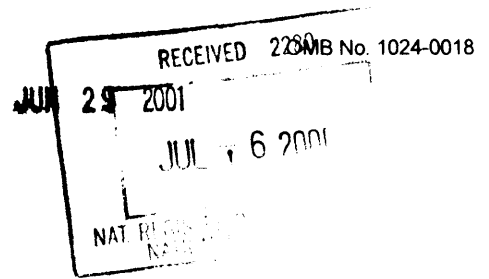


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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 How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Englert Theatre

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 221 E. Washington Street not for publication N/A
city or town Iowa City vicinity N/A
state Iowa code IA county Johnson code 103 zip code 52240

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination _____ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets _____ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant _____ nationally _____ statewide X locally. (_____ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Rowell J. Soike, July 11, 2001
Signature of certifying official Date
STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting or other official Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:
X entered in the National Register
____ See continuation sheet.
____ determined eligible for the
National Register
____ See continuation sheet.
____ determined not eligible for the
National Register
____ removed from the National Register
____ other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper Date of Action
ENTERED AUG 30 2001

Englert Theatre
Name of Property

Johnson County - Iowa
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
 public-local
 public-State
 public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
 district
 site
 structure
 object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing Noncontributing

<u> 1 </u>	<u> </u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u> 1 </u>	<u> 0 </u>	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

 N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

 N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

WORK IN PROGRESS

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN/Second Renaissance Revival
LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS/Tudor Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE
roof WOOD
walls BRICK
other _____

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

- ARCHITECTURE
- ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Period of Significance

1912 - 1951

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or a grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Significant Dates

1912
1926
ca. 1950

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Wiley & Son
Vorse, Kraetsch & Kraetsch

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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 # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: "Save America's Treasures" Project - National Trust for Historic Preservation

Englert Theatre
Name of Property

Johnson County - Iowa
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	15	622210	4	612820	
2			3		
			4		

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jan Olive Nash w/ research assistance by Jeremy Faden

organization Tallgrass Historians L.C. date February 01, 2001

street & number 2118 S. Riverside Drive telephone 319/354-6722

city or town Iowa City state IA zip code 52246

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Englert Civic Theatre, Inc.

street & number 221 E. Washington Street telephone 319-688-2653

city or town Iowa City state IA zip code 52240

=====
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. 470 et seq.).
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Englert Theatre
name of property

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Johnson County - Iowa
county and state

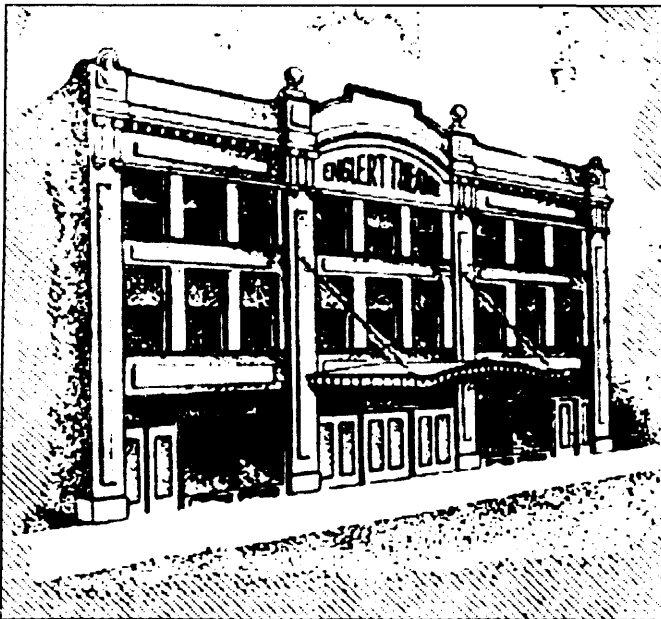
Section 7 Page 1

7. DESCRIPTION

Narrative Description

Constructed in 1912 and substantially rebuilt after a fire destroyed much of the interior in 1926, the Englert Theatre's facade maintains its original classical detailing based in the Second Renaissance Revival.¹ The theater interior, however, was rebuilt after the fire with a Tudor Revival theme that reflects the popular architectural style of the '20s. The building shell is made of load-bearing brick walls that rest on a concrete foundation. Attached brick neighbors sit on either side. The back wall of the building overlooks an urban service alley, while the front faces Washington Street in the heart of downtown Iowa City. Rear and side walls are of an unpretentious common red brick laid in a 7-course common bond, but the façade on Washington Street is faced with kidney-red bricks and trimmed with a contrasting pale yellow brick. Joints between the façade brick are very thin and mortar matches the brick it binds, either red or yellow. White tile coping caps the façade roofline and below, at the sidewalk level, two massive stone plinth blocks, carved "Englert Block 1912," mark the base of either side wall and denote the limits of the building for sidewalk traffic.

The front of the three-story building is divided into three vertical bays. Bays of the upper two floors are each filled with a band of three large sash windows separated by thin brick mullions. Each band of windows sits on a communal concrete or stone sill, while header (3rd story) or soldier (2nd story) courses of bricks form the window headers. Windows on the top floor appear slightly smaller than second story openings. The central bay of the facade is arched at the roofline and taller than the side bays. Oversized classical details decorate the roofline over the sidewalks of Washington Street. An overhanging cornice, massive dentils, and brackets that end in guttae, all hint at the "temple" of culture and entertainment to be found within. Two large ball finials at the roofline, seen in an early pre-fire playbill (*left*), are missing today if they ever existed.



The ground floor of the façade and the wide central doorways of the theater entrance are covered by a massive marquee suspended from the brick wall and supported by both solid metal pole braces and guy wires. The marquee, ca. 1950, is at least the third to mark the theater's entrance and is the landmark icon that represents the entire building for the general public. "Englert" in script is spelled out in red letters against a blue field. A wide band of yellow underneath the name is illuminated from within and holds red letters to advertise the featured attraction. Both neon and incandescent lights are used to create varied light patterns. The underside of the broad, sheltering structure has a ceiling with rows of bulbs that light up the night for patrons waiting to enter. The use of color and electricity to generate excitement, convey information, and illuminate this sign make it an outstanding mid-century marquee with high integrity.

