

PHQ 365131

# DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED APR 5 1977  
DATE ENTERED MAY 26 1977

## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

### 1 NAME

**\*** HISTORIC The Strand Theatre

AND/OR COMMON  
Same

### 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER 630 Crockett

CITY, TOWN Shreveport VICINITY OF 4th Joe D. Waggoner, Jr.  
STATE Louisiana CODE 22 COUNTY Caddo CODE 017

### 2 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 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	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<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 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 type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

### 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME ABC Interstate Theaters, Inc.

STREET & NUMBER 1300 Avenue of the Americas

CITY, TOWN New York VICINITY OF New York 10019

### 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Caddo Parish Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER 500 Texas Street

CITY, TOWN Shreveport STATE Louisiana

### 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE None known

DATE  
FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN 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 _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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

The Strand Theatre is a combination movie, legitimate theatre and office building of four to five stories designed by New Orleans architect Emile Weil. The original blueprints and specifications (available) are dated September 17, 1923. Construction began soon afterward, taking eighteen months to complete. The grand opening was on July 3, 1925.

The general contractor for the construction was Stewart-McGehee of Little Rock, Arkansas, who also built in Shreveport the Commercial National Bank, the Youree Hotel, the Scottish Rite Cathedral and the Highland Sanitarium. The building is constructed of fireproof materials throughout (original sprinkler system is in place), of stone, brick, steel and reinforced concrete. The only structural wood in the building is used in the stage floor and in exterior doors. "One of the greatest I-beams ever shipped to Shreveport (by 1925) supports the gallery. The roof, all concrete, rests on a treble support of brick, reinforced concrete and steel."<sup>1</sup>

The architectural style of the Strand Theatre can only be called Eclectic, with various elements reflecting different periods and types of architecture. The exterior, which makes use of brick, stone, cast aggregate concrete, tile and metal, was reported (at the time of the opening) to be a combination of embellishments copied from a number of theatres and other public buildings in both America and Europe, which the architectural firm had had occasion to visit. The Crockett Street side has a great arch surrounding Baroque-like decorative work. The inscription on the arch, "Progressive Entertainment for Progressive People," is cut in the stone and gilded. The roof (at least that part which can be seen) is covered with red Spanish tiles and the flashing and vents are copper. From the open-work cast concrete dome at the Louisiana Avenue-Crockett Street corner of the building, to the gold painted ornamentation that encrusts the interior, the Strand Theatre is in the opulent tradition of the original Roxy Theatre in New York City, the pinnacle of theatres during that period.

The theatre is entered through an oval lobby which has marble and travertine walls. The floor is laid with marble blocks. Surrounding the upper wall of the lobby is a painting by artist Paul M. Heerwagen of Fayetteville, Arkansas, portraying an old English falcon hunt. The lobby is directly above a tile and terrazzo men's smoking room in the basement, which matches the lobby in size and shape. The lobby opens into a long rectangular foyer which has an ornately framed mirror and a grand staircase with marble steps and decorative metal balustrade.

At the head of the grand staircase is the first mezzanine with classical colonnade and balustraded open well overlooking the orchestra section. The staircase continues upward to the second mezzanine, which serves as foyer for the upper balcony.

Inside the auditorium are the orchestra, loge, lower balcony and upper balcony sections. The lower boxes at orchestra level remain, while the loge level boxes were removed with the advent of Cinemascope in 1954. In the balcony, all seats are original with cast iron supports carrying the S/E (Saenger-Ehrlich)

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The Strand Theatre

CONTINUATION SHEET 1

ITEM NUMBER 7

PAGE 2

7. Description (cont'd)

monogram. The original seating capacity was 2,250, but is now only around 1,750, because not all the seating is still used and because the orchestra seating was replaced in 1953 by newer, larger seating.

All of the art work within the theatre was done by Paul M. Heerwagen (mentioned above). He personally painted the six "canvasses" on the walls of the auditorium. On the right-hand walls are representations of the different muses - terpsichorean, drama and song - while on the left-hand walls are represented innocence, passion and life or love.

When the Strand first opened, the ceiling was described in a local newspaper as being an exact replica of a Venetian ducal palace. Whether or not this is so, the ceiling is extremely elaborate with a series of ovals and rectangles filled with plaster work including swags, coffered rosettes, urns, stylized plant and animal forms and putti. The great crystal chandelier and two smaller ones fronting the organ loft chambers are the only ones remaining from many which originally graced the interior.

The Strand contains a pipe organ located in the orchestra, designed specifically for theatre use. The organ is a Robert Morton "Golden Voice" with a two-manual console and thirteen ranks totaling 939 pipes. This type organ is no longer made.

