

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

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

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



80

1. Name

historic Robert E. Lee Hotel (Lyceum Theater)

and/or common Commodore Hotel/Lyceum Theater

2. Location

street & number 815 Third Ave. (Hotel) & 314 "F" Street (Theater) not for publication

city, town San Diego vicinity of congressional district 41st (Rep. Wilson)

state California code 06 county San Diego code 073

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Margaret A. Allen

street & number 1010 Second Avenue, Suite 1917

city, town San Diego vicinity of state California 92101

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. County Administration Building, County Records Office

street & number 1600 Pacific Highway

city, town San Diego vicinity of state California 92101

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

None Known

title has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town vicinity of state

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved	date <u>November 1979</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

General

The Commodore/Lyceum occupies Lots E & F, Block 63, Horton's Addition in the City of San Diego, and measures 100' x 100'. The building fronts on "F" Street (to the south) and Third Avenue (to the west). The four story Grand-Horton Hotel (1887) is located immediately to the east and a vacant lot is located immediately to the north.

The building is four stories in height. A partial basement occurs under the Theater stage which contains dressing rooms, toilets and orchestra pit. The Theater occupies the east 60' x 100' of the structure and has 437 seats in a main floor, balcony and boxes. The Theater is one-story at the foyer and lobby, two-stories at the auditorium and four-stories plus at the stage. The remaining 40' x 100' on the ground floor contains the Backstage Restaurant, the Hotel lobby and additional Theater space at the northwest corner. The upper floors contain 94 hotel rooms. The total gross area of the building is approximately 42,000 SF.

Construction

The building is constructed of reinforced concrete with square concrete columns supporting concrete beams on an approximate 16' x 16' module. The theater module is approximately 16' x 50'. Floors and roof are of reinforced concrete. Roofing is composition and gravel surface, sloped to drains at the southeast and northwest corners. There are five light-wells on the roof and two of these have metal and glass, hip framed skylights. Above the roof level, there is an elevator penthouse and the stage house with smoke vent. Exterior walls are hollow clay tile infill between columns/girders with stucco/plaster finish over. Interior partitions are metal studs with metal lath and plaster over. These may well be the first such installation in San Diego.

Exterior Facade

The Architectural style is adapted from the Classic Revival with vertically aligned windows/spandrels placed between unadorned flat wall pilasters. A continuous 18" projecting ornamental cornice (with cast concrete brackets, dentil course, and egg and dart frieze) occurs at the roof line below the parapet. A continuous horizontal 12" projecting concrete belt course with plain molds, occurs at the second floor line. Window openings at the upper three floors are rectilinear with lightly indented head and jamb reveals. Windows are wood double hung one over one with wood heads, jambs and sills. Windows occur both singly and in pairs. Ornamental concrete spandrel panels occur at the third and fourth floor lines and have an interesting raised relieved panel over an indented window header with a decorative keystone centered over each window opening. Above the second floor all original fabric is extant, however much of the lower (ground floor) storefront has been altered.

Interior

The ground floor contains Theater dressing rooms/exit (at the northwest corner), the Hotel lobby, the "Backstage" restaurant (at the southwest corner) and the "Lyceum Theater" (the east side of the building).

The Theater is divided into the Foyer, the Lobby, the Auditorium (with balcony and boxes) and the Stage. A marquee occurs over the foyer and projects over the public sidewalk. The

8. Significance

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

Specific dates Const. May, 1913 **Builder/Architect** Willis J. Dean, Engineer

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Commodore/Lyceum is significant for its architectural type and its historical association with the turn of the century Renaissance of the downtown area as the City prepared for the Panama-California Exposition. It is most significant for its historical contribution to the theatrical arts of the City, as well as its identification with actors, performers, musicians and other significant personalities over the past 66 years.

This structure is the only known example ever built in San Diego of the "theatrical hotel" which was more popular in large eastern cities such as New York. It is the only known remaining work of Willis J. Dean, prominent San Diego Engineer and is the second oldest theater in San Diego extant. It is the oldest theater built for dramatic productions and is the only small intimate theater (430 seats) with full stage and fly galley in the downtown area. It was also the location of the first Spanish speaking dramatic theater presented in San Diego (1915).