¹See Marcus Whiffen, American Architecture Since 1780, (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1969), 154-158.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Englert Theatre
name of property

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Johnson County - Iowa
county and state

Section 7 Page 2

In addition to the wide central theater entrance, the street level façade is further divided into a small shop just west (to the right in pictures) of the theater lobby, and a stairway leading to the upper residential floors beyond that. Retail shop space to the east of the lobby was converted in the 1970s to restrooms for the theater and now the opening onto the sidewalk is filled in with wood painted dark red. The small west shopfront has black architectural glass covering the bulkhead below its large plate glass window, and white glass above it. Brushed aluminum sash holds the glass as well as the glass of a small display window near the west side entrance to the theater. A framework of enameled metal panels surrounds the six modern glass doors of the wide theater entrance. The color of these panels is a mottled dark red. These architectural elements across the front of the building at the sidewalk level appear to date to a later period than its 1912 construction year. They may be a result of the fire reconstruction in 1926 or later updates. The mottled red of the enameled panels, for example, is consistent with the "Old English" decorative scheme of the 1926 repairs, but the architectural glass of the west shop may date to the 1940s and the massive overhanging marquee to the 1950s.² Despite these minor street level alterations, the theater's overall exterior integrity is extremely good. The marquee itself has achieved local significance as a landmark object, an icon not only for the Englert Theatre, but also for downtown Iowa City.

Interior Today

When a massive, fast-burning fire all but destroyed the building one Saturday morning in 1926, only the exterior walls and the front lobby with residential quarters above were left standing. A brick fire wall—part of the support structure for the wide balcony hanging over the auditorium floor— separated the stage and auditorium from the lobby and saved the front part of the building. The owners immediately announced they had contacted the prominent Chicago firm of Rapp & Rapp (architects of the Tivoli and Chicago Theaters) to draw plans for a "New Englert."³ For unknown reasons, however, the architects who received the commission were Vorse, Kraetsch & Kraetsch [VK&K], of Des Moines. According to the local newspaper, this Iowa firm created an "interior design...which leads it to be called 'theater unique,' [and] follows that of an old English theater of several centuries ago. The design is plain; there is nothing ornate, gaudy or garish that tends to jar the eye."⁴ Today, the interior is a mix of original features and later modifications. Some floors, such as the basement actors' dressing room area and second floor owners' residence are exceptionally intact. Major modifications, such as the wall added in the 1980s when the theater was subdivided into two small-screen movie houses, are being reversed as the theater is restored by its new owners, a non-profit volunteer organization.

The *lobby* is just inside the front entrance. To the right is the ticket counter and refreshment bar. On either side of the room are staircases leading to the mezzanine and balcony. To the rear is the approach to the theater auditorium. VK&K's plans for the interior indicate the present configuration of the lobby has been altered to accommodate the sale of pop, candy and popcorn. The plans call for a small, free-standing box office positioned near the center of the lobby space. Non-ticketed patrons could linger between it and the entrance doors in a "vestibule" area, but to enter any further required the purchase or presentation of a ticket. Plans also reveal paired

²Recent visitors to the theater have remarked that the present marquee dates to 1952 and is a replacement for an identical one that was blown down in a wind storm shortly after its installation. Jeremy Faden, board member, Englert Civic Theatre, Inc., to Jan Olive Nash, 1/20/01.

³Iowa City Press-Citizen, 2/15/1926.

⁴Iowa City Press-Citizen, 11/26/1926.

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Englert Theatre
name of property

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Johnson County - Iowa
county and state

Section 7 Page 3

arched portals at the base of the balcony stairways, though some have been filled in and the arches over others have been closed. The floor and wall surfaces are covered with modern (1970s?) materials, but the basic space and its function remain the same as when they were constructed in 1926. Evidence of the "Old English" motif designed by VK&K are still seen in the scored plaster walls meant to look like coursed stone, the multi-colored slate floor, and the black and green-veined marble baseboards. Above the modern dropped ceiling is the original molded plaster and, probably, remnants of the 1926 paint scheme. This plasterwork, with its floral design, is still extant in many places throughout the building.⁵

Access to the *manager's office* is by way of the *foyer*, which is located between the lobby and the theater auditorium. These two spaces are essentially intact, though surface coverings are modern, and alterations from the 1970s(?) are reversible. Three doorways lead from the slightly curved foyer into the *auditorium*. Until January 2001, the central auditorium doorway was blocked by a major but easily reversed alteration. Trying to compete with small-screen theaters of new suburban shopping malls and the nearby urban-renewal Old Capitol Mall (1980), Englert Theater owners had erected a partition wall down the central aisle. They replaced the single large movie screen (1950s?) with two smaller screens and in effect made two small movie theaters out of the single large volume of space. These two small screens were removed at the end of 2000, and on January 20th, 2001, community volunteers and members of the U.S. Army Reserve tore down the partition wall that divided the auditorium seating. The result was that for the first time in literally decades, the full auditorium, proscenium and wooden performance stage were once again open and visible to theater visitors. Fixed movie screens had obscured the stage for decades and, perhaps, because of that the original 1926 stage floor, riggings, gravity-operated scenery drops, overhead catwalk, and orchestra pit all remain intact. Also extant on the stage is the electrical board that operated lights and the stage curtains and a bank of lights described by the local newspaper as "a mammoth bank of dimmers" that would enable "special lighting effects." The old stage curtain still hangs, rolled up, high above the stage floor. It is uncertain which curtains remain extant up there. The main curtain was a brocade in red, green, and gold, but there was also an "asbestos curtain, weighing 800 pounds [that could] be lowered in a few seconds."⁶ Clearly, the management of the "New Englert" sought to ease the public's concern about another fire as it reopened for a fall season in November 1926.

