

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: Davis Theater

Other names/site number: Pershing Theatre

Name of related multiple property listing: \_\_\_\_\_

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

### 2. Location

Street & number: 4616-4630 North Lincoln Avenue

City or town: Chicago State: IL County: Cook

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

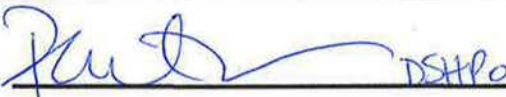
I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property  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  local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A  B  C  D

	<u>3/4/14</u>
Signature of certifying official/Title:	Date
<u>Illinois Historic Preservation Agency</u>	
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

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In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

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**Signature of commenting official:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**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:) \_\_\_\_\_

*by Barbara Wyatt*  
Signature of the Keeper

*4-26-16*  
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
-

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Site

Structure

Object

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing

Noncontributing

1

buildings

sites

structures

objects

Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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## Narrative Description

### Exterior

#### *Site & Setting*

The Davis Theater is a three-story tall building occupying nearly the entire footprint of its property boundaries along Lincoln Avenue in the Lincoln Square community of Chicago; approximately seven miles northwest of downtown on the west side of Lincoln Avenue, just north of Wilson Avenue. The building is U-shaped in plan with a narrow passage separating the L-shaped theater block from the mixed-use commercial/residential block extending north. The building, sited mid-block, rises approximately 40'-0" above grade and is consistent in scale with the adjacent three-story commercial buildings built during the same period. The Davis Theater is situated along Lincoln Avenue, one of Chicago's major commercial thoroughfares running southeast to northwest through Lincoln Square.

Overall, the property is trapezoidal in plan and measures approximately 130' deep at its widest point and approximately 175' long. Sitting on a quarter of a city block in length, the Davis Theater occupies the largest lot on its block. However, its integration with adjacent construction gives the Davis Theater a consistent appearance along Lincoln Avenue. The theater block itself is largely located at the rear of the lot with a rectangular leg that is in line with the adjacent commercial construction along Lincoln Avenue. This rectangular section has approximately 36'-0" of street frontage and serves as the primary façade and main entrance for the theater section of the building. The attached commercial block is rectangular in plan, measuring approximately 34'-0" deep, and with 137'-0" of street frontage extending north from the theater bay. An alley borders the property at the rear and the theater shares a party wall with the adjacent building to the south. At the north end, a narrow passage separates the commercial block from the adjacent building to the north and opens on to a small, irregular-shaped courtyard at the north end of the theater. From here, an approximately 13'-0" wide passage extends south between the main portion of the theater and the commercial block. This passage terminates at the theater block where there was originally a loading entrance into the theater.

The theater entrance bay at the far south end of the building is slightly taller and houses a one-story lobby with a second floor apartment above. The commercial block and a portion of the theater block have basements below grade. The larger volume of the theater, at the back of the lot, is at about the same height as the rest of the building, but is not visible from Lincoln Avenue. The Davis Theater is constructed of steel framing at the theater block and wood joists at the commercial block with load-bearing masonry walls. The main volume of the theater is covered with a bow-truss roof while the rest of the building has a flat roof concealed behind a masonry parapet along Lincoln Avenue.

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*East Elevation*

The street facing façade is comprised of red brick detailed with cream-colored terra cotta. The theater block is distinguished from the rest of the building through its façade arrangement and higher level of ornamentation. A tall blade sign that reads “DAVIS” prominently identifies the theater. The sign has a substantial steel structure that extends approximately 40’-0” above the front parapet; though the exact date of installation is unknown this tall blade sign dates to c.1960 and is a significant historic façade feature. A second non-historic 1980s internally lit blade sign is centered at the second floor façade.

The street façade of the theater bay is composed of the main theater entrance at the first floor, set beneath a non-historic pent roof, and with a tall second floor framed and ornamented with terra cotta. The upper portion of the façade features a central composition of three arched window openings with a Classically-detailed terra cotta surround. This is framed by multiple bands of terra cotta and the façade is also detailed with diamond shaped terra cotta units that are regularly spaced within a band of brick. Wall-mounted lighting sockets are located across the façade’s second floor – lining each window opening, clustered above window openings, centered within each diamond shape terra cotta unit and regularly spaced within the outermost band of terra cotta trim. At the parapet, the façade is detailed with a projecting terra cotta cornice with ornamented terra cotta panels and coping above.

The first floor of the theater bay is devoted to the theater entrance, which is deeply recessed and is composed of three pairs of non-historic entry doors flanked by non-historic fixed display windows. The doors and frames are of clear-finished aluminum, most likely dating to the 1930s renovation. Historic built-in opaque glass panels and clear glass display cabinets are located toward the sidewalk at each end of the entry. A separate entrance that accesses an interior stair is located at the north end of the theater bay. The first floor of the theater bay is clad in orange and red enamel panels below the non-historic pent roof. The entrance floor is of terrazzo with a polychrome, geometric design, probably installed in the 1930 renovation.

The street façade of the commercial block is divided into three main sections, delineated by terra cotta trimmed piers. The façade treatment in this location is more simplified, with terra cotta detailing limited to window sills and lintels, stringcourses, coping, decorative panels and ornamented trim at storefronts and entries. The continuous coping is broken up with simple projecting elements. Each section of the commercial block façade is composed of a center, arched entrance flanked by retail storefronts at the first floor. All original storefronts dating to the original 1918 construction are missing, though the three south storefronts that display aluminum frames and opaque glass transoms were remodeled during the period of significance. The second and third floors above the main entrance have pairs of smaller, punched openings. Larger window openings, each with three windows, are located above the storefronts. All windows are single light, double-hung, replacement units.

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### *West Elevation*

The west (rear) elevations are clad in common brick and feature limited window and door openings, which are primarily concentrated at the commercial block. This block also features exterior porches off the second and third floor residential units.

## **Interior**

### *Summary*

The theater block of the Davis Theater displays its original spatial layout with surviving decorative elements from its initial 1918 completion. A significant renovation was complete in 1930, with two additional renovations undertaken in the 1980s. The theater block retains its original spatial layout with a southeast lobby, south lobby corridor, and west auditorium space, subdivided into four separate screening rooms by previous owners.

### *Entrance Lobby & Lobby Corridor*

The interior of the theater block is arranged with the ground level Lincoln Avenue entrance lobby at its east end connected to a corridor that extends west, providing access to the main auditorium. The entrance lobby and corridor are open, one-story tall spaces displaying non-historic carpeted floors, plaster walls, and a non-historic gridded ceiling obscuring an original plaster ceiling above. Overall, the entrance lobby and corridor retain their original 1918 spatial layout along with original painted interior doors and door and base trim original to the building. The entrance lobby and corridor were renovated during the theater's conversion to a talking picture house in 1930, a renovation reflected in the minimal ornament and streamline curved walls typical of Moderne Style architecture of the 1920s and 1930s. Art Deco features added during this 1930 renovation include an ornate metal lobby chandelier, curved column pilasters and display walls, and decorative door pulls installed on the original auditorium doors. Non-historic ticket counter and concession stands are located along the north end of the main lobby.

A curved plaster wall at the northwest corner of the main lobby encloses a former egress path out to the center gangway. The original steel doors there are infilled on the lobby (south side) but exposed on the retail (north) side. A men's restroom located north of the main lobby underneath a residential stair is clad in non-historic finishes and fixtures.

Within the lobby corridor, four inset door openings along the north wall are framed in original painted wood door trim and house original wood double doors with 1930 Art Deco push and pull panels. These doors allow access to Screening Rooms 1 and 4. The original wood doors are in deteriorated condition. Non-historic sconce light fixtures are located over the door openings. A large non-historic center opening along the lobby corridor's north wall connects to the non-historic corridor north to Screening Rooms 2 and 3.



