

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PH0685496

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED DEC 2 1978  
DATE ENTERED DEC 14 1978

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  
Palace and Majestic Theaters  
AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER  
1315-1357 Main Street  
CITY, TOWN  
Bridgeport  
STATE  
Connecticut  
VICINITY OF  
4th - Stewart B. McKinney  
COUNTY  
Fairfield  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT  
NOT FOR PUBLICATION

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
			<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
			<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME  
Estate of Anthony E. Debek, c/o John Koons  
STREET & NUMBER  
1174  
1899 Stratfield Road  
CITY, TOWN  
Fairfield  
STATE  
Connecticut  
VICINITY OF  
Allan Debek  
see letter  
DR 12-6-78  
06430 06432

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.  
Bridgeport City Hall  
STREET & NUMBER  
45 Lyon Terrace  
CITY, TOWN  
Bridgeport  
STATE  
Connecticut 06604

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE  
DATE  
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS  
CITY, TOWN  
STATE  
FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input 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 Palace and Majestic Theaters building (1921-22) is located on the northwest corner of Congress Street and Main Street six blocks north of the center of downtown Bridgeport, Connecticut. The city's Central Business District is a triangle based on the Connecticut Turnpike with its two long (north-south) sides defined by State Highway 8 and the Pequonnock River. The theaters are in the northern part of the triangle, in a 22-acre neighborhood that has been designated the Congress Plaza Redevelopment Area.

The area around the theaters has been undergoing redevelopment for several years. To the north and west are now town houses interspersed with vacant lots. A large hotel nearby is in the course of rehabilitation for housing for the elderly. Older commercial buildings are located to the south and east, some of them vacant and vandalized. To the northeast there are industrial sites, railroad tracks, a new high rise for the elderly under construction, and vandalized buildings. The theater building, always big and impressive, now with the lack of adjacent structures is a focal point for the area. It is one of a group of buildings including a new church, the nearby police station and the new housing, that constitutes a base on which it is hope to build renewed strength for the neighborhood.

The two theaters are side by side in the steel-reinforced concrete building behind a five-story, 101-room hotel that occupies the front of the structure. Fronting 222 feet on Main Street, the elegant, five-story facade is executed in a lush, Beaux-Arts classicism. There are eight retail stores at street level, and two tile-floored entrances to the theaters, under marquees. A band of leaded glass runs the length of the building over the store fronts, framed at the top by an egg and dart molding. Several of the store fronts have been somewhat altered, in one case with new brick, and two-thirds of the leaded glass has been covered over (in a manner that appears to be reversible), but essentially this level of the facade is still intact, and it is the only part of the building that has been altered to any appreciable degree. Overall, the building is in its original condition.

From the second through fifth floors the facade is executed in a convincing imitation granite that was poured on site at the time of construction. The second floor has a row of two-over-two windows arranged in groups of three under a heavy cornice. This cornice supports an impressive two-story arcade that runs across the entire front of the building except for the bays at the corners where paired windows are repeated on each floor. The twelve colossal pilasters of the arcade and the engaged columns that flank them have modified Corinthian capitals. Eleven round, keystone arches spring from the entablatures of the columns, their spandrel decorated with anthemion motifs. At the roof line is another entablature and cornice with balustrade. The arcade motif returns for two bays on the sides, after which the balance of the building is faced with brick.

Inside the building the Palace, to the left (south), is the larger of the two theaters and seats 3700. The stage is 97 feet across and 28 feet deep, with 49 feet under the proscenium arch. The Majestic seats 2600 and has a stage of 79 x 32 feet under a 42-foot proscenium arch. The two theaters have similar, elaborately decorated interiors. The style in both cases

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Palace and Majestic Theaters  
Bridgeport, Connecticut

**CONTINUATION SHEET** Description ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 1

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is romantic Italian Renaissance Revival heavy with red plush carpets, mirrored glass, gold leaf, wine-red brocade, crystal chandeliers, medallions, and panelling. The ceilings are painted in idealized scenes of formal gardens. The lobbies are impressive, ornate interior spaces notable for broad stairways and wide expanses of imitation marble. In the lobby of the Majestic there is also some real marble, and separating this lobby from the theater proper is a fine, tall, leaded, stained glass screen.