At the opposite end of the auditorium from the stage, an enormous *balcony* is cantilevered over the ground floor seating. At the rear of the balcony is a relatively large *projection booth*, complete with metal storage shelves and cases, projection paraphernalia, and a toilet and wash sink so the projectionist would not need to abandon the job for any reason. In 1926, the newspaper reported that "the finest projection equipment" was installed and "the latest types of spotlights and transformers" completed the equipment list "The booth [was] a model of its kind."⁷ Between the third floor balcony and the ground floor auditorium seats, the mezzanine level contains a *lounge* for intermission mingling and socializing. The *owners' apartment* (over the lobby at the front of the building) can be reached through the lounge or from the exterior sidewalk entrance and stairway. In recent years, a law firm occupied the apartment, however except for newer carpeting, it is exceptionally intact. This space was not destroyed by the fire, but it was

⁵The non-profit owner was awarded a \$100,000 grant from the State Historical Society of Iowa in 2000 to restore the lobby/vestibule area to its 1926 appearance. A supply of the dark marble was discovered preserved in the basement and is available for re-installation.

⁶Iowa City Press-Citizen, 11/26/1926.

⁷Ibid.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Englert Theatre
name of property

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Johnson County - Iowa
county and state

Section 7, 8 Page 4

clearly renovated afterwards. The 1926 kitchen and bathroom fixtures and wall surfaces still exist and the woodwork throughout appears to be the dark, fumed oak or Douglas fir, cut in the simple styling of the 1920s.⁸

The final two major spaces are the third floor *residential rooms* at the front of the building and, at the opposite corner of the building, the actors' *dressing rooms* in the basement under the stage at the rear of the building. The third floor rooms still exist and the majority of recent tenants have been University of Iowa students who shared a communal kitchen and bathroom. Intact and looking much as it did after that construction project in 1926, stepping into the hallway of the dressing room area is like stepping back in time. Actors reached their dressing rooms under the stage via a set of stairs at the rear right of the stage. Another set of stairs led up to the auditorium. Fire doors to the alley are in this same area as well. The dressing rooms are located on either side of a wide central hall. Small individual rooms with corner sinks are lined up on one side of the hall, while two larger "chorus" rooms are on the other side. The walls of these rooms are simple wooden partitions, covered with drop siding painted drab gray or green. Hand painted numbers mark the dressing room doors and signage on the wall sternly admonishes "no smoking." Best of all, a painted hand on the wall near the stage steps quietly points the way up to the stage for actors unfamiliar with the theater's layout.

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Summary Statement

The Englert Theatre is locally significant as a cultural landmark and downtown amusement venue known to generations of Iowa City residents and University of Iowa students. Host to both live performances and first-run movies since its construction in 1912, the importance of the building to the community was acknowledged as early as 1926 when it was nearly destroyed by fire. With the interior quickly reconstructed, the theater remained open to the public for another 73 years. Though smaller and less ornate than the "picture palaces" of Chicago or New York City, the Englert nevertheless was constructed to be among the best, if not *the* finest, stage and movie houses built in the heart of this small community. The Englert Theatre's stage and orchestra pit witnessed performances as varied as Madame Sarah Bernhardt, live in 1917, to Clint Eastwood, bigger than life in a spaghetti Western in 1967. Historically, and as an architectural property type, this combination performance and movie theater is the last of its type in Iowa City. Constructed in 1912 by William Englert, an important turn-of-the-century Iowa City entrepreneur, and reconstructed in 1926 by his widow Etta Englert Hanlon, the building is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C.

⁸Iowa City Daily Press, 9/27/1912. The "Old English" aesthetic of the new interior reflects the popularity of revival styles, generally, during the twenties. Across the Iowa River, the Gothic Revival entrance to the University Hospitals is another good example of this rage for revivals as it was played out locally. Nationally, hundreds of campuses possess buildings from the 1920s, constructed in "Collegiate Tudor."

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Englert Theatre
name of property

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Johnson County - Iowa
county and state

Section 8 Page 5

William Englert's Theater⁹

The Englert was built during prosperous economic times that spawned a building boom in downtown Iowa City.¹⁰ According to local historian Irving Weber, "1911-13...stands out as one of the more outstanding building periods in Iowa City history."¹¹ Among these extant projects were a significant enlargement of the First National Bank from the original single storefront to its present size (1911); the Paul-Helen Building (1911); the Iowa State Bank & Trust Building (1912); the Englert (1912); and the Hotel Jefferson (1913). All these buildings are within a block of the main downtown intersection of Dubuque and Washington Streets. The Paul-Helen Building is the Englert's neighbor to the west. William Englert's role in re-developing part of downtown (the theater replaced a livery stable) was applauded by the local newspaper. "The theatrical world has seen beauty knocking at its doors, and receiv[ed] a royal welcome. W.H. Englert has evidenced his wideawake uptodateness, by erecting a 20th Century playhouse bearing his name, to be dedicated during the current week. Iowa has nothing finer, size considered."¹²

Opening night, September 26th, was well attended and "hundreds of townspeople and students visited the beautiful playhouse," filling its 1071 seats to see a performance by Thomas W. Ross. Ross, "one of America's greatest actors, in the comedy and dramatic world," performed in a "powerful play with a splendid supporting company."¹³ Less than a week later, on September 30th, the theater hosted "five splendid acts" that introduced Iowa Citians to "20th Century Vaudeville." "Metropolitan vaudeville," the local paper announced, "will open its career in Iowa City...at the new Englert theatre."¹⁴ Rooms for the vaudeville performers were provided in the third floor of the theater building, above the second floor residential apartment of William and Etta Englert. Movies were an integral part of vaudeville by this point and were also shown as individual features in smaller neighborhood theaters. One of these, the Pastime (nonextant), was also constructed downtown at this time but received much less fanfare. The Pastime ran silent movies that changed each night. Three-reel films with titles such as "The Outcast" and "In Old Tennessee" were featured in the fall of 1912. The projection equipment in the much larger Englert Theater was located "in the heart of the balcony...[T]he moving picture machine, [is] a thoroughly modern mechanism adapted to the lovers of vaudeville and the accompanying 'movies.'"¹⁵ This balcony was large and provided less expensive but still good seats. Four, pricier but more private, elegant boxes also hung from each side wall near the stage to provide a bird's eye view of the performance.