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Existing doors along the south wall of the lobby corridor connect to basement stairs, second floor stairs, a private bathroom with non-historic finishes and fixtures, a south egress walkway, and a women's restroom, which is clad in non-historic finishes and fixtures.

### *Auditorium Space*

North of the entrance lobby and corridor is the Davis Theater's auditorium space, which was originally one large volume with concrete floors sloping down toward the room's primary focus, a plaster proscenium arch surrounding a small movie screen. The auditorium's original decorative proscenium arch remains intact along with a shallow concrete stage and steps for early vaudeville performers. The auditorium's original decorative plaster ceiling remains intact above a non-historic gridded ceiling. Though the auditorium's original organ console is missing, original organ pipes remain intact in their original pipe lofts flanking each side of the proscenium. The Davis Theater auditorium underwent a 1980s renovation that replaced theater seating and introduced a reversible projection booth on the second floor above the center corridor, in addition to reversible drywall partitions to create four screening rooms. Screening room #1 is located to the southeast, #2 to the southwest, #3 to the northwest, and #4 to the northeast. A one-story center corridor connects the lobby corridor to the two north screening rooms. The four screening rooms each have exposed painted concrete flooring, curved and sloped toward the original north proscenium. The screening rooms are clad in non-historic painted drywall walls with non-historic movie screens, and a non-historic dropped ceiling above. Theater seating was replaced in the 1980s and 1990s by previous owners. Remnants of the original decorative plaster ceiling have been discovered above the non-historic ceiling though any historic wall and floor ornamentation were removed by previous owners.

The theater's small second floor projection and storage rooms located at the south end of the theater block, are accessed by an enclosed existing stair at the south end of the lobby corridor. The second floor's original projection and storage rooms and 1980s projection room extensions are utilitarian in character. The projection rooms extend from the rear projection room to the center of the original auditorium volume. Small utilitarian enclosures at the northeast and northwest corners of the original auditorium house concrete steps that egress to the theater's alley and center gangway.

Despite these changes to the space, the auditorium's overall spatial layout and decorative elements remains intact and in-use as a movie screening space, which has been in continual operation since 1918.

### *Commercial Block*

The theater block and commercial block are not connected through the interior. Likewise, each section of the commercial block is divided by masonry firewalls. The commercial block consists of three, repetitive bays. Each bay consists of a central stair accessed directly from the sidewalk. At the first floor, this stair is flanked by retail space that extends the full depth of the building. Above, each bay is divided into two residential units per floor, with a total of twelve apartment units in the building.

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The first floor of the Davis Theater's original east retail/apartment block houses six retail spaces. The original Lincoln Avenue storefronts were removed by previous owners and replaced with non-historic glass and masonry infill. The two north retail spaces are currently occupied by retail tenants with existing buildouts. The four south retail spaces were heavily damaged in an earlier fire that severely damaged or destroyed the spaces' previous partitions and floor, ceiling, and wall finishes. Today, the four south retail spaces have open floor plans, exposed concrete floors, exposed brick walls, and exposed wood ceiling structure, with little to no historic fabric intact. The retail spaces are currently connected through existing openings in their brick party walls and by shared basement stair vestibules. The masonry west wall of this now-combined retail space faces into the existing center gangway and exhibits both original and later non-historic door and window openings; all original doors and windows along this wall are non-historic.

The residential apartments that occupy the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floors of the commercial block all retain their original "four-square" layouts with bathroom and living room spaces facing Lincoln Avenue to the east and kitchen and bedroom spaces facing the interior alley to the west. These spaces retain their original layouts but have been altered over ninety years of use and display no character-defining historic features.

### **Integrity**

The exterior massing of the Davis Theater remains largely intact with only a small one-story masonry addition infilling the south end of the internal passageway between the two parts of the building. Exterior alterations include: replacement of windows and doors; storefront alterations and infill of selected storefronts with masonry; new awnings and signage. The theater entrance was modernized in the mid-twentieth century with the installation of historically significant opaque glass wall cladding. Later owners added non-historic metal entry doors and a non-historic pent roof, sometime most likely in the 1970s. Although the exact date for these façade alterations is unknown, an article from the *Chicago Tribune* in 1979 shows the current marquee and pent roof already in place.<sup>1</sup>

Interior alterations in the theater lobby include the addition of a dropped ceiling in the west theater lobby corridor. The larger theater lobby retains much of its appearance following the 1930 renovation.

Interior alterations in the theater auditorium include the subdivision of the main theater into four smaller theaters using reversible partitions and mezzanines. Exploratory demolition in fall 2015 behind non-historic wall and ceiling finishes in the auditorium area revealed the following auditorium elements to be intact: the original north screen wall and proscenium, fragments of the original concrete stage, organ pipe archways, decorative pilaster capitals, and an immense barrel vaulted ceiling with decorative plaster trim. The two north screening rooms closer to the original screen wall have been combined into one single theater space and will remain open following a 2015-2016 renovation. The two smaller rear (south) screening rooms will remain as separate theater spaces but do not impact the integrity and significance of the larger north theater space.

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<sup>1</sup> "2 Theaters Revive the Classic and Campy," *Chicago Tribune*, July 1, 1979.

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The most interior changes in the building have occurred in the 1<sup>st</sup> floor retail spaces due to alterations over time by many retail tenants and by a 2000s fire that gutted the four southernmost retail spaces. These changes did not impact any character-defining historic features, and the retail spaces retain their historic spatial layout.

Finishes and fixtures in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floor residential units above the Lincoln Avenue commercial block have been changed over time but the apartments retain their significant original “four square” plan layouts.

Overall, the Davis Theater retains good exterior and interior integrity and continues to express the significance of early neighborhood movie houses in twentieth century Chicago.

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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. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years



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**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 Davis Theater, located at 4616-4630 North Lincoln Avenue in Chicago, is locally significant under Criterion A for Entertainment as one of Chicago's oldest and longest-operating movie houses. With its exuberant Classical Revival Style terra cotta façade, one-story Moderne Style lobby, and auditorium that originally sat nearly 1,500 spectators, the Davis Theater is the Lincoln Square neighborhood's sole surviving historic movie theater and among the oldest and longest-running movie theaters in the city of Chicago. Originally opened as the Pershing Theatre in 1918, the Davis Theater was one of at least five neighborhood theaters opened in Lincoln Square and the adjacent Ravenswood and North Center neighborhoods during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Davis Theater was among the larger of these theaters and is the best surviving example of this group. Many of these historic theaters have been demolished while those that remain have been converted to other uses and retain little to no trace of their historic functions. Designed by architect Walter Ahlschlager and completed in 1918, the Davis Theater is one of only three known Ahlschlager-designed theaters that are still in operation in the United States. The theater is also one of the last remaining theaters associated with Lubliner & Trinz, the prominent 1910s and 1920s Chicago movie theater chain for whom the Davis was built. From 1918 until the 1970s, the Davis Theater served as an important part of the Lincoln Park Neighborhood, even embracing its local heritage by showing German Language films. After the theater ceased showing first-run movies, it continued to function as an important entertainment center for the city's Northwest Side, until it starting showing classic films in the 1970s. The building is designated as "orange-rated" by the Chicago Historic Resources Survey for its potential significance within the City of Chicago. The Davis Theater's period of significance spans from 1918, the year the theater opened, to 1966, the fifty-year cut off for historic significance.