The structure has most all of its original fabric extant with only minor later alterations and intrusions. Preservation and restoration of the building is intended utilizing the Tax Reform Act provisions. At present, the building is imminently threatened with condemnation and demolition by the City of San Diego which proposes to utilize the site for a parking structure as part of the Horton Plaza Development project.

Historical Background

The initial sub-division of Block 63 was recorded in 1868 by Alonzo E. Horton "the Father of San Diego". The first sale recorded was from Horton to A.F. Hinchman of lots A-L.¹ In Dec. 1886, Francisca Temple de Ajuria sold lots C,D,E & F to R.A. Thomas and Thomas Daley.² In March 1887, Daley sold lots E & F to James McCoy³ who then immediately sold the same lots to Charles W. Pauly.⁴ It is believed that Pauly built or had built (under lease) the two-story wood frame building which appears on the 1887 Sanborn Fire Map.⁵ This structure had a livery stable and stores on the ground floor with lodging rooms above and was known as Charles Kelly Livery. Kelly was noted as a hotel-keeper in the 1887/1888 City Directory. The property then passed through several subsequent ownerships. In the 1892 Directory, the Pacific Stables⁶ was shown at 3rd and F. In February 1893, Levi Chase acquired the property (Sheriffs Sale).⁷ In September, Chase sold the property to A.L. and Mary Ross who, with their heirs, would continue ownership to the present day.

In 1887/88, San Diego had a boom period with many new buildings constructed. This boom expanded the downtown development along Fifth Ave. almost to D Street (Broadway). After this boom ended, significant subsequent events guided and shaped San Diego's further downtown development. In 1890, the Chamber of Commerce began strongly supporting the proposed Nicaragua (Panama) Canal as they could easily see what its economic benefit could be to San Diego. By 1900, after the effects of the Bank Panic had subsided, the Chamber also actively promoted for San Diego: a direct rail line to the East; permanent Federal facilities; permanent military installations; expansion of the port facilities; and establishment of a Normal School in San Diego.⁹ In 1902 Congress authorized the construc-

9. Major Bibliographical References

City Directories: City of San Diego
 County Recorders Office: Deed Books, Lease Books and Miscellaneous Records
 Historical Collections/Records: S.D. Public Library and S.D. Historical Society
 Newspapers: San Diego Sun and San Diego Union
 Oral Interviews: Bob Johnston, Jerome O'Conner and Welton Jones

10. Geographical Data

UTM NOT VERIFIED

Acreeage of nominated property 0.23 Acres

ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

Quadrangle name Point Loma, Calif.

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A

1	1	4	8	4	9	3	0	3	6	1	9	3	8	0
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 Zone Easting Northing

B

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 Zone Easting Northing

C

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Verbal boundary description and justification (San Diego Parcel 533-577-08)

The nominated property occupies two City lots known as Lots E & F, Block 63, Horton's Addition, City of San Diego. The property measures 100' x 100'. See Plat Attached.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries None

state code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title John D. Henderson, A.I.A./Dr. Ray Brandes

organization Macy, Henderson & Cole, A.I.A. date 28 November 1979

street & number 631 Fifth Avenue telephone (714) 234-3551

city or town San Diego state California 92101

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Kerry Mellon

title _____ date April 15, 1980

For HCERS use only.