⁹ William Englert was a native born Iowa Citian (7/13/1874 -6/22/1920). He married Etta Chopek (4/30/1883-2/13/1952) who remarried, after William's death at 46, to James J. Hanlon. Hanlon had been the barber in one of the Englert Theater's storefront shops. Etta Englert Hanlon continued to own the theater for years afterwards, though management was in other hands. Etta Englert Hanlon and William Englert are buried in a family plot in the old section of St. Joseph's cemetery in Iowa City.

¹⁰ Iowa and the Midwest in general were in the midst of the "golden age of agriculture" during this period. Much of the present built landscape of the state dates to this period of prosperity, generally from the mid-1890s to 1920. See Leland L. Sage, A History of Iowa (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1974).

¹¹ Irving Weber, Irving Weber's Iowa City 5(1989): 21.

¹² Iowa City Daily Press, 9/23/1912.

¹³ Ibid., 9/24/1912.

¹⁴ Ibid., 9/28/1912.

¹⁵ Ibid.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Englert Theatre
name of property

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Johnson County - Iowa
county and state

Section 8 Page 6

The Fire

Entertainment at the Englert almost ended 14 years after it opened when a massive fire nearly destroyed the building. The alarm was raised at 10:15 on Saturday morning, February 13, 1926.¹⁶ By 2:30 that afternoon, the fire had caused an estimated \$175,000 damage—\$125,000 of it to a building that had been constructed in 1912 for \$60,000. Included among the fire's victims were orchestra instruments, shopkeepers' inventory and equipment in the adjoining storefronts (the Hanlon barber shop and a confectionery shop), and belongings of tenants in the residential floors at the front of the building. Though the front rooms were saved, the fire wall between them and the auditorium was punctured and partially burned. The rest of the building was gutted. "The roof is gone, the balcony is a mass of ruins, and while from Washington street the front seems intact, in reality only a shell remains of what at 10 o'clock this morning was Iowa City's finest theater" lamented the news reporter on the front page of that evening's Press-Citizen. The conflagration was described in the paper as the "worst blaze in four years," so big that the "entire downtown section of [the] city [was] threatened." Electric power to the business section of town was turned off for fear the building would collapse onto power wires. Indeed, shortly thereafter, the "corrugated steel walls of the big scenery loft" did collapse onto the power lines. But the effect of the fire on the community was not limited to the immediate danger. Firefighters had emptied the city's reserves of treated water onto the blaze and residents were warned to boil their water until the City could replenish and treat its reserves. In a large ad in that evening's paper, the "Iowa City Water Co." explained, "[t]he Water Company was called upon this morning to use up all its reserve supply of water and was forced to put water into the mains THAT DID NOT PASS THROUGH THE FILTERS. This water was not taken from the river direct, but from the galleries below the river." Several days later residents were advised the water again was safe.¹⁷

Despite the devastating fire, Etta Englert Hanlon and her new husband, James, did not skip a beat. They placed an ad in the evening paper informing readers of the obvious—that the Englert was closed due to the fire—but also reminding them that a sister theater, the Garden, was open for business as usual that Saturday evening. And they did not hesitate to announce their intention to rebuild. In the following Monday's paper (2/15/1926), the Hanlons announced that Chicago architects, Rapp & Rapp, had been contacted to draw up plans for a "New Englert." It is not surprising they looked to these architects or to Chicago for them. It was the heyday of movie house construction and Chicago had produced several grand picture palaces, including the Chicago, the Tivoli, and the Granada Theater, the latter under construction that very year. "Picture palaces were architectural wonders, splendidly designed and grandly scaled. And they were not confined just to Chicago or the Midwest. From New York to San Francisco, every large metropolis had its array of fantasy palaces, each trying to outdo the extravagances of the other in a competition for the growing middle-class leisure dollar."¹⁸ True picture palaces were vastly bigger and more ornate than any new Englert the Hanlons could dream of or afford. The Roxie in New York City, for example, also under construction in 1926, seated 6200 people. Grauman's Chinese Theater (1927) in Hollywood seated a mere 2258 by

¹⁶ "Fire and Alarm Record," February 1926. (Journal in the collection of the State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City office).

¹⁷ The effects of the fire continued to ripple through the community. The fire was still blazing when Fire Commissioner Paul G. Schmidt complained to a reporter about the inadequacy of the town's fire fighting equipment and vowed to go before the City Council to request better gear and trucks. True to his word, four days after the fire a special meeting of "leaders in civic life" was called to discuss the town's fire fighting capabilities and the need for more equipment. The public as well as police and fire commissioners and members of the chamber of commerce were invited to attend.

¹⁸ Jan Olive Nash, "Granada Theater: Public Space and Private Memories," (unpubl. t.s. located in the archives of the Loyola University Chicago, 1997), 4.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Englert Theatre
name of property

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Johnson County - Iowa
county and state

Section 8 Page 7

comparison, but this was still double the Englert's pre-fire capacity. Filled with expensive artwork, fine furniture, and exquisite velvet draperies, sumptuous 1920s movie palaces seem incongruous with the basic commercial function that created them. Viewed within the context of the 1920s, however, the extravagances of movie palaces are more understandable. Still recovering psychologically from the brutality of the first "modern" war in history, Americans were anxious to leave the ugliness behind. The magic of movies was one way to do it. Movies in the 1920s, according to theater historian David Naylor, "came to symbolize the feverish pitch of the times and the wildest dreams of those who lived through" the "roaring twenties."¹⁹

Within this context, the Hanlons apparently reconsidered their selection of Rapp & Rapp to design the new interior. Perhaps the commission was too much or the Rapps' vision too great. Ultimately a Des Moines firm with prior theater experience was selected, Vorse, Kraetsch & Kraetsch.

The 1926 Reconstruction

The Des Moines architects designed a new interior for the Englert Theatre that tapped into prevailing tastes in the 1920s for revival styles. According to the local paper, the new interior "follows that of an old English theater of several centuries ago." Unlike the Victorian architecture that preceded it, and which was still very much out of favor, the "Old English" interior of the new Englert was "plain [with] nothing ornate, gaudy or garish" to "jar the eye." The lobby had walls of green and gold and a slate floor in various hues (extant). The floor of the "loggia," located just beyond the heavy plate glass doors that were positioned at the box office, was covered with "luxurious rugs of black and burnt orange in a checkerboard effect." The 1300 chairs inside the main floor auditorium were upholstered, unlike the original seating, and the auditorium's lighting fixtures (some extant) were "hand hammered from wrought iron" to "harmonize with the Old English effect which is carried out in the decoration of the walls."²⁰ This decoration consisted of plaster that was scored to look like stone blocks (extant) and doorways openings that sported arches more Gothic than Tudor. Trefoils and other geometric tracery are called for by the architects' plans, though not observed today.