The space between the two theaters is utilized as a fire exit. At the west end of this space the two theaters are joined by a section that houses 40 dressing rooms serving both theaters. The east end of the fire exit space, where it passes through the front of the building, is the hotel's elevator lobby providing access to its second floor reception level.

After several decades of steady use, the theaters were closed and re-opened several times. Finally, the Majestic closed for the last time in 1967, the hotel in 1973, and the Palace in 1975. Still in structurally sound condition, the theaters and the hotel show signs of wear and tear and reflect the absence of normal maintenance. The interior of the Majestic is in better condition than that of the Palace. The entire property is vacant with the exception of two stores. Proposals for rehabilitation have been put forward from time to time in recent years, as have proposals for demolition, and adaptive re-use is still being actively pursued.

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The clientele for which the hotel was planned was primarily the performers appearing at the two theaters, and other people associated with the shows. A centrally located bank of two elevators serves the five floors of the hotel. Adjoining the elevators is a stairway of marble steps and iron balustrade. Two more, similar interior stairways are at the ends of the building, lighted by skylights. The elevators open directly into the 30 by 50 foot lobby on the second floor. A half-round, wooden, Art Deco reception desk is located in the southwest corner of the lobby. Panelled wainscoting surrounds the room. The ceiling was coffered in plaster with the recessed panels containing figures, eagles, and other decorative motifs painted in colors, but the ceiling was destroyed by a fire bomb in the 1970s. A single Art Deco glass chandelier remains in place.

Hallways to the north and south open from the lobby and lead to the guest rooms. Interior rooms, west of the hallways, are lighted by two central wells that rise above the theater foyers. A typical single room measures 19 feet in length from door to window and 11 feet in width. Six feet of the 19 foot dimension are occupied by closet and bathroom. The bathrooms have white, hexagonal tesserae floors, white glazed, oblong tile walls, and bath tubs whose shape is visible, not cased in. The rooms have access from one to another by inter-connecting doors. The hallways and guest rooms are plain, without decorative embellishments, and have painted plaster walls. The paint is peeling.

From the roof of the hotel a fine view is provided of the roofs of the two theaters. Each is roughly hip in shape, with the faces of the hip having two slopes, and is made of concrete, built up with bitumen and roofing paper. The roofs are carried on steel beam frames. Steel straps from the beams in turn support the hung ceilings of the theaters. A brick parapet capped by red tile surrounds the base of each roof.

Like the theaters, the hotel is not used. It appears to be structurally sound, but untidy, in need of cleaning and maintenance.

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Palace and Majestic Theaters  
Bridgeport, Connecticut

CONTINUATION SHEET Significance      ITEM NUMBER 8      PAGE 1

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classical detail and proportion. On the interior Lamb was fortunate to have the services of a painter named Hans Lehman, who executed the ceiling frescoes of dream-like Italian formal gardens.

The entire work has a unity that is first rate.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1921-1922

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Thomas W. Lamb

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

From the imitation granite of its exterior to the imitation marble of its lobbies, the Palace and Majestic theaters building provides a fine display of the lush panoply of 1920's theater art. Here the world of make believe lives on in the elaborate classical exterior and the ornate plush and gilded interiors, all skillfully executed to the design of the famous theater architect, Thomas W. Lamb.

Movie houses with lavish opulence were not rare in America in the 1920's. They are now becoming rare. Bridgeport's Palace and Majestic constitute a unit that is a highly professional example of the genre. It is unusual for its free-standing construction and its 101-room hotel across the front, existing now with complete integrity and in reasonable good condition.

Sylvester Z. Poli was the entrepreneur who caused the Palace and Majestic theater building to be constructed in 1921-22 as part of his theater chain. Movie houses were a growth industry at the time and were being built in many cities. Apparently, in Bridgeport the combination of strong consumer demand and the availability of a lot of suitable size led to the decision to build the unusual combination of two theaters and a hotel in one building.

Poli commissioned the Scottish-born architect, Thomas W. Lamb (1871-1942), to draw the plans. Lamb had an international reputation for theater design. His most famous work was the second Madison Square Garden on 49th Street, New York City. In addition, he designed theaters in England, Australia, India, and Egypt, as well as Ziegfeld's on 42nd Street, Keith's on 84th Street, both in New York, Loew's in Kansas City, Fox's in Philadelphia, and many more. In Connecticut he drew the plans for the Palace Theater in Waterbury, which is quite similar to the Palace in Bridgeport.