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Sally G. Odden
 Keeper of the National Register

date 5/13/80

Attest:

Chief of Registration

[Signature]

date 5-14-80

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one-story Foyer has the original octagonal white ceramic tile floor with inset green tile borders, dots and lettering (The Lyceum Theater) extant, under the carpeted floor. Aluminum and glass doors have been installed at the building face (originally open) and a box-office was incorporated in 1970 at the west end of the foyer. The original marble walls, wainscot and base are not in evidence as existing walls are plain with a wall covering finish. The classical panel ceiling with decorative molding is extant, but has been covered by a spray plaster coating. The Lobby (remodeled 1970) has a suspended acoustic tile ceiling, with wallcovering and carpeted floors. The original concrete balcony stairs (at each end of the lobby) are extant including the cast iron railings and newel posts. The Auditorium is two-stories in height, measures 59'-6" x 54-1/2", has a sloping floor (with three banks of seating and four aisles) and contains 317 seats. The Auditorium ceiling is divided into three bays by the structural beams. Each bay contains a shallow coved ceiling panel with heavily scrolled border which has inset theatrical lights. Simple corbeled molds articulate the concrete beams and terminate in a decorative belt frieze with loop motif and egg and dart course below. A recessed half-dome with cove lighting occurs at the center of the central ceiling panel. A balcony projects 24'-6" feet from the Lobby wall with boxes (at each side) occupying the space between the balcony face and the proscenium wall. There is a projection control booth at the rear of the balcony which also contains the original light board from the 1929 Pantages (Orpheum) Theater (razed in the 1960's). The balcony and boxes contain 120 seats. Many of the original seats are extant with new fabric covering on seats and back. The Forestage measures 41'-2" x 10'-4" and partially covers the original Orchestra pit, still extant. The rectangular proscenium opening measures 21'-0" x 17'-7" and is accented with a fluted and banded frame with a decorative crest above containing a lyre in high relief. The Stage is 59'-6" x 17'-6" and extends through the roof of the building. The original grid is 50' above the stage floor and is totally extant. Originally a cable house, new manila hemp rigging has been installed. Stairs occur on each side of the stage area which connect to dressing rooms, toilets and orchestra pit located below the stage area. There are also an exitway (with additional dressing rooms, toilets and shower) at the west side of the stage area which connects to Third Avenue.

The Backstage Restaurant was developed in 1970. The original store fronts were altered, although the original plaster walls and ceiling are extant. The restaurant kitchen utilized part of the original hotel lobby space.

The present Hotel Lobby occupies a (original) store space and 1/2 of the original lobby. The store fronts have been remodeled however the original fabric is otherwise extant. The original manually operated electric overhead elevator (Van Emon Elevator Co. - San Francisco) and the surrounding concrete stairway are extant. The elevator was originally an open wire-cage type, later enclosed by plastered shaft walls. The original cab also had metal panels installed (inside the caging) and later hall doors of metal frames with metal panels and wire glass (date unknown).

The upper floors contain a total of 94 rooms oriented to interior corridors, interior lightwells and exterior windows. The floor plans vary from floor to floor due to the interweaving of the hotel space with the theater space. Interior finishes are plaster at walls and ceilings with asphalt tile floors. Doors (3'-0" x 7'-0") are plain with simple

FHR-8-300A
(11/78)

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inset panels and have small operating transoms (3'-0" x 1'-0") over. Wood trim 1x4 at jambs with 1x6 and bed mold (as capitols) at heads. Base is 1x6 plain. All trim, walls and ceilings are painted.

Condition

The general condition of the building is good with no evidence of distress and only minor evidence of deterioration such as the roof skylights. The building, fully occupied, is reasonably well maintained and appears to present no problems concerning its continued use.

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tion of the Panama Canal. In that same year Samuel Parsons, the New York landscape architect, completed plans for development of the 1400 acre City (Balboa) Park.¹⁰ About 1904, the Civic Improvement Committee of the Chamber was formed with Julius Wangenheim, Chairman. Among others, George W. Marston and Melville Klauber were influential members. The Committee hired John Nolen, New York landscape architect, to undertake a Comprehensive Development Plan for improvements to San Diego.¹¹ Nolen presented this plan in 1908¹² to groups throughout the area and Wangenheim and Marston widely promoted San Diego throughout the Country, encouraging business interests and tourists to come here. By 1906, another boom period began which would reach a high peak about 1912-13. In 1909, the Exposition Committee had been formed and intense planning began for the Panama-California Exposition which was to be opened in 1915. By 1910 the new Federal Building location was settled, the U.S. Grant Hotel was open, and John D. Spreckels completed the San Diego Hotel and had other buildings in process. Spreckels, who had purchased the San Diego Railway in 1892, began expansion of the system with D (Broadway), F and Market Streets as main east-west arteries. In 1911 Glen Curtis opened his flying school at North Island, the State Legislative gave the City control of its tidelands in San Diego Bay, and the Exposition groundbreaking was held.³ By 1913 construction in San Diego was at its most intense with many buildings built or under way. On February 13, 1913, the San Diego Union wrote:

"Building operations are active on "F" Street. Next to "D" Street and State, there are probably more building blocks under construction on this thoroughfare than any other in the downtown district. In the ten blocks from the Federal Building, at State and "F", to the Hotel Marquette, at Eighth, buildings are under construction which will cost more than three-quarters of a million dollars. They include the Federal Building, a \$250,000 structure which now is under construction on the block between Union and State. Extending from Front to Union is the Starkey & Sundberg Hotel and store building costing about \$60,000. At the northeast corner of First and "F" is the Schoonover Hotel which will cost about \$55,000.

Two blocks east of the Schoonover Building is the (Theatrical/Hotel) structure being erected by the United Investment Company. On the opposite corner the \$20,000. Engebretsen Building is being erected. The Lu Mau Block, of five stories at Fifth and "F", will cost about \$75,000. The entire frontage on the north side of "F", between Sixth and Seventh is being cleared for the Sefton Arcade and Hotel which will cost about \$150,000. At Eighth and "F" is the Marquette Hotel which recently was completed at a cost of about \$65,000.

Other buildings are proposed for "F" Street. Investors and property owners believe the thoroughfare will soon become important, not only through the business district, but to the east of the business section for several blocks".

Earlier, on April 3, 1912, Ross et al, had entered into a lease with Chaffey¹⁴ (Construction Co.) and Cobb (Attorney) to construct a building on the property. The San Diego Union of May 19, 1912 announced that "Excavation has begun for the founda-

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tions of five-story Class A Theater, hotel and office building....from plans prepared by Hamilton and Smith Bros. (Architects)...will cost about \$125,000." The events of the next few months are unclear, however, a lease¹⁵ of Aug. 12, 1912 assigned the Chaffey and Cobb interests to the United Investment Co. Mechanic liens were also filed against the property by the Architects and several material suppliers.

However, the optimism for San Diego's downtown future was still at its peak and "F" Street was considered to be a key thoroughfare. On February 23, 1913, the San Diego Union reported:

"Work is progressing rapidly on the Construction of the four-story hotel, theater and store building on 100x100 feet of ground at the northeast corner of Third and F Streets. It is being built by the United Investment Company, S.W. Grier, President, who expects to have the structure ready for occupancy in about sixty days. The Theater will be known as the New Lyceum. It has been leased to Dennis, Weiss and Dowell, who propose to organize a dramatic stock company to operate the house. No stock shows have been seen in San Diego for some time and it is expected the new lessees will make a success of their venture. They are now conducting two moving picture houses in San Diego.

The Theater has a frontage of 50 feet on F Street and is 80 feet deep, taking up two floors of the building. It will have a seating capacity of 800 including balcony and boxes. Besides the Theater, the first floor will contain four stores on F Street and three on Third Street. The remainder of the building will be taken up with the hotel, which will be known as the Robert E. Lee. It will contain 93 rooms of which twenty will have private baths in connection and will be modern in every respect.

The building is absolutely fireproof, constructed throughout of reinforced concrete and hollow tile, excepting the partitions, which will be built of a fireproof material not before used in San Diego. The partitions will consist of double steel studs and steel lath finished with plaster. It is said that this style of construction is far more soundproof than concrete or hollow tile.

Several applications have been received for a lease on the hotel, but it has not yet been leased. The exterior of the building will be finished with concrete waterproofing in a light buff color. The structure will cost about \$75,000."

The article also showed a perspective sketch of the completed building, which closely resembles the present day structure, and noted that it had been designed by Willis J. Dean.