The hanging private boxes were not reinstalled in the auditorium, but a large public balcony was built and behind it a "mezzanine floor where a luxurious lounge" was located. This lounge was fitted out with Chippendale furniture and ten specially trained, uniformed ushers provided "courtesy service [to] rank with the best in the country." Comfort, elegant furnishings, and a sense of opulence were important criteria for establishing an atmosphere of refinement and excitement comparable to the movie houses in larger urban centers. The extra effort put into the interior design and new services made the Englert as close to a picture palace as Iowa City would ever see. With more than a bit of hyperbole, the local newspaper announced, "[t]he New Englert, in its interior design, represents something absolute new in theater design and construction...The new playhouse, from lobby to stage, represents the finest that can be incorporated in a modern theater and the Old English interior decoration scheme, worked out by decorators from Younkens Brothers at Des Moines, is something new in theater decoration. The entire

¹⁹ David Naylor, American Picture Palaces: The Architecture of Fantasy (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1981), 88. See also, generally, Lary May, Screening out the Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

²⁰ Iowa City Press-Citizen, 11/16/1926.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Englert Theatre
name of property

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Johnson County - Iowa
county and state

Section 8,9 Page 8

theater is unusual not only in its design, but in its many comfort features for patrons and courtesy plans which the management will put into effect.”²¹

The new Englert operated for decades as a joint venture. Etta Englert Hanlon continued to own and reside in the building with her second husband. The management of the theater, however, was handled by Mrs. Nate Chapman of Iowa City and Mr. A. H. Blank of Des Moines. Years later, Central States of Des Moines operated the theater (as well as other Iowa City theaters and theaters in many other Iowa towns) and supervised its division into two small-screen theater spaces. Competition for the theater ticket dollar stiffened in the 1960s when the first mall movie theaters opened in Iowa City’s outlying Sycamore Mall, and further intensified in the 1980s with the opening of three more theaters in a new downtown mall. By the end of the 1990s, with the grand opening of a large mall with multiple small-screen theaters in the adjacent community of Coralville, managers of the Englert finally decided to abandon the landmark but aging downtown building. Almost immediately, community volunteers organized to raise the money to purchase the theater and are now actively restoring it. In December, 2000, the Englert Theatre was declared a *Save America’s Treasures* Official Project.²²

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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Hall, Ben M. The Best Remaining Seats: The Story of the Golden Age of the Movie Palace. New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1961.

Iowa City Daily Press, multiple issues, September, 1912.

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Nash, Jan Olive. “Granada Theater: Public Space and Private Memories,” Unpubl. typescript, 1997. [Collection of the author and on file at the Loyola University Chicago archives.]

²¹ Ibid.

²² “*Save America’s Treasures* is a White House Millennium Council initiative created by President and Mrs. Clinton as part of the National Millennium Commemoration and established by Executive Order 13072 (Feb. 2, 1998)” [quoted from the “official projects” application]. The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a White House Millennium Council Partner.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Englert Theatre
name of property

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Johnson County - Iowa
county and state

Section 9, 10 Page 9

Naylor, David. American Picture Palaces: The Architecture of Fantasy. New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1981.

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description

Original Town Block 65, Lot 2.

Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes only the building itself and the sidewalk in front of it over which the marquee hangs, and does not include the public alley on the south, the public street on the north, or the adjacent buildings on the east and west sides owned by others.

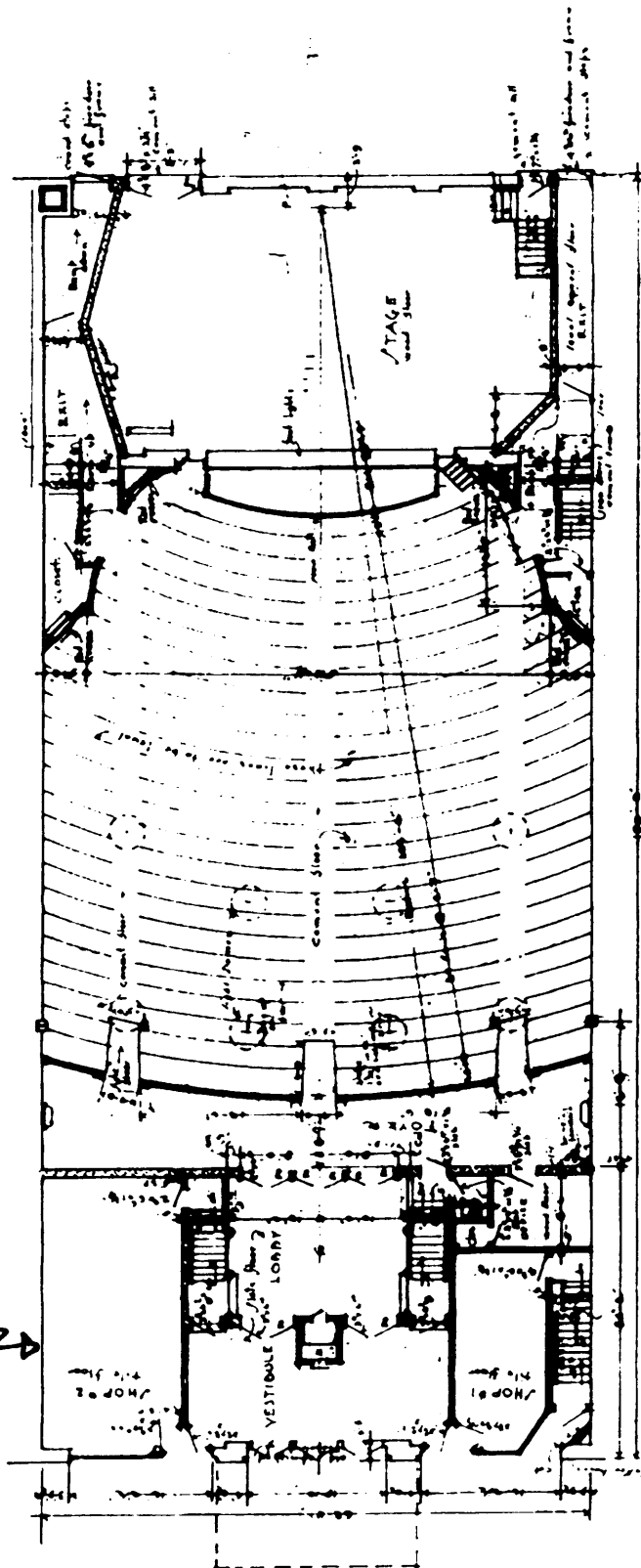
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Englert Theatre
name of property