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

### **Early Chicago Neighborhood Movie Theaters**

The American movie theater building type dates to the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when indoor exhibition spaces, usually cramped, unadorned converted storefronts, were first adapted for viewing short films. These early movie theaters, known as nickelodeons for their nickel cost of admission, were assemblies of basic unsophisticated projection equipment and makeshift seating that nonetheless flourished from 1905 to 1915. Refinement of movie production technology in this period led to an increase in the numbers, quality, and duration of early films, leading to more interest in movie going and to rapid changes in movie exhibition spaces. The first purpose-built movie theaters appeared in America's large cities in the 1910s, and generally consisted of a large auditorium space designed specifically to show motion pictures.

Movie theaters in Chicago progressed rapidly from the first nickelodeons built in the city in the early 1900s to the grand movie palaces of the 1920s. While these large, opulent movie palaces are

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the best-known examples of historic movie theaters, the smaller, less elaborate neighborhood theaters were important destinations in communities located throughout the city. The advent of mass-production of films for screening triggered an exponential growth of movie houses in 1926, bringing theaters to most city neighborhoods.<sup>2</sup> A majority of these neighborhood theaters were located on major arterial streets, situated within commercial districts.

In the years immediately following World War I, movie theaters in Chicago were built larger and more visually elaborate than the smaller first-generation theaters, but more visually modest than later "movie palaces" such as the Uptown and Chicago Theaters. The Central Park Theater at 3531-39 W. Roosevelt Road, built in 1917 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2005, is widely considered to be one of the earliest of these "transitional" movie theaters in Chicago.<sup>3</sup> Such theaters that include the Davis Theater were larger in scale than first-generation theaters, often three stories in height and combining a theater with stores, offices and residences. The design of these theaters was more elaborate with more extensive ornamentation, usually terra cotta, used to define theater entrances and to provide a sense of visual celebration. Lobbies and auditoriums within transitional movie theaters often are elaborate in detail while remaining more modest spatially than later movie palaces.

Unlike purpose-built live theater venues, "transitional" movie theaters were designed to accommodate both film and vaudeville acts. To accommodate both uses, the proscenium arches in these theaters often concealed fly lofts and framed full stages, some of which projected into the auditorium. Because this era of theater production coincided with the silent film era, these theaters often had orchestra pits or prominently located organ consoles for the musicians who would accompany silent films. In addition to the Davis Theater, other examples of "transitional movie theaters" include the Majestic Theatre (1906) at 22 West Monroe Street, the Marshall Square Theater (1917) at 2875 W. Cermak Road, and the Admiral Theatre (1927) at 3940 West Lawrence Avenue, all of which are still in use as entertainment venues.

Many of Chicago's early movie houses from the late 1910s and early 1920s have been demolished or their auditoriums converted to other commercial, non-assembly uses. Though its lobby was redesigned in 1930 and its large auditorium has been subdivided using reversible partitions, the Davis Theater retains a majority of its exterior ornamentation and a large portion of intact auditorium ornament, making it an unusual survivor among historic Chicago movie theaters.

### **Lubliner & Trinz**

The Davis Theater (originally the Pershing Theatre) was one of twenty-five vaudeville and movie houses operated by the Chicago-based theater chain of Lubliner & Trinz. The company's principal partners were Harry M. Lubliner (1880-1952), born in New York to German parents, and Austrian-born Joseph Trinz (1871-1926) who immigrated to America as a young man. Joseph Trinz came from a clan of successful theater operators. His older brother Henry (1860-1926) was a prominent

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<sup>2</sup> Michael P. Conzen and Christopher P. Thale, "Movie Theaters in Chicago, 1926, 1937 and 2002," *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, online edition.

<sup>3</sup> Jean Guarino Clark, "Central Park Theater," National Register of Historic Places Nomination, March 15, 2005, NR Cert. No. 10240018.

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music hall theater and manager in Chicago where he opened one of the city's first movie theaters in 1903 and later operated some of Milwaukee's largest movie houses. Two of Joseph's younger brothers, Aaron (1878-1942) and Samuel (1889-1956) were also successful Milwaukee theater managers. Though Harry Lubliner and Joseph Trinz were the principal executives of the entertainment partnership, Joseph's three brothers came to play important supporting management roles as the Lubliner & Trinz collection of theaters grew.<sup>4</sup>

Harry Lubliner and Joseph Trinz first collaborated in a string of downtown Chicago florist shops before entering the theater business in 1914. The first Lubliner & Trinz endeavor was a three-month off-season transformation of Chicago's Orchestra Hall into a movie and vaudeville house. The success of this temporary leasing enterprise led to their investment in the construction and acquisition of a string of new theaters, beginning in 1916 with the opening of the Covent Garden (or Covent) Theater at 2655 North Clark Street (architect unknown, partially demolished). Their success continued with the purchase of the Biograph Theater at 2433 North Lincoln Avenue (designed by Samuel N. Crowen, completed 1914, extant) and the Vitagraph Theater at 3133 North Lincoln Avenue (architect unknown, completed in 1914, demolished).

While Lubliner & Trinz made attempts to compete in Chicago's crowded downtown theater market, their most successful 1910s and 1920s entertainment ventures were sprawling movie palaces scattered among the city's many outlying neighborhood commercial districts. In Chicago's North Side, Uptown neighborhood, Lubliner & Trinz built the 3,000-seat Pantheon Theatre at 4642 North Sheridan Road (designed by Walter W. Ahlschlager, completed 1918, demolished). In the West Side Garfield Park community, they built the 3,097-seat Senate Theatre at 3128 West Madison Street (designed by Walter W. Ahlschlager, completed 1921, demolished), which advertised its own "Senate Symphony Orchestra." In the Northwest Side's Logan Square neighborhood, they built the Harding Theater at 2724 North Milwaukee Avenue (completed 1925, demolished) and the Congress Theater (completed 1926), both designed by Fridstein & Co. In the Northwest Side Lincoln Square neighborhood, they completed the Pershing Theatre (designed by Walter Ahlschlager, completed 1918). In the city's South Side Woodlawn neighborhood, they built the \$2.2 million Tower Theatre at 1510 E. 63<sup>rd</sup> Street (designed by Fridstein & Co., completed 1926, demolished) whose electric-lit steel tower was visible for miles. The firm even extended their reach into northwest Indiana with a South Bend Lubliner & Trinz theater. Lubliner & Trinz also purchased existing theaters to add to their collection, including the Paramount (now Logan) Theatre at 2646 North Milwaukee Avenue (completed 1915, extant) and the Pershing (now Davis) Theater at 4614 North Lincoln Avenue (completed 1918, extant). At its height, Lubliner & Trinz operated twenty-six theaters in the Chicago area.<sup>5</sup>

Beginning in the mid-1920s, Lubliner & Trinz gradually transferred the operation of its movie houses to the larger Chicago-based theater operators Balaban & Katz. In 1927, one year after Joseph Trinz's death, Balaban & Katz acquired a majority of Lubliner & Trinz corporation stock but retained the Lubliner & Trinz moniker on many of its theaters until the late 1930s. Into the

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<sup>4</sup> "Henry Trinz," *The Billboard* (September 5, 1908), 16.

<sup>5</sup> David Balaban, *The Chicago Movie Palaces of Balaban and Katz* (Chicago: Arcadia Publishing, 2006), 72.



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1940s and 1950s, Harry M. Lubliner and Joseph Trinz's surviving brothers along with many of their descendants remained in management roles of many of Lubliner & Trinz's former holdings.