Theater History (The various names shown in quotation marks and underlined)

Edward H. Dowell and partners effected a new 10 year lease in April¹⁶ with United Investment and the "Lyceum Theater" had its grand opening on May 5, 1913.¹⁷ The opening presen-

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tation was entitled "Deep Purple". It was written by Paul Armstrong and introduced the New Lyceum Stock Company.¹⁸ Dowell managed the theater and directed the stock company while his wife, Julia Gray, starred in the production. Dowell later served on the City Council (1927-31), was the Vice-President of the California Federation of Labor (1937) and President of the Projectionist Union in San Diego.¹⁹

The Robert E. Lee Hotel opened in September of 1913.²⁰ The name presumably was chosen as a southern answer (United's president was from Texas) to the U.S. Grant Hotel located two blocks north. As no Hotel registers have been found, little is known of the early hotel residents or guests, however many of the artists appearing at the Lyceum must have stayed there.²¹

By early November, Dowell experienced financial problems (his partners had deserted him) and the production closed. The Dowells formed a new company and toured the National Vaudeville circuit for several years.²² By the end of November, Richard Sampsell, the new manager of the "Gaiety Theater" opened a musical called "The Social Whirl".²³ Early in 1914 newspapers exclaimed that the new managers George and Edna Dill of the "Little Theater" would replace musicals with the Exposition Stock Company. The Dills were evidently very successful for, in August, they moved their production to the Spreckels.²⁴ Stock dramas then appeared at the "Little Theater" with one production being "Life's Shop Window".²⁵

By January 1915, "Ballein's Vaudeville Theater" was showing films and presenting acts from the Bert Levy Vaudeville Circuit. Artists who appeared included the Ben Hardy Trio (Ragtime Artists), Victor the Great and Clothilda (ventriloquists), Mrs. E.T. Dougherty and her troop of trained poodles, the Japanese minstrels, Fern Buck (toe dancer) and Vivian Norris Bourbette (Spectacle of singing and dancing).^{26, 27} In March and April, the "Teatro Le Mexican" presented the Hispana-American Stock Company from Mexico City in drama and operas which was the first professional Hispanic presentation in San Diego.²⁸ By June, the "Gaiety Theater", under new management, presented "high class vaudeville and selected motion pictures" with Maurice Homer (the Charlie Chaplin of Vaudeville), the Rosaels (Comedy Singing and Dancing Duo) and Lillian Colson (the Dublin Daisey) as featured performers.²⁹ Occasionally a dramatic stock company would be brought to San Diego for a limited engagement. The San Diego Union of December 7, 1915, advertised the "New Gaiety Theater" presents The New Congressman with J.W. Clifford and Lew H. Dunbar, the funniest operatic comedians on the West Coast" and also a "Big Beauty Chorus". A special feature was "Doxie Emerson and her famous tango dancers."

By January 1917, Julia Gray & Company presented dramas at the "Little Theater" which changed each week and included "The Spend Thrift", "The Man She Loved", and "The Other Side". Ed Dowell and Julia Gray, who had returned to live in San Diego, both appeared in these performances.³⁰ By August, "The Little Theater" was presenting musical comedys. The productions featured spectacular reviews, jazz bands, a chorus of American beauties or an amateur night.³¹ In November, the advertisements read "20 - The Twentieth Century Girls - 20".³²

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On January 2, 1919, the "Gaiety Theater" advertised a Spanish vaudeville "Cuadro Novel".³³ During this period, the Theater also had sports shows and occasionally staged boxing matches.³⁴ Local fighters who appeared at the "Gaiety" included Jerome O'Conner and Spud Murphy.³⁴ In January 1920, a new lease³⁵ was recorded to Louis and Carmelita Fontanel who reopened the "Lyceum Theater" and continued the musical comedy and all girl revue format for the next several years. The Fontanels son was a famous Hollywood comedian who appeared on the national vaudeville circuit and was billed as Bozo Lord. Bozo appeared at the "Hollywood" in the late Thirties.³⁶ Billy Wayne, Eddie Burch, Dick Harding, George Lord, Pankey Wayne, Izzy de Voe, George Rehn and Louis Newman were local headliners.³⁷