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Johnson County - Iowa
county and state

Section Additional Documentation Page 10



MILL ENGLERT THEATRE BKG
NO 1852 1/2 E HANLON
633 IOWA CITY IOWA
VOSE REYNOLDS & REYNOLDS ARCHT
PLN

FIRST FLOOR PLAN
Scale 1/8" = 1'-0"

See other Continuation Sheets
for detail views of 2nd and 3rd
floors in this area of building.



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Englert Theatre
name of property

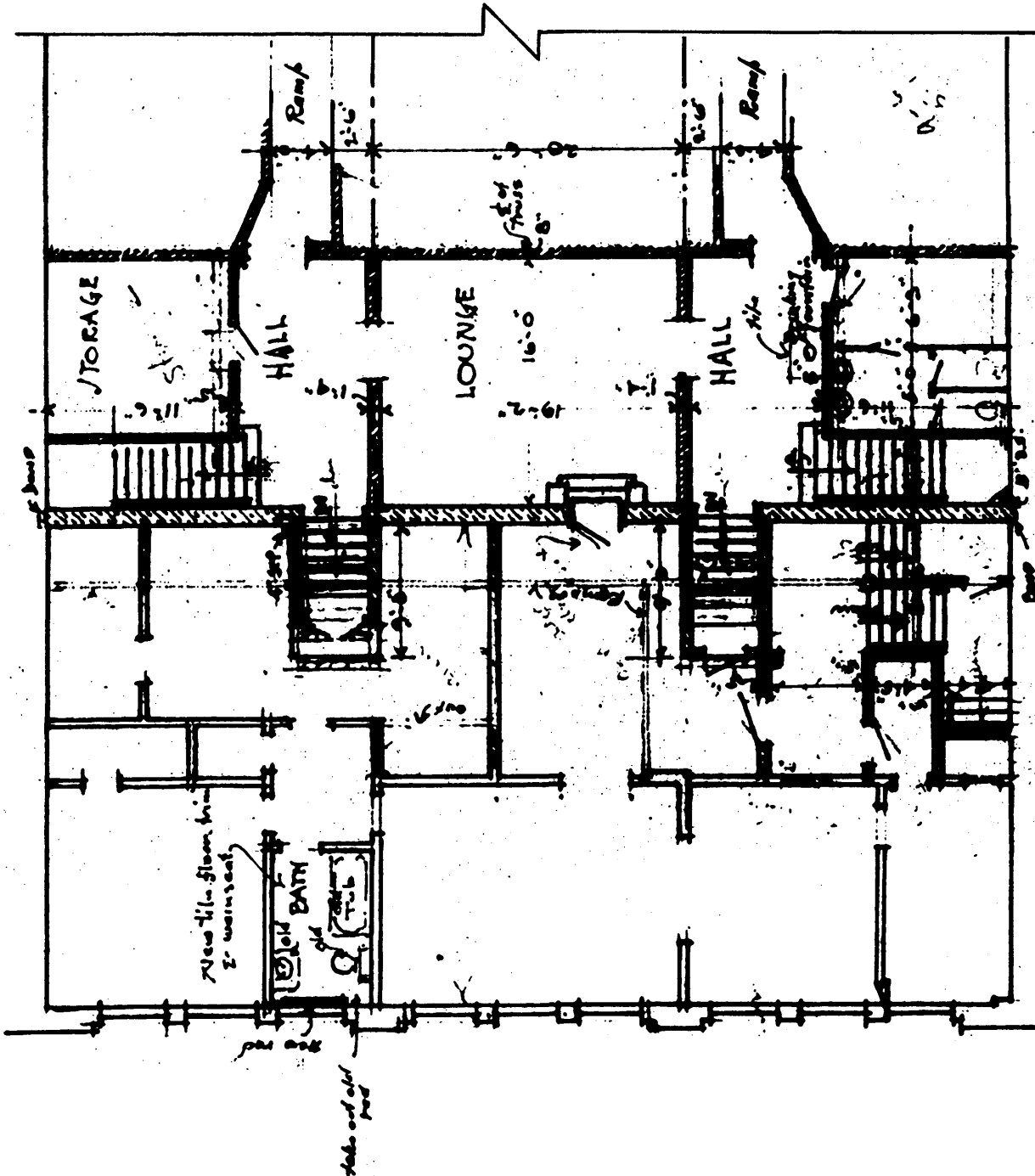
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Johnson County - Iowa
county and state