The Majestic Theater opened on November 4, 1922. Headliner for the event was Eddie Cantor, who starred in a Parisian revue called "Make It Snappy." Other greats of vaudeville, silent films, and talkies entertained in the two theaters over the years. In 1934 Loew's Theaters, Inc., acquired the property and the Palace was known for a period as Loew's Poli. The name of the Majestic was never changed. The combined theaters played to their ten millionth patron on August 20, 1939.

Meanwhile, the management of the hotel changed hands from time to time, as did its name. The choice of names ranged from the imaginative "Hotel Majesticana" to the mundane "Stratfield Annex." The hotel space is now proposed for conversion to offices.

Architect Lamb was at the prime of his career when he designed the Neo-Classical building. Its architecture is pure theater, but well done with proper attention to accepted

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Norman Benedict Associates, "Marlet Feasibility Study, Bridgeport Art and Civic Center," Hamden, Connecticut: Norman Benedict Associates, 1976.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1.3

QUADRANGLE NAME Bridgeport

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24 000

UTM REFERENCES

A 1,8 65,1 7,1,0 4,5,6,0 3,6,0  
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B                    
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C                  

D                  

E                  

F                  

G                  

H                  

## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property is section 9, map 2, block 905, lot 13 as described in Bridgeport Land Records volume 1493, page 131.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

David F. Ransom, Consultant

ORGANIZATION

Connecticut Historical Commission

DATE

May 25, 1978

STREET & NUMBER

59 South Prospect Street

TELEPHONE

203 566-3005

CITY OR TOWN

Hartford

STATE

Connecticut 06106

# 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 SIGNATURE

TITLE Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

DATE September 21, 1978

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

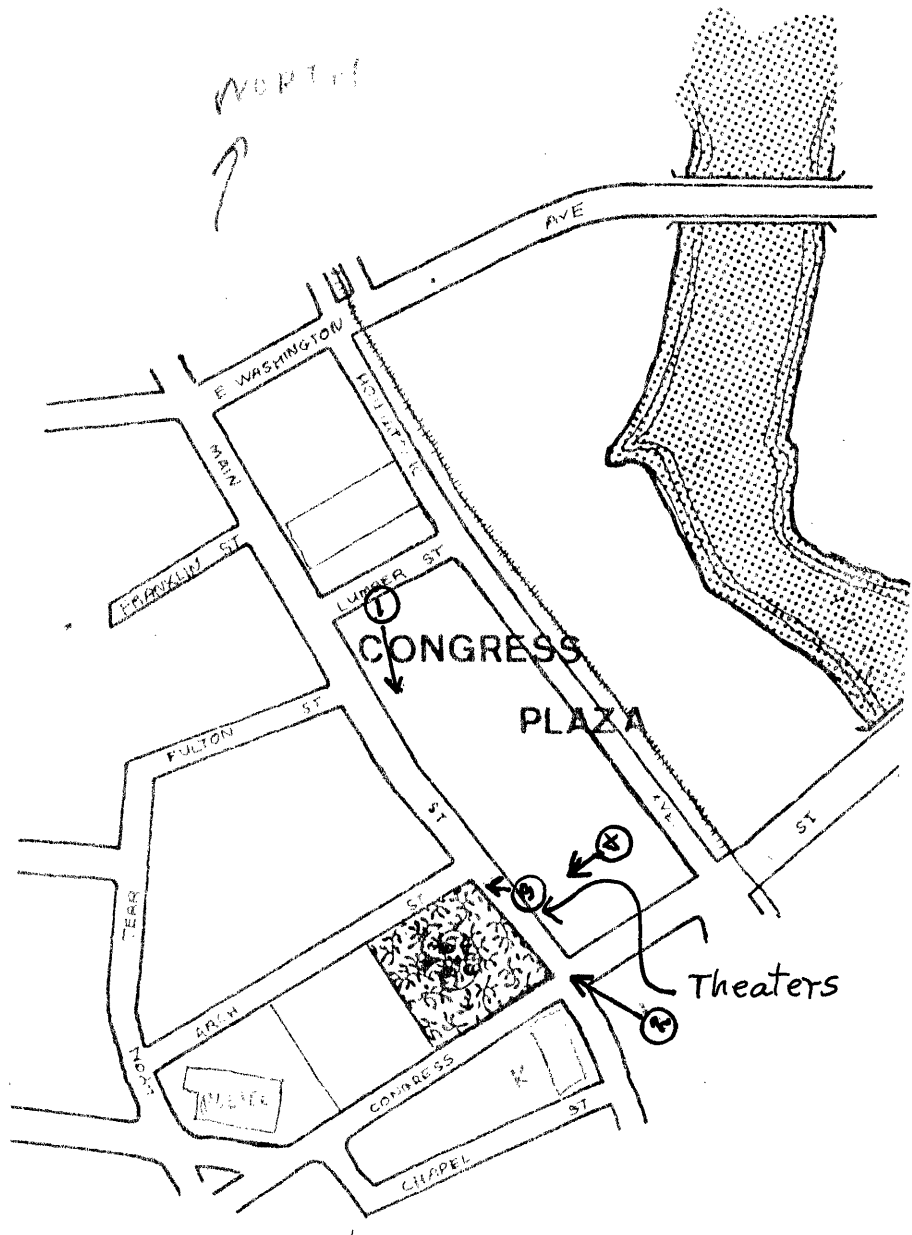
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE 12/14/78