Bob Johnston, who had earlier appeared on the Pantages Circuit as the "Newsboy Tenor", operated the candy concession at the "Lyceum" in 1923, and also the Savoy (Isis) Theater.³⁸

In July of 1923, a playbill advertised a "Monumental Program", featuring "La Nina de los Besos" and "El Soldado de Chocolate" at the "Teatro Lyceum".³⁹ By 1924, the "Liberty Theater" appears in the City Directory. Newspaper advertisements, of January 1925, indicate that a series of musical comedies would present "pretty girls, comics and movies".⁴⁰ Then Bob Johnston became Theater manager of the "Liberty Theater" and brought the show, "Whizz Bang Babies" from the Savoy.⁴¹ For the next several years the theme was vaudeville and burlesque comedy. Notable performers of that period included John De Weese, "Bubbles and the Rose Bud Girls" and "8 Liberty Belles".⁴² From 1926 to 1928, the City Directory lists the "Liberty Family Theater", which apparently continued the comedy revue theme. From 1929 to 1931 it was again the "Liberty Theater".⁴³

Newspapers in January and February of 1929 advertised burlesque⁴⁴ which would be the main attraction for the next forty years, under Bob Johnston's management. Vaudeville was dead and burlesque would take over. From 1932 to 1970, the "Hollywood Theater" was wholly burlesque and, at its most popular period, would run up to six shows a day. Bob Johnston was the master of ceremonies and appeared in the show. The more famous performers to appear at the "Hollywood" were Lou Costello (prior to his partnership with Bud Abbott), Lily St. Cyr (who started her career at the Hollywood), Betty Rowland (The Blonde Bombshell), Lois DeFee and Tempest Storm. Texas Bobbi Roberts was a particular local favorite as well as "Say No More" Joe and Eddie Ware, "Monkey" Kirland and "Bubbles" Rose, all burlesque comics. In 1935, during the California-Pacific International Exposition, Johnston closed the "Hollywood" and ran the "Streets of Paris" show in the Gold Gulch area, featuring "The Gold Gulch Girls". In 1950 Bob Johnston and Otto Ecklund bought the "Palace", next door. Johnston had also been active as a fight promoter and manager. Fight personalities who toured the burlesque circuit and appeared at the "Hollywood" were Johnston's friends such as Jack Johnson, Henry Armstrong and Lou Nova. Johnson even had Joe Louis give an impromptu talk to the audience when Joe was in town.⁴⁵

In 1970, Vincent Miranda bought out Bob Johnston and the "Hollywood Theater" (possibly the last burlesque theater in the United States) was finally closed.⁴⁶ Early in 1971, Miranda opened "The Off-Broadway Theater" which presented live dramatic theater and featured stars from Hollywood. Productions included "40 Carats" with Marjorie Lord and Angela Cartwright, "You're a Good Man Charlie Brown", "Everybody's Girl" with Rose Marie, "Victory Canteen" with Patty Andrews and "Last of the Red Hot Lovers" with Don Knotts.

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Some 15 other productions followed and featured such stars as Van Johnson, Dorothy Lamour, Kaye Ballard, Sid Caesar, Eve Arden, Adrienne Barbeau, John Saxon, Virginia Mayo, Bob Crane, Dana Andrews, June Allyson, Yvonne de Carlo, Dean Jones, Ann Miller, Jo Ann Worley, Maureen Reagan, Brandon de Wilde, and James Drury.⁴⁷ In 1973, he developed the Backstage Restaurant, adjacent to the theater lobby.

In January 1975, Miranda closed the "Off-Broadway" and incorporated the Theater into his "Pussycat"⁴⁸ chain of theaters, showing the movie "Deep Throat" which ran continuously for four years. In 1979, the Downtowners Ltd. assumed the lease on the Theater and immediately began restoration of the "Lyceum Theater" and preparation for the "Lyceum Follies" which opened on October 13, 1979.⁴⁹ The Lyceum Follies, whose theme is the history of an old Theater about to be torn down, stars among others Bob Johnston and his daughter, Dee Ann.