Section Additional Documentation Page 11

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Partial 2nd Floor Plan



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

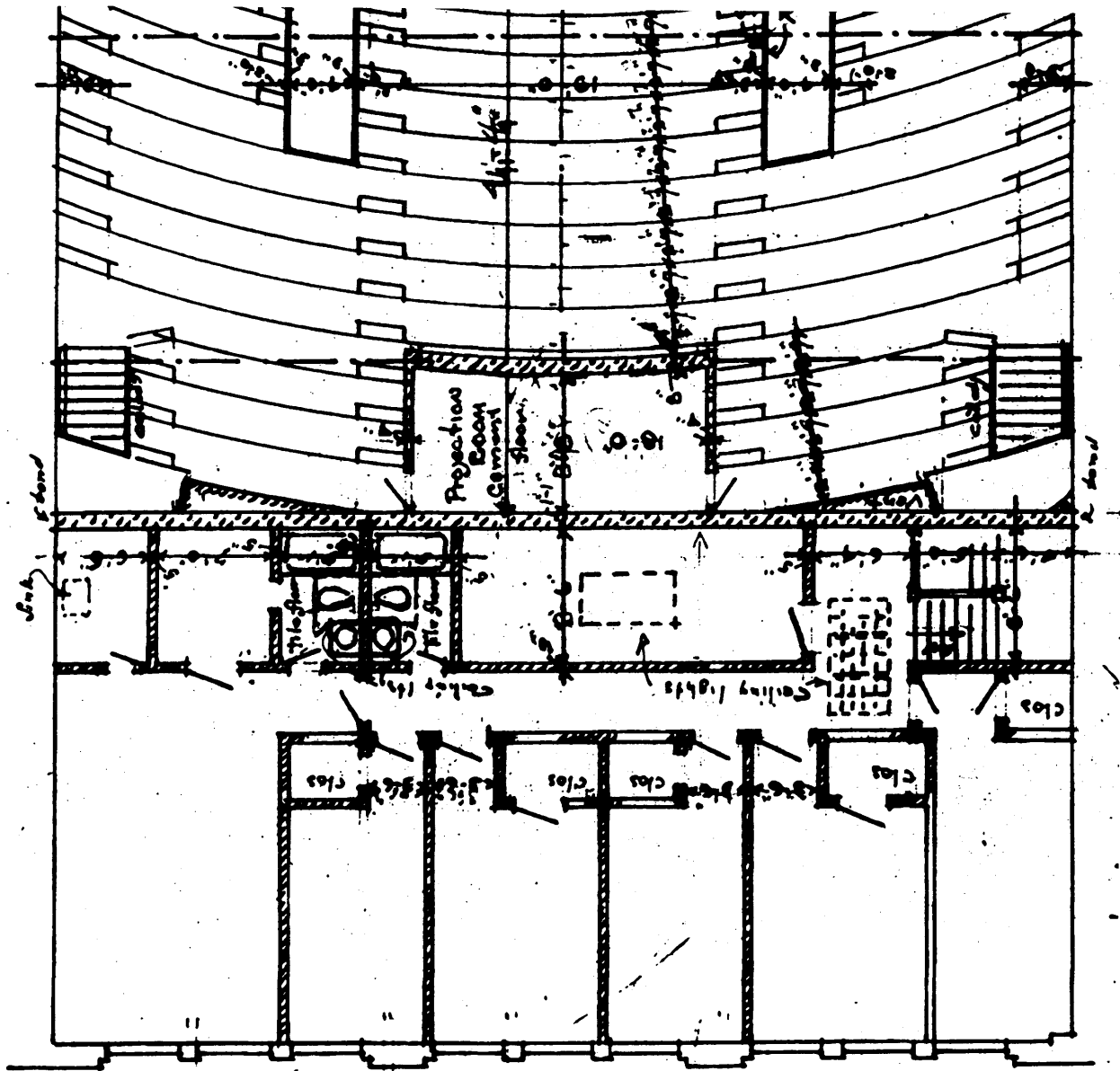
Section Additional Documentation Page 12

Englert Theatre
name of property

Johnson County - Iowa
county and state

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Partial 3rd Floor Plan



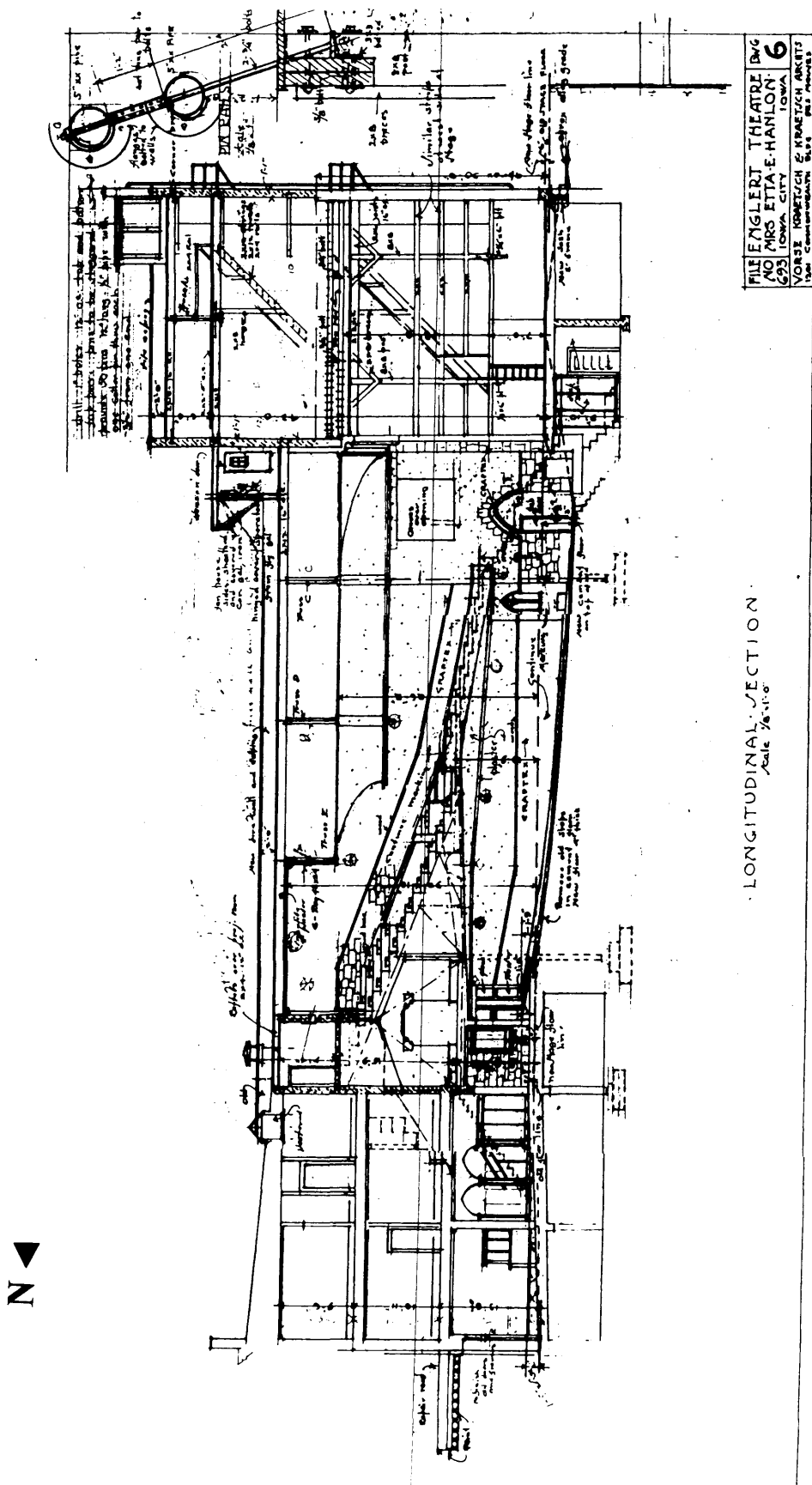
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Englert Theatre
name of property