The stage is 81 feet wide from wall to wall and 40 feet deep from footlights to the rear wall, and is complete with trapdoors. The proscenium width is 42 feet and the height is 27 feet. The steel "grid" is 90 feet above the stage with a paint bridge midway in the fly gallery.

Backstage are more than a dozen dressing rooms on four levels. The original vaudeville board for room assignments still hangs just outside the first floor dressing rooms. A number of old painted backdrops are stored on the back wall of the stage.

On the whole, the Strand Theatre has remained largely unaltered since its completion. Alterations not previously mentioned include the electric fountain beneath the foyer mirror which has been removed and the secondary ticket office in the foyer which has been removed and replaced with a refreshment area.

Integrated into the structure on the Louisiana Avenue side is a four story office and store building which was originally leased to the medical profession

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The Strand Theatre

CONTINUATION SHEET 2

ITEM NUMBER 7

PAGE 3

7. Description (cont'd)

but which has been essentially vacant for years. The fourth floor is not included in the original drawings of the building. However, during the course of construction, the decision was made to go ahead and add this floor. For the first three stories, the dressing rooms of the theatre and the floors of the office building mesh. They do not, however, on the fourth story.

The Strand Theatre fronts 150' on Louisiana Avenue and 110' on Crockett Street in the downtown business district of Shreveport.

<sup>1</sup>Strand Theatre Section, Shreveport Times, Shreveport, Louisiana, July 3, 1925, p. 10.



# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Conveyance Records. Caddo Parish, Louisiana.  
 Hewitt, Louise M. Days of Building: History of a Jewish Community. Shreveport: Jewish Historical Committee of Shreveport, 1965.  
 "Illustrations of Selected Work of Emile Weil, Architect, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1900-1928". Unpublished limited commercial edition, 1926(?).  
 Mortgage Records. Orleans Parish, Louisiana.  
 (cont'd)

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1/2 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A 

1	5
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4	2	9	5	7	5
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3	5	9	7	0	5	0
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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE S. Judd Tooke, President

ORGANIZATION Strand Theatre of Shreveport Corporation DATE November 1976

STREET & NUMBER 711 Texas Street TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN Shreveport STATE Louisiana

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL      STATE      LOCAL X

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

~~STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER~~ Andra J. Thompson

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer DATE March 30, 1977

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER	
<u>Charles Adams</u>	DATE <u>5.26.77</u>
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION	
ATTEST: <u>Hez Ward</u>	DATE <u>5/26/77</u>
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER	

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The Strand Theatre

CONTINUATION SHEET 3

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 2

8. Significance (cont'd)

Abe and Julian Saenger moved to Shreveport in 1890 with their father, Rabbi Israel Saenger. Graduates in Pharmacology from Johns Hopkins University, the brothers organized the Saenger Drug Store at Milam and Louisiana Streets in 1895. (This building, still standing, is exactly one block over from the Strand Theatre at Crockett and Louisiana Streets. The cornice of the building is inscribed, "Saenger 1900". The business was the first 24-hour drug store in Shreveport.) Eventually, the Saengers owned the entire north side of the business block of Milam, from Louisiana to McNeil Streets.

In 1911 the Saenger brothers built the first Saenger Theatre at 620 Milam, next to their drug store. (Although still standing, this theatre - now the Capri - bears little resemblance in interior or exterior appearance to the past.) The Saenger was operated as a vaudeville house for one year, but Julian had become fascinated with moving pictures and foresaw their future. E. V. Richards, Jr. had been installed as manager of the Saenger by the brothers and, along with L. M. Ash, they formed the Saenger Amusement Company on August 14, 1913. This was the chartered origin of the Saenger empire, which grew from its inception in Shreveport to reach as far as Havana, Cuba. Thus Shreveport was the birthplace for one of the largest chains of theatres in the United States during the first half of this century. The name Saenger Amusement Company was retained until 1927 when, after the home office had moved to New Orleans, it was changed to Saenger Theatres Incorporated.

The Ehrlich brothers, Harry and Simon, were born in St. Louis. Simon was the least active to the two, although records show that he held equal shares in the enterprises throughout the years. When Harry was young, he became a program boy and later an usher at the Capitol Theatre in Little Rock, Arkansas, eventually progressing to house manager. Harry came to Shreveport before the turn of the century as manager of the Grand Opera House. In 1925, the year the Strand opened, the Ehrlichs had lived in Shreveport for 28 years, being engaged continuously in the theatrical business. That same year, Harry Ehrlich was said by the Shreveport Times to be the oldest theatrical manager, in point of service, in the South.

