gabriel, Los Angeles County, California
National Register of Historic Places**

Dear Ms. Beasley:

The enclosed disk contains the true and correct copy of nomination for the San Gabriel Mission Playhouse to the National Register of Historic Places. This property is located in San Gabriel, Los Angeles County, California. On May 17, 2018, the State Historical Resources Commission unanimously found the property eligible for the National Register under Criteria A and C at the local level of significance, with a period of significance of 1927-1947. This revised nomination addresses the return comments provided by the Keeper's office on July 23, 2018, regarding verbal boundary description, format, NPS certification, and description of contributing features within the nomination boundary.

If you have any questions regarding this nomination, please contact William Burg of my staff at 916-445-7004.

Sincerely,

Julianne Polanco
State Historic Preservation Officer

Enclosures