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Johnson County - Iowa
county and state

Section Additional Documentation Page 13



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

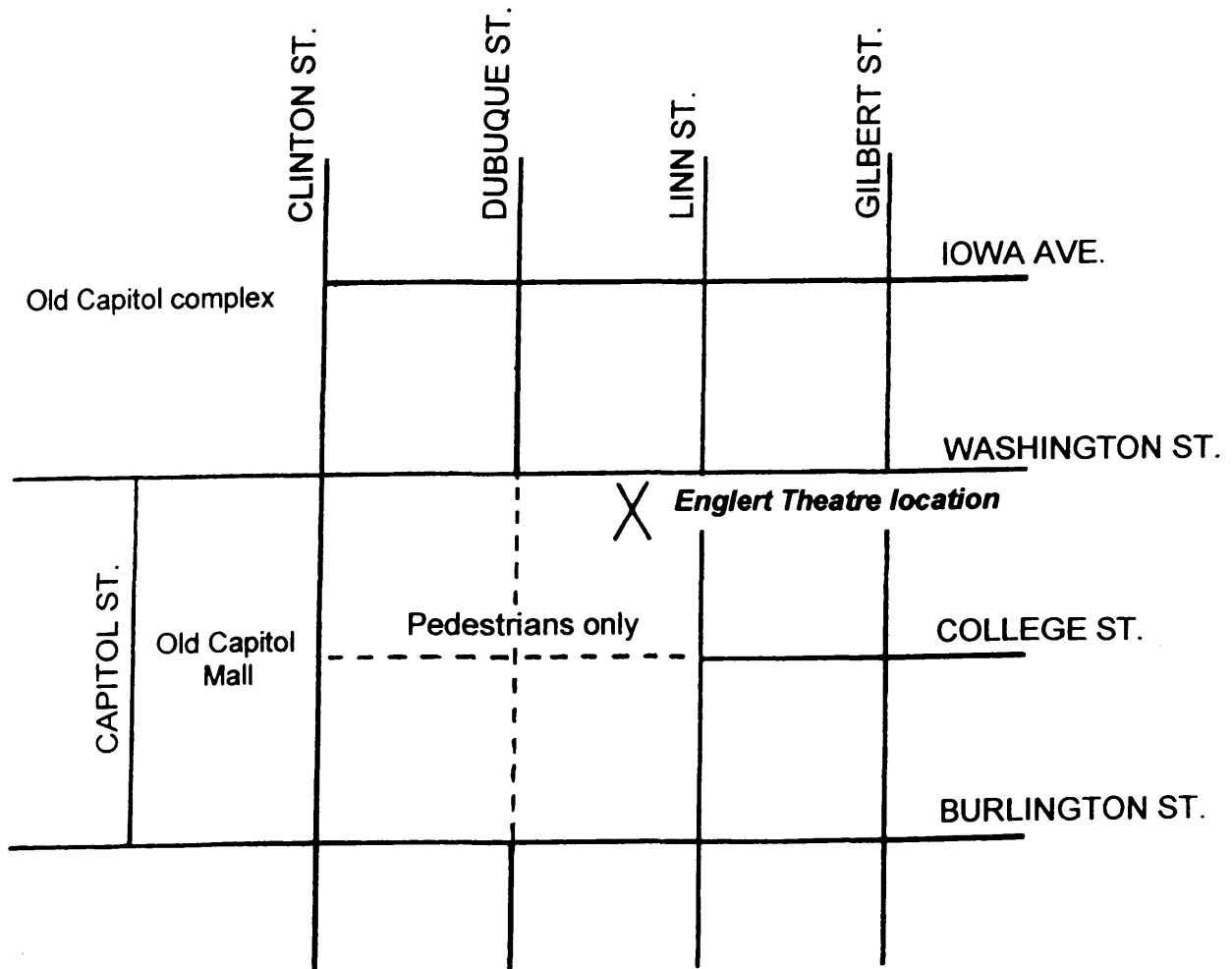
Englert Theatre
name of property

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Johnson County - Iowa
county and state

Section Additional Documentation Page 14

Site Map



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Englert Theatre
name of property

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Johnson County - Iowa
county and state

Section Additional Documentation Page 15

Photographs

1. *All photographs:* Englert Theatre
2. *All photographs:* Johnson County, Iowa
3. *All photographs:* Jan Olive Nash
4. #1: August 31, 2000
All remaining photographs: January 21, 2001
5. *All photographs:* Jan Olive Nash
6. *Views:*

#1: façade from across Washington Street, facing south

#2: rear wall from alley, facing east

#3: interior view from balcony, looking down at stage and proscenium; taken the day after the partition wall was removed

#4: interior view from stage, looking at auditorium and balcony; taken the day after the partition wall was removed

#5: interior hallway from mezzanine level to balcony, looking through to the proscenium

#6: detail of interior plaster heraldic ornament; "E" superimposed on "T" in the middle of the shield and flags or ribbons; located on doorway to balcony from stairway near stage

#7: interior detail of basement hallway wall and handpainted "no smoking" sign; located in dressing room area used by actors under and behind stage