### History of Chicago's Lincoln Square Community Area

Chicago's Lincoln Square community area is located seven miles north of the loop, and is bounded by Bryn Mawr and Peterson Avenues on the north, Montrose Avenue on the south, Ravenswood Avenue on the east, and the Chicago River on the west. The area is bisected by Lincoln Avenue, one of Chicago's major commercial thoroughfares, which runs southeast to northwest. Greater Lincoln Square encompasses the smaller neighborhoods of Ravenswood Gardens, Ravenswood, Bowmanville, Budlong Woods, and Lincoln Square (neighborhood). The area was once collectively known as Ravenswood after the small, but highly influential residential subdivision located within the larger community area.

Lincoln Square's early agricultural economy once boasted a booming truck farm industry. Truck farmers, primarily of German and English descent, emphasized the mass production of flowers, pickles, and celery during the early- to mid-nineteenth century. Goods were then transferred by wagon down what is now Lincoln Avenue (then known as Little Fort Road) to market in Chicago. Investors and land speculators began promoting non-agricultural land use in the area, particularly focusing on the development of residential subdivisions. The addition of electric street railways in the 1890s, followed by the opening of the Ravenswood elevated line in 1907, accelerated the construction of bungalows, two-flats, and small apartment buildings, bringing new residents to Lincoln Square. A number of local German businesses in particular drew in record numbers of German immigrants. Greeks also began populating the area, setting the stage for what would become the "new Greektown" in the mid-1950s. By 1930, however, the community had grown to a population of 46,419, with 22.5% of residents categorized as "foreign-born" with an additional 40% identifying as "native with foreign parentage."<sup>6</sup> The growing population meant expanding development, which covered most of the area between North Avenue and Irving Park Road on the north and south, and Clark Street and the north branch of the Chicago River on the east and west.

After WWII, businesses began filling vacant commercial buildings and for the first time local merchants promoted Lincoln Square as a separate unified neighborhood with booming central shopping district. Today, Lincoln Avenue, once the path of Lincoln Square's early truck farmers, is a major thoroughfare running diagonally along Clark Street on the western border of Lincoln Park, ending in Morton Grove. The street runs a distance of 13 miles, although not entirely continuous. Eventually, this major thoroughfare would become the business and social center of the German immigrant community, earning the nickname, "Sauerkraut Boulevard."

The Davis Theater, completed in 1918, was a major commercial destination along Lincoln Avenue throughout the twentieth century. It served as the primary entertainment venue for the expanding population in Lincoln Square and even specialized in German-language films during the height of

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<sup>6</sup> Amanda Seligman, "Lincoln Square," *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, online edition.

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the area's German population, as early as 1931.<sup>7</sup> The theater remains the oldest operating entertainment venue in Chicago's Lincoln Square community.

### History of the Davis Theater

Lubliner & Trinz's Pershing Theatre opened to the public on Wednesday, November 6, 1918, promising to be a venue "for refined entertainment" with a showing of the silent film "The Forbidden City," starring Norma Talmadge.<sup>8</sup> The theater was originally a palatial venue exclusively housed traveling vaudeville shows and silent motion pictures. It featured a Barton organ to accompany the silent films and was reported to have 1,098 seats, which were soon expanded to 1,431. The theater was named for the popular American general, John J. "Black Jack" Pershing (1860-1948), leader of the American Expeditionary Forces in the recently ended World War I.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to its elegant lobby and auditorium, the theater property housed three separate residential blocks each consisting of six retail storefronts and twelve upper level apartments. Combining movie theaters with leasable housing and commercial spaces into a larger "theater-block" building was a common method used by 1910s and 1920s architects and developers to increase the profitability and viability of large movie complexes.

The Pershing Theatre was among the larger neighborhood theaters of Lincoln Square in the 1910s and 1920s. Competitors included the Leland, 4716 N. Lincoln Avenue (number of seats unknown, demolished); the Bertha, 4717 N. Lincoln Avenue (591 seats, extant but converted to commercial use); the Rosewood, 1823 W. Montrose Avenue (985 seats, demolished); the North Center, 4031 N. Lincoln Avenue (2,500 seats, demolished); Bugg, 3940 N. Robey Street (now Damen Avenue) (992 seats, demolished); and the Republic, 3918 N. Lincoln Avenue (770 seats, demolished).<sup>10</sup> Only two of Lincoln Square's early movie houses, the Pershing Theatre (now the Davis Theater), and the Bertha Theater, remain standing, though the Bertha has lost most of its interior integrity.

After exclusively showing silent films for 12 years, the theater was renovated in 1930 by the Essaness Theater Corporation to show pictures with recorded sound tracks, referred to at the time as "talkies." Interior and exterior renovations were completed at a cost of \$100,000 and included new signage, "re-decoration," and adjustment of interior walls to provide for better acoustics.<sup>11</sup> The theater reopened as the Davis Theater on August 29, 1930 and was promoted as "the best-equipped and most modern of talkie houses in the city."<sup>12</sup> A showing of the "The Arizona Kid" starring Oscar award winner Warner Baxter with Argentinian actress Mona Maris, known for her roles in

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<sup>7</sup> "Neighborhood Theaters," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 22, 1931.

<sup>8</sup> "North Side Lubliner & Trinz Pershing Opens Today," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 6, 1918.

<sup>9</sup> Heartland Historical Research Service, "Research Report: Davis Theater, Chicago, Illinois" (June 25, 2006), 7.

<sup>10</sup> Mike Fourcher, "The Davis Theater: A history and tour," *Center Square Journal*, accessed September 17, 2014, <http://www.centersquarejournal.com/news/the-davis-theater-a-history-and-tour>.

<sup>11</sup> Heartland Historical Research Service, "Research Report: Davis Theater, Chicago, Illinois" (June 25, 2006), 8.

<sup>12</sup> Richard C. Bjorklund, "The Pershing/Davis Theater," *RLVHA Newsletter*, No. 12, (summer 2000), 2.

Davis Theater

Name of Property

Cook County, Illinois

County and State

German-language films, kicked off the newly renovated Davis Theater.<sup>13</sup> The opening night program also included musical shorts “Nile Green” and “Cave Club,” the comedy “Fast Work,” and “living news events.”<sup>14</sup> Over 2,500 visitors attended the opening night festivities and the theater’s modernization was promoted as a source of civic pride as well as a sign of the neighborhood’s progress. After renovations, the Davis Theater showed first run films and also gave benefit showings for neighborhood groups including the local Parent-Teacher Association and the American Legion. As early as 1931 until at least 1990, the theater also showed German-language films as well as other foreign offerings. By request of a German resident, the theater kicked off a series of German films in 1931. The premiere of “Seine Ferundin, Annette,” a German Paramount production in February of that same year, was the second in the series which kicked off the theater’s long history with German films.

Throughout its later history the theater showed a variety of genres of film. In 1972, the Chicago International Film Festival used the Davis Theater as its venue for “German Film Week,” where it featured films by Fassbinder and Herzog as well as two early talkies, honoring the theater’s German history.<sup>15</sup> Under new ownership in 1979, the theater was re-billed as a revival house showing primarily classic films. The new owners made various improvements to the theater including a new screen and sound system and lobby renovations. The revival house was short lived, however, and the theater soon returned to showing second-run films.

The interior of the theater space was subdivided around 1986 to provide three additional screens with a fourth screen added in 1999. That same year the theater was threatened with potential demolition when it was put up for sale. After protests from local residents, preservationists, and community groups, the theater was renovated and reopened under new ownership. Renovations included new lobby finishes, upgrades to the concession stand, installation of an antique ticket booth, and renovations of each of the theater’s four screening rooms.<sup>16</sup>

The Davis Theater remains today one of the longest-operating movie theaters in Chicago and the sole surviving early movie house in the Lincoln Square community.