Although identified with many various names⁵⁰ (Lyceum, Gaiety, Little, Balleins Vaudeville, Teatro le Mexican, Teatro Lyceum, Liberty, Liberty Family, Hollywood, Off-Broadway, Pussycat and finally Lyceum) it has been the scene of the complete spectrum of Theater productions (legitimate, vaudeville, burlesque, sports, opera, comedy, drama and movies) which spans over 66 years of San Diego's theatrical arts history.

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NOTES

1. County Recorder - Deed 3/283, dated 10/15/68
2. County Recorder - Deed 77/456, dated 12/29/86
3. County Recorder - Deed 81/314, dated 3/17/87
4. County Recorder - Deed 97/379, dated 3/19/87
5. Public Library - Sanborn Map File
6. City Directory - 1896. Pacific Stables was later name for Charles Kelly Livery
7. County Recorder - Deed 222/273, dated 8/25/93
8. County Recorder - Deed 216/406, dated 9/4/93
9. Chamber of Commerce, Board Minutes, 1890-1900
10. Christman, Florence, The Romance of Balboa Park, San Diego, Neyenesch Printers, 1973
11. Pourade, Richard F., Gold In The Sun, San Diego, Union-Tribune Publishing Co., 1965
12. Nolen, John, San Diego, A Comprehensive Plan For Its Development, Boston, George H. Ellis Co., 1908
13. Pourade, op. cit.
14. County Recorder - Lease 9/33, dated 4/17/12
15. County Recorder - Lease 12/470, dated 8/19/12
16. County Recorder - Lease 10/164, dated 4/1/13
17. San Diego Union - 5/5/13
18. San Diego Union - 5/4/13
19. Serra Museum - vertical files (biography)
20. San Diego Union - 9/7/13
21. Public Library - unpublished research report by Edward Scott
22. San Diego Union - 2/14/58
23. San Diego Union - 10/7/79
24. San Diego Union - 10/7/79
25. Public Library - Theatrical files, Ad dated 1914
26. San Diego Sun - 1/2/15, 2/6/15, 3/19/15 & 3/29/15
27. San Diego Sun - 3/30/15 & 4/6/15
28. The Exposition Committee actively encouraged cultural exchange activities with Mexico for the Fair.
29. San Diego Sun - 6/6/15, 6/8/15 & 6/9/15
30. San Diego Sun - 1/4/17, 1/17/17 & 1/20/17
31. San Diego Sun - 7/29/17, 8/7/17, 8/14/17 & 9/21/17

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32. San Diego Sun - 11/17/17, 11/22/17,
11/28/17, 12/1/17, 12/2/17, 12/14/17,
12/20/17 & 12/31/17
33. San Diego Sun - 1/2/19
34. Oral interview with Jerome O'Conner - 1979
35. County Recorder - Lease 15/169, dated 1/2/20
36. Oral Interview with Bob Johnson - 1979
37. San Diego Sun - 1/1/21, 1/20/21, 2/1/21
& 2/17/21
38. Oral Interview with Bob Johnston - 1979
39. Dr. Ray Brandes - Allen Wright Collection
40. San Diego Sun - 1/1/25
41. Oral Interview with Bob Johnston - 1979
42. San Diego Sun - 1/17/25, 2/17/25 & 5/7/25
43. City Directories, 1929-1931
44. San Diego Union
45. Oral Interview with Bob Johnston - 1979
46. San Diego Union - 9/19/69 & 2/9/70
47. San Diego Union - 10/11/70, 11/22/70, 4/28/71,
5/11/71, 8/1/71, 8/6/71, 8/25/71, 9/25/71,
3/17/72, 4/8/72, 4/29/72, 6/30/72, 9/12/72,
1/28/73, 3/1/73, 3/11/73 & 6/6/73
48. San Diego Union - 5/15/75
49. San Diego Union - 7/6/79 & 10/7/79
50. City Directories - 1913-1979

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City of San Diego-Portion of
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