The career of E. V. Richards, Jr., mentioned above, intertwined with that of the Saengers and the Ehrlichs. Richards came to Shreveport in 1908 and with a partner purchased the Musee Theatre at 625 Milam. Later that same year, they established the Bijou Theatre on Texas Street. From relative obscurity, Richards went on to become President of Saenger Theatres, Inc., Saenger-Ehrlich Enterprises, Inc., and Paramount-Richards Theatres, Inc., his own chain. He also was one of the organizers of First National Pictures (later bought

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The Strand Theatre

CONTINUATION SHEET 4                      ITEM NUMBER 8                      PAGE 3

8. Significance (cont'd)

out by Warner Brothers), one of the pioneer motion picture studios in Hollywood, California.

In 1914 the separate operations of these men began to blend when the Ehrlich brothers became associated with the Saenger Amusement Company in operation of Shreveport theatres. Local Court House records show that over the years the Saengers would provide equipment and service to theatres on which the Ehrlichs held leases. At that same time, the Ehrlich brothers owned or operated other theatres in Shreveport, Alexandria, Monroe, Baton Rouge, Texarkana, Yazoo City, Mississippi and Natchez. (Apparently, throughout the years the Ehrlichs were pure managers, operating their theatre businesses under lease. During their long careers as theatrical managers, they brought to Shreveport such artists as Sarah Bernhardt, David Warfield, Lillian Russell, Anna Held, and Dustin, William and Frank Farnum.)

Eventually, all of these theatres came under the management of the Saenger Amusement Company. Under Richards' management, the Saenger chain numbered 138 theatres in 1925 when the Strand opened. During the expansion peak of 1926 and 1927, the holding company had 320 theatres, with branches in twelve southern states, Cuba, Jamaica, Panama and Costa Rica.

The dream of the Saenger and Ehrlich brothers had been to build the largest and finest palace of entertainment in the South. Even though the Saenger operation had moved to New Orleans in 1919 (Richards moved to New Orleans at this time, as did Julian Saenger, although Abe Saenger may have stayed in Shreveport), the thought was to provide this theatre for the newly oil-rich Shreveport, where the Ehrlichs remained.

Although the Strand did not open until 1925, the idea was apparently already forming in 1919. The building is located on Lots 1, 2 and 3 of Block 13, City of Shreveport. Lots 1 and 2 were bought on September 15, 1919, by the Saenger Amusement Company (1/2) and Harry and Simon Ehrlich (1/4 each, purchasing as single men) for \$50,000. On that same day, Saenger Amusement Company purchased Lot 3 for \$17,500 and three days later sold 1/2 interest to Simon and Harry Ehrlich, 1/4 each.

On May 29, 1923, page one of the Shreveport Times announced that "plans are being prepared by New Orleans architect, it was announced yesterday, for a new opera house to be built at the corner of Louisiana and Crockett Streets. The building and equipment, it is estimated, will cost approximately \$750,000. The new building will be designed to seat 2,500 persons . . . The



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The Strand Theatre

CONTINUATION SHEET 5

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 4

8. Significance (cont'd)

Saenger-Ehrlich Enterprises, Inc. . . are to be the owners of the new building. A pipe organ, to cost \$30,000, will be among the features of the new building, Harry Ehrlich said. The plans will be available for the inspection of contractors within a few days, . . ." Saenger-Ehrlich Enterprises, Inc. had been formed on June 14, 1922 in New Orleans, and in November of 1923, Saenger Amusement Company and Harry and Simon Ehrlich Enterprises transferred the land to it for \$67,500.

The idea that the Strand Theatre was the major joint effort of the Saenger and Ehrlich brothers and possibly the sole reason for the formation of Saenger-Ehrlich Enterprises, is further substantiated by the fact that the company which built the Strand Theatre in 1925 later came under the management of the Saenger Amusement Company. In 1929, when Saenger Theaters, Inc. (formerly Saenger Amusement Company) sold to Paramount Pictures, the Strand lease was acquired with the other Saenger holdings. The Saengers reportedly received ten million dollars in that transaction, shortly before the stock market crash.

Although under various ownerships, the Strand Theatre has remained in continuous use from its opening in 1925 to the present, remaining a monument to the efforts of the Saenger and Ehrlich brothers of Shreveport.

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CONTINUATION SHEET 6

ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 2

9. Bibliography (cont'd)

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S. Judd Tooke, July 12, 1976.

Shreveport Journal. July 2, 1925.

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Wittenberg, Henrietta Ash (daughter of L. M. Ash and Florence Saenger Ash; niece  
of Julian and Abe Saenger). Interviewed in New Orleans by S. Judd  
Tooke, July 12, 1976.

Zurik, Jesselyn Benson (daughter of Herbert A. Benson, partner of Emile Weil).  
Interviewed in New Orleans by S. Judd Tooke, July 12, 1976.