### **Architect Walter Ahlschlager (1887-1965)**

The Davis Theater is one of two surviving and operating movie theaters in Chicago designed by the Chicago-based architect, Walter Ahlschlager (1887-1965). The Davis Theater is among Ahlschlager’s early theater designs and is representative of his designs, which incorporates a large theater block into an adjacent commercial block. After studying at the Armour Institute of Technology, Ahlschlager began his early career as a partner with his father, John Ahlschlager. John Ahlschlager had practiced as an architect since 1881 with his brother, Frederick, until Frederick’s death in 1905.<sup>17</sup> The father and son firm primarily specialized in bakery buildings until

<sup>13</sup> “Davis Theater,” *Ravenswood News* (August 27, 1930), 7.

<sup>14</sup> Richard C. Bjorklund, “The Pershing/Davis Theater,” *RLVHA Newsletter*, No. 12, (summer 2000), 2.

<sup>15</sup> Gene Siskel, “Viewing German Export,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (July 7, 1972), B1.

<sup>16</sup> Pier Peterson, “Davis to get facelift, but not higher prices,” unknown newspaper source (February 9, 2000).

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Bluestone, “Schulze Baking Company Plant,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination, November 12, 1982, NR Cert. No. 82000393, 9.

Davis Theater

Name of Property

Cook County, Illinois

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John's death in 1915. Walter Ahlschlager went on to expand his practice to include a range of commercial building types and became particularly well known for his designs of theaters as well as office towers. Ahlschlager later moved to Dallas, Texas, where he died in 1965.

While Ahlschlager was responsible for a number of prominent commercial buildings in Chicago and various cities throughout the United States, he was perhaps best known for his design of the Roxy Theater in New York City. Opened in 1927 and with nearly 6,000 seats, this palatial theater was purported to be the largest in the world.<sup>18</sup> The Roxy was demolished in 1961.

Of the twelve documented theater buildings designed by Ahlschlager, only five remain in some form in the United States. Of these five, only three continue to operate as theaters. In addition to the Davis, these are the Logan Theater (formerly the Paramount, opened 1915) in Chicago and the Beacon Theater (opened 1929) in New York City.<sup>19</sup> The other theater buildings have been converted to other uses. These consist of the Grove Theatre at 7616-20 S. Cottage Grove Avenue, which has been converted for use by a church, and the Belmont Theater at 1633-1639 W. Belmont Avenue, which has been converted to residential use.

Other notable works by Ahlschlager include: the Medinah Athletic Club (presently the Hotel Inter-Continental), the former Covent Club and the Uptown Broadway Building in Chicago; the Carew Tower in Cincinnati, Ohio and the Peabody Hotel in Memphis, Tennessee.<sup>20</sup>

## Conclusion

The Davis Theater located in Lincoln Square is one of the oldest and longest-operating movie houses in the city of Chicago. Its exuberant Classical Revival Style terra cotta façade and one-story Moderne Style lobby make the Davis Theater one of the best surviving and most intact examples of its kind. Four of the other known theaters constructed in Lincoln Square and adjacent Ravenswood and North Center neighborhoods during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century have since been demolished or converted to other uses with little to no trace of their historic functions. The Davis Theater, however, retains a majority of its exterior ornamentation and a large portion of intact auditorium ornament, making it an unusual survivor among historic Chicago movie theaters. Constructed in 1918, it is one of only three known Ahlschlager-designed theaters still in operation in the United States and one of the last remaining theaters associated with the prominent movie-theater chain operators, Lubliner & Trinz. The Davis Theater has served as an important entertainment venue from the early commercial expansion of Lincoln Avenue to the booming shopping district today, presenting vaudeville shows, movies and other special events to the city's Northwest side.

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<sup>18</sup> Mark Shiel, *Hollywood Cinema and the Real Los Angeles*, London: Reaktion Books, Ltd., 2012, 236.

<sup>19</sup> Heartland Historical Research Service, "Research Report: Davis Theater, Chicago, Illinois" (June 25, 2006), 5.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

Davis Theater  
Name of Property

Cook County, Illinois  
County and State

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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

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Davis Theater  
Name of Property

Cook County, Illinois  
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“North Side Lubliner & Trinz Pershing Opens Today.” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 6, 1918.

Peterson, Pier. “Davis to get facelift, but not higher prices.” Unknown newspaper source (February 9, 2000).

Pridmore, Jay. “A New Old World: Changing Times on ‘Sauerkraut Boulevard.’” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Nov. 11, 1988, F5.

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*Sanborn Fire Insurance Map*, 1951.

Seligman, Amanda. “Lincoln Square.” *Encyclopedia of Chicago*, online edition. Accessed November 5, 2014. <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/747.html>.

Shiel, Mark. *Hollywood Cinema and the Real Los Angeles* (London: Reaktion Books, Ltd., 2012).

Sinkevitch, Alice, ed. *AIA Guide to Chicago*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1993.

Siskel, Gene. “Viewing German Export.” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (July 7, 1972).

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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 # \_\_\_\_\_  
 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

Davis Theater  
Name of Property

Cook County, Illinois  
County and State

University  
 Other  
Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

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### 10. Geographical Data

**Acreeage of Property** Less than one 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: 41.965409 | Longitude: -87.686466 |
| 2. Latitude:           | Longitude:            |
| 3. Latitude:           | Longitude:            |
| 4. Latitude:           | Longitude:            |

**Or**

#### UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

- |          |           |           |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

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

Davis Theater  
Name of Property

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County and State

Lots 38 through 44 in P.J. Saxton's Addition to Chicago, in the northwest ¼ of the northwest ¼ of Section 18, Township 40 North, Range 14, East of the third principal meridian, in Cook County, Illinois. Commonly known as: 4614-4632 N. Lincoln Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries encompass the entire parcel of land associated with the Davis Theater in Chicago, Cook County, Illinois.

---

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: John D. Cramer, Senior Associate  
organization: MacRostie Historic Advisors  
street & number: 53 W. Jackson Blvd., Suite 1323  
city or town: Chicago state: IL zip code: 60604  
e-mail: jcramer@mac-ha.com  
telephone: 312.786.1700 x7010  
date: July 6, 2015

---

**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.)



Davis Theater  
Name of Property

Cook County, Illinois  
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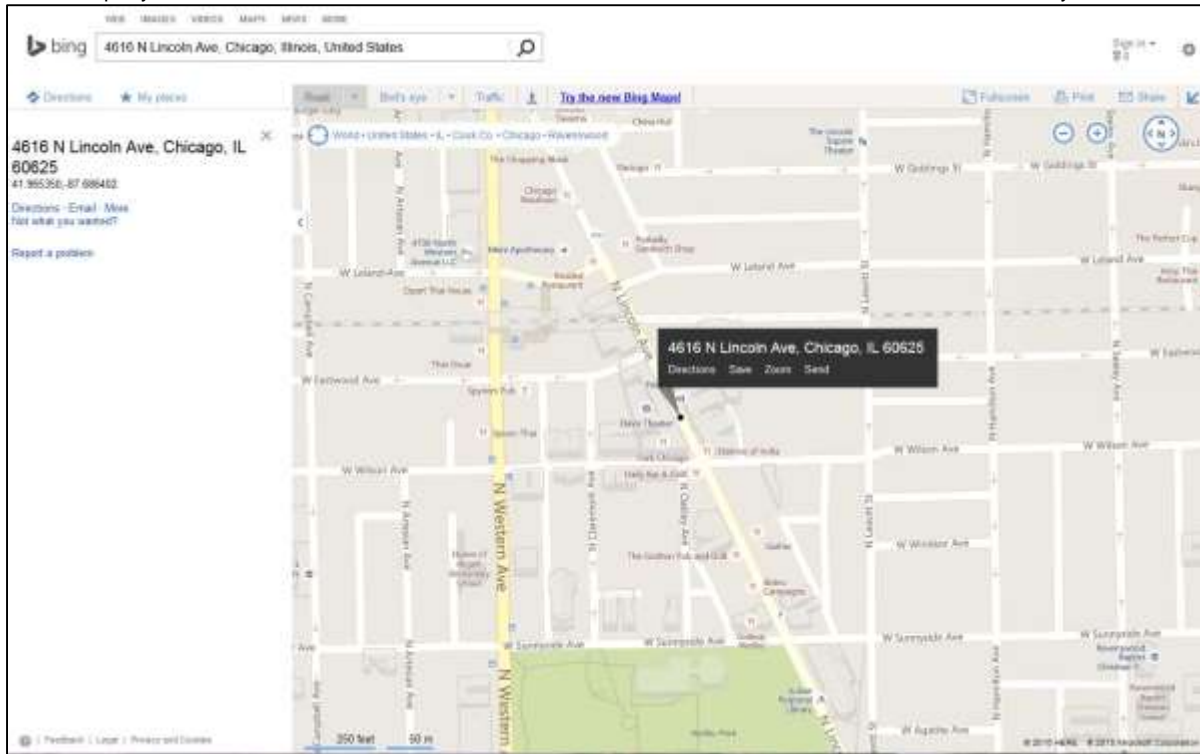


Figure 1: Site map of Davis Theater at 4616-4630 North Lincoln Avenue, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois 60625 (41.965350,-87.686402).

Davis Theater  
Name of Property

Cook County, Illinois  
County and State

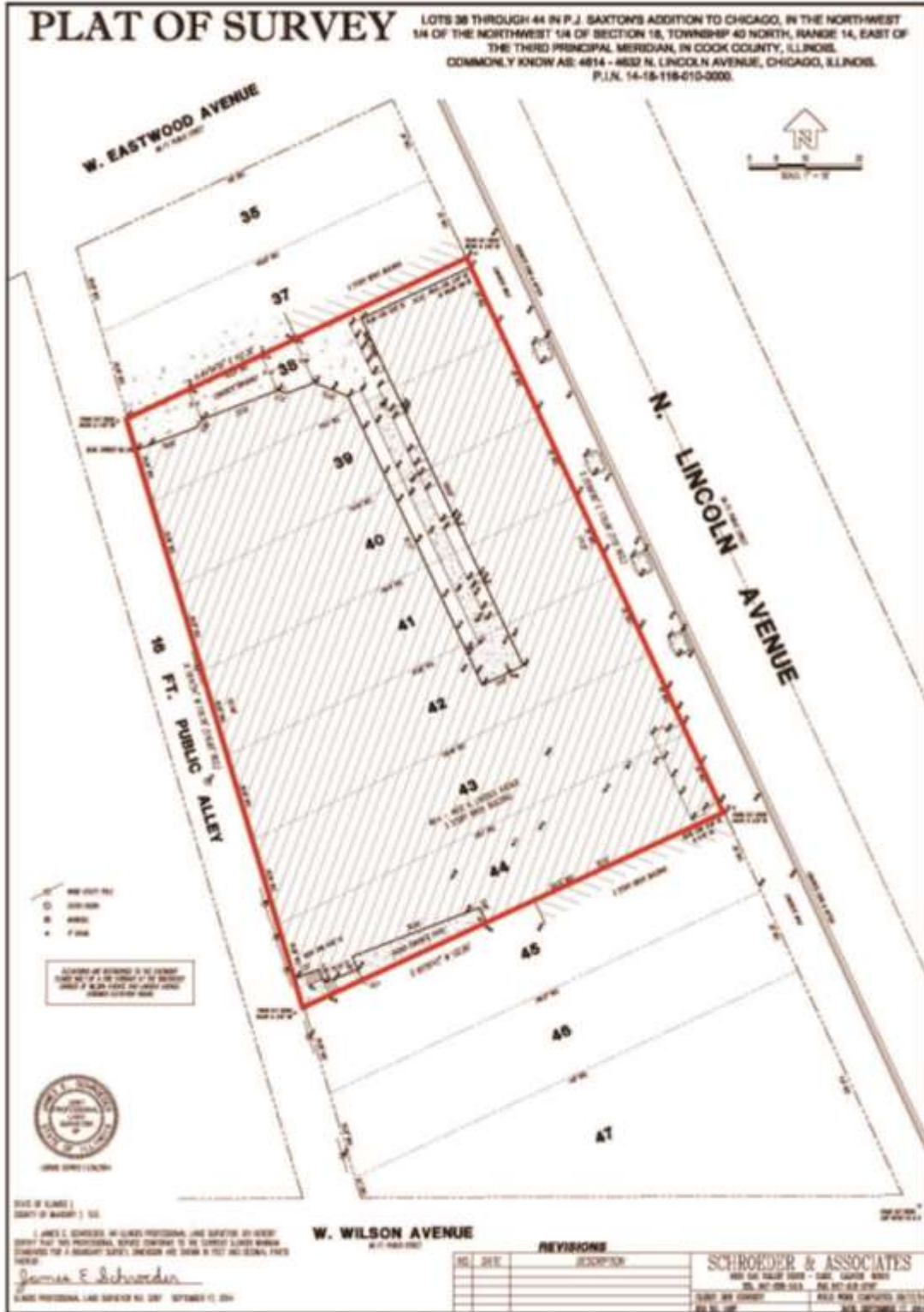


Figure 2: Plat of survey of the Davis Theater (lots 38-44) outlined in red (September 17, 2014).

Davis Theater  
Name of Property

Cook County, Illinois  
County and State



Figure 3: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1951 showing the Davis Theater outlined in red.

Davis Theater  
Name of Property

Cook County, Illinois  
County and State



Figure 4: Davis Theater ca. 1921 (photo courtesy of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Beverly Hills, California – B’Hend-Kaufmann Collection).

Davis Theater  
Name of Property

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County and State



Figure 5: View looking north on Lincoln Avenue from Lawrence Avenue, April 1930 (Chicago History Museum collection of photographs).

Davis Theater  
Name of Property

Cook County, Illinois  
County and State

### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property: Davis Theater  
City or Vicinity: Chicago  
County: Cook State: IL  
Photographer: John Cramer  
Date Photographed: October 2014

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 17: Davis Theater, east elevation (Lincoln Avenue façade), looking south
- 2 of 17: East elevation (Lincoln Avenue façade), looking south
- 3 of 17: Theater entrance, looking southwest
- 4 of 17: Theater entrance detail, looking west
- 5 of 17: Retail and apartment entrance detail, looking west
- 6 of 17: Theater lobby, looking west
- 7 of 17: Theater lobby, looking southwest
- 8 of 17: Theater corridor, looking southwest
- 9 of 17: Auditorium (north), looking north toward original proscenium arch, stage, and steps
- 10 of 17: Auditorium (north), looking south
- 11 of 17: Auditorium (north) proscenium arch detail
- 12 of 17: Auditorium (north) wall and ceiling detail
- 13 of 17: Auditorium (south) looking south

Davis Theater

Name of Property

Cook County, Illinois

County and State

14 of 17: Second floor projection room looking east

15 of 17: Typical storefront interior

16 of 17: Typical apartment stair

17 of 17: Typical upper floor apartment interior

**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.



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THE NOVEMBER MAN  
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THE NOVEMBER MAN  
BOYHOOD  
DOLPHIN TALE 2  
MAGIC IN MOONLIGHT  
GUARDIANS OF...

STORE  
www.ign.com  
770.564.1310

NO PARKING  
EVEN TONIGHT

4618



CINEMA 1	MAGIC IN THE MOONLIGHT 720 PG-13 NOVEMBER MAN 450 540 R	CINEMA 3	GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY 500 730 1000 PG-13
CINEMA 2	DOLPHIN TALE 2 440 710 930 PG	CINEMA 4	607(000) 530 900 R

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9:00 THEREAFTER

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AND  
SENIORS \$6.00  
AT ALL TIMES

NO OUTSIDE FOOD  
OR DRINKS ALLOWED  
EVERY ONE MUST PAY THEIR OWN

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of the District

Free admission  
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46

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780-4850

21626

White paper covering the left window.

White paper covering the right window.

# The Davis Theater

NOVEMBER MAN  
MAYE MOONLIGHT



# The Davis Theater



COMING SOON



1 NOVEMBER 1944  
MAGIC MOONLIGHT



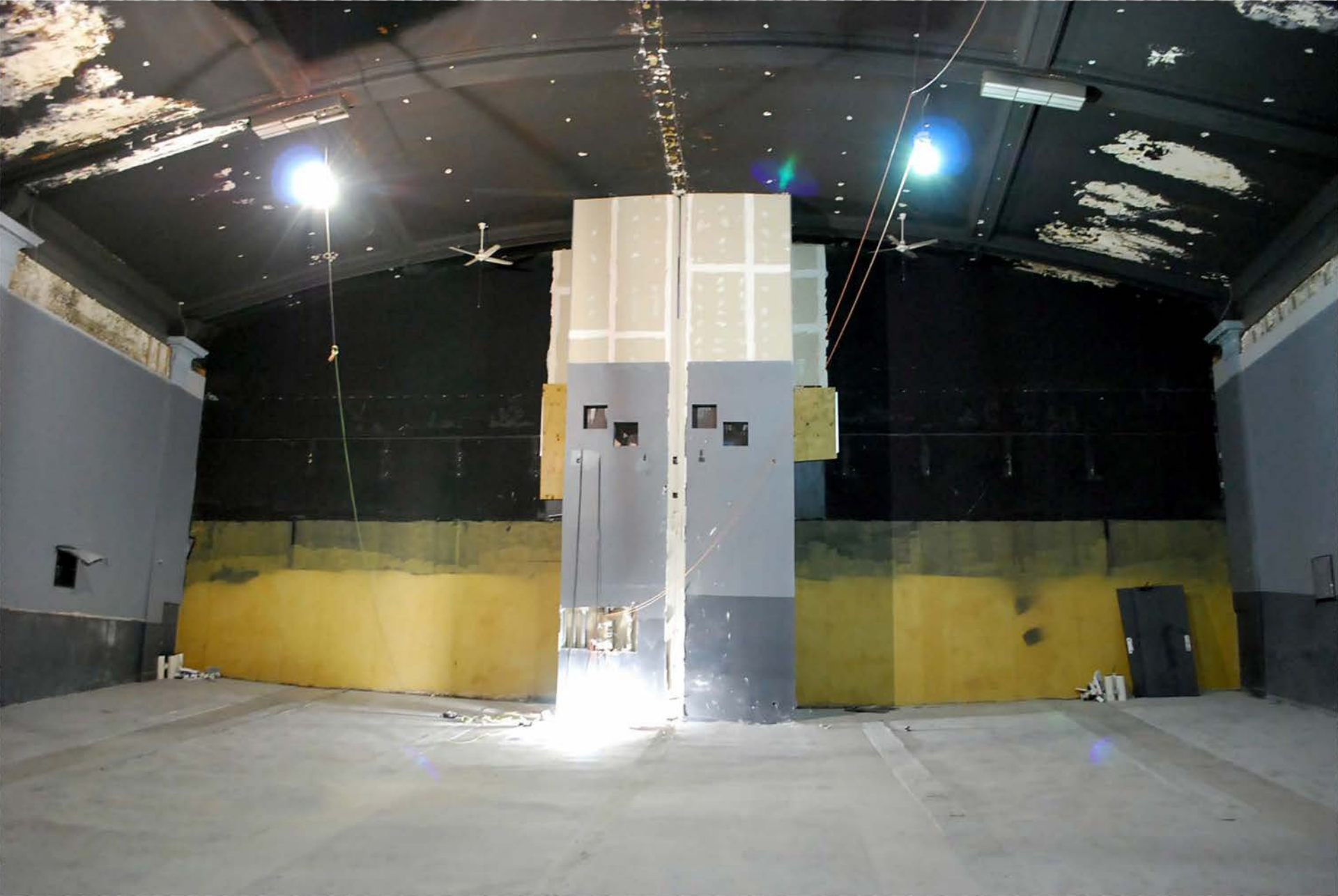


1 NOVEMBER MAN  
MAGIC MOONLIGHT

























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.



RECEIVED 2280

NOV 13 2015

Nat. Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service

November 6, 2015

Ms. Barbara Wyatt  
National Register of Historic Places Program  
National Park Service, Department of the Interior  
1201 Eye Street, NW (2280)  
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Ms. Wyatt:

Enclosed are the disks that contain the true and correct copies of the National Register nominations recommended for nomination by the Illinois Historic Sites Advisory Council at its June 27, 2014 meeting and signed by the State Historic Preservation Officer:

Thompson Brothers Rock Art Site, Makanda vicinity, Union County  
Jackson County Courthouse, Murphysboro, Jackson County  
Turner School, Rockford  
Hauge Lutheran Church, Norway, LaSalle County  
Davis Theater, Chicago, Cook County

**Please note the following:**

- 1. Hauge Lutheran Church is being nominated for national significance.**
- 2. The revisions to the East Rockford Historic District (Additional Documentation, Boundary Expansion) are included under a separate cover letter.**

Please contact me at 217/785-4324 if you need any additional information. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Andrew Heckenkamp, Coordinator  
Survey and National Register program

enclosures

---

1 Old State Capitol Plaza  
Springfield IL 62701

ILLINOISHISTORY.GOV

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.

RECEIVED 2280

NOV 13 2015

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Davis Theater

Other names/site number: Pershing Theatre

Name of related multiple property listing:

Nat. Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

## 2. Location

Street & number: 4616-4630 North Lincoln Avenue

City or town: Chicago State: IL County: Cook

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  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  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  local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A \_\_\_ B \_\_\_ C \_\_\_ D

	<u>11/6/15</u>
<b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b>	<b>Date</b>
<u>Illinois Historic Preservation Agency</u>	
<b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>	

Davis Theater  
Name of Property

Cook County, Illinois  
County and State

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**

**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 Date of Action

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Davis Theater  
NAME:

MULTIPLE  
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: ILLINOIS, Cook

DATE RECEIVED: 11/13/15 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 12/16/15  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 12/31/15 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 12/29/15  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 15000930

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: Y PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: Y SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT  RETURN  REJECT \_\_\_\_\_ DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

**Return:**  
**Please see the attached**  
**National Register Evaluation/Return Sheet**  
**for an explanation.**

RECOM./CRITERIA

REVIEWER Barbara Byall DISCIPLINE Historian  
TELEPHONE 202-354-2252 DATE 12-23-15

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



# United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20240

## United States Department of the Interior National Park Service National Register of Historic Places

### Comments Evaluation/Return Sheet

**Property Name:** Davis Theater

**Property Location:** Chicago, Illinois

**Reference Number:** 15000930

**Date of Return:** January 6, 2016

#### **Reason for Return**

The nomination for the Davis Theater is being returned for additional information and corrections to substantiate its eligibility for the National Register.

#### **Summary**

The Davis Theater was nominated under Criterion A for its significance in the area of Entertainment/Recreation at the local level of significance. A Preliminary Determination of Eligibility was approved by Roger Reed in February 2015.

#### **Problems with Submitted Documentation**

The nomination needs additional information to substantiate that the changes on the interior and exterior have not compromised the building's integrity. First, however, it is necessary to reconsider the period of significance, in order to consider which changes were made during the significant period and which post-date it. The nomination identifies the period of significance as 1918 (original construction) to 1965 (reflecting on-going significance).

**Period of Significance.** The theater does not appear to have maintained its significance as a neighborhood theater over time and up to the present, which is implied by the end date of the period of significance. The nomination states, "For 96 years since the building opened in 1918, the Davis Theater has served as an important entertainment center for the city's Northwest Side, first presenting vaudeville shows, then movies and other special events" (p. 12). In fact, the theater appears to have followed the path of downtown theaters throughout the country in the last few decades of the twentieth century, as it specialized in foreign language films and "classic" films, instead of serving as the neighborhood first run venue. The new first run theaters were often located in suburbia and reflected the design changes imposed on the Davis in later years.

primarily “classic” films beginning in 1979 (p. 17). It seems that when the theater began to show other than first run films, it ceased to be “an important entertainment center for the city's Northwest Side.” If you have evidence to the contrary, please explain. Again, this information is needed to justify the end date of the period of significance as either on-going or as having waned sometime in the last few decades of the twentieth century. A specific date should be identified. On-going use of the building as a theater should not be confused with on-going significance.

The subdivision of the interior into four smaller theaters reinforces the need to re-think the purpose of the Davis, its role in the community, and the period of significance. The reconfiguration was probably done to maintain its economic viability by mimicking new theaters with multiple venues. Please consider the history of the role of the theater in the Lincoln Square area, and establish when the Davis ceased to be the first run theater of choice for the neighborhood. This may reflect the end date of the period of significance.

**Section 6, Function or Use.** Please refer to the list on pages 20-23 of the *How To* bulletin, and use “Recreation and Culture/theater” instead of “Entertainment/Recreation,” which is an area of significance.

#### **Exterior Integrity**

The main elevation of the Davis Theater has been subjected to several changes over time, and it is not clear which are considered contributing. Major alterations include the addition of the pent roof and the entrance projection beneath it (on the right, facing the theater), and alterations to the associated commercial blocks. The signage (roof top and projecting) may or may not contribute.

**Commercial Blocks.** The purpose of the six retail spaces is not discussed in much detail. They serve an important architectural function on the front elevation, and the only consideration for this nomination may be their role in establishing architectural integrity. That said, the “non-historic glass and masonry infill” has had a negative impact on the commercial elevations. Fortunately, at least two of the piers between stores and at least two of the original arched entrances remain. The others are not discussed or shown in photos. The four southernmost spaces were particularly impacted by fire (date unknown) that resulted in significant reconstruction, not in keeping with the original design. Although this nomination concerns the historical significance of the theater only, please address how the poor integrity of the storefronts affects the overall significance. Also consider if the retail businesses that occupied the building had any role in the life of the theater and its significance as a neighborhood theater—in other words, anything related to Criterion A.

**Signs.** Please determine when the big Davis sign rising from the roof was installed, whether it was within the period of significance, and if the sign contributes to the building’s significance under Criterion A. The projecting sign should be evaluated in the same way.

United States Department of the Interior  
NPS/NRHP Evaluation/Return Sheet  
Property Name: Davis Theater  
Property Location: Chicago, Illinois  
Reference Number: 15000930  
Date of Return: January 6, 2015

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**Pent Roof.** This is identified as non-historic, but, if possible, please identify the original or 1930s treatment it replaced.

**Interior Integrity.** Major episodes of remodeling took place in the 1930s and 1980s. The lobby is the most intact feature, largely reflecting its 1930s conversion when talkies were introduced. The major non-historic changes seem to be the dropped ceilings, ticket counter, and concession stand. Some lighting, changes to openings (some added, some covered) are also non-historic. In all, the integrity of the lobby seems sufficient.

The large auditorium space, subdivided into four separate theaters, is the most significant change. Completed after the end-date of the period of significance, the impact of this alteration on integrity needs to be better defined. The original vaudeville stage, which remained even after this phase passed, was obscured by this remodeling, virtually erasing the original vaudeville history. Other significant changes that came with the subdivision of the auditorium include dropped ceilings, new seating, and the addition of projection rooms. The impact of these changes on significance under Criterion A should be more thoroughly described, including any ameliorating factors that may override the reconfiguration of the auditorium space.

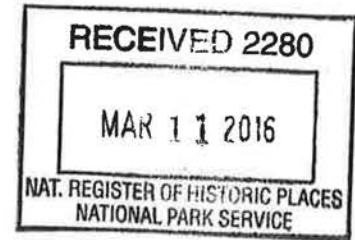
With the lapses in integrity exhibited by this property, eligibility under Criterion A is difficult to defend, especially with the loss of the component most associated with movies—the auditorium. If the losses in integrity can be explained as not severe enough to override the integrity that remains, it may be easier to nominate the building under Criterion C, as a type, period, and method of construction, especially if such neighborhood venues are truly rare. With that approach, other losses, particularly the auditorium, may be ameliorated.

Please call me at 202-354-2252 or send an email to [barbara\\_wyatt@nps.gov](mailto:barbara_wyatt@nps.gov) if you have any questions.



Barbara Wyatt, Historian  
National Register of Historic Places





March 4, 2016

Ms. Barbara Wyatt  
National Register of Historic Places Program  
National Park Service, Department of the Interior  
1201 Eye Street, NW (2280)  
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Ms. Wyatt:

Enclosed are the disks that contain the true and correct copies of the National Register nominations recommended for nomination by the Illinois Historic Sites Advisory Council at its February 26, 2016 meeting and signed by the State Historic Preservation Officer:

Big Woods School, Aurora, Kane County  
Bridge at Thirteenth Street, St. Francisville, Lawrence County

**PLEASE NOTE THAT THE PACKAGE ALSO CONTAINS THE FOLLOWING:**

1. Corrections for the Hauge Lutheran Church, Sheridan, LaSalle County
2. Corrections for the Central Springfield Historic District, Additional Documentation and Boundary Extension, Springfield, Sangamon County
3. Corrections for the Davis Theater, Chicago, Cook County
4. A corrected cover page for the Central Manufacturing District: Original East Historic District, Chicago, Cook County

Please contact me at 217/785-4324 if you need any additional information. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Andrew Heckenkamp, Coordinator  
Survey and National Register program

enclosures

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1 Old State Capitol Plaza  
Springfield IL 62701

ILLINOISHISTORY.GOV

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: RESUBMISSION

PROPERTY Davis Theater  
NAME:

MULTIPLE  
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: ILLINOIS, Cook

DATE RECEIVED: 3/11/16 DATE OF PENDING LIST:  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: DATE OF 45TH DAY: 4/26/16  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 15000930

DETAILED EVALUATION:

ACCEPT  RETURN  REJECT \_\_\_\_\_ DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

The Davis Theater is listed in the National Register under Criterion A for its significance as a neighborhood theater in Chicago. The period of significance begins in 1918 and extends to 1966, reflecting its ongoing importance.

RECOM./CRITERIA A

REVIEWER Barbara Dyer

DISCIPLINE Historian

TELEPHONE 202-354-2252

DATE 4-26-16

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N