ATTEST:

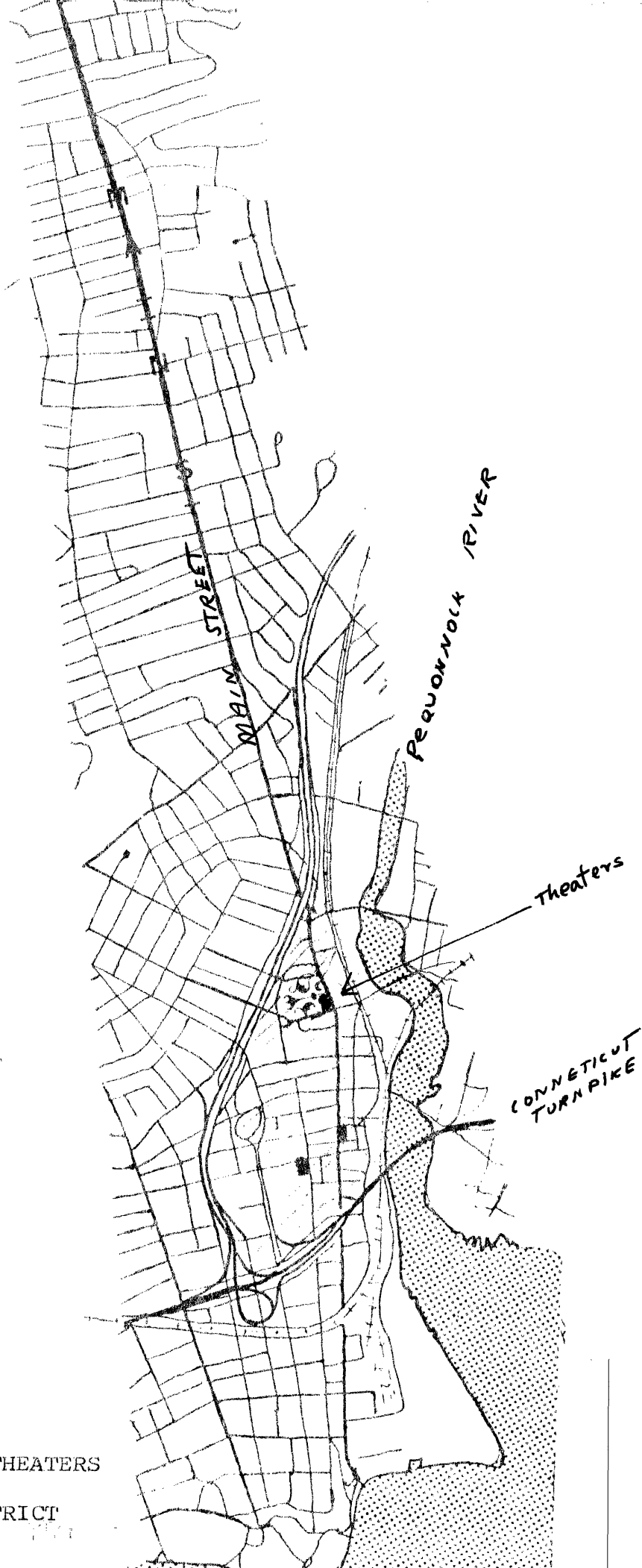
CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE 12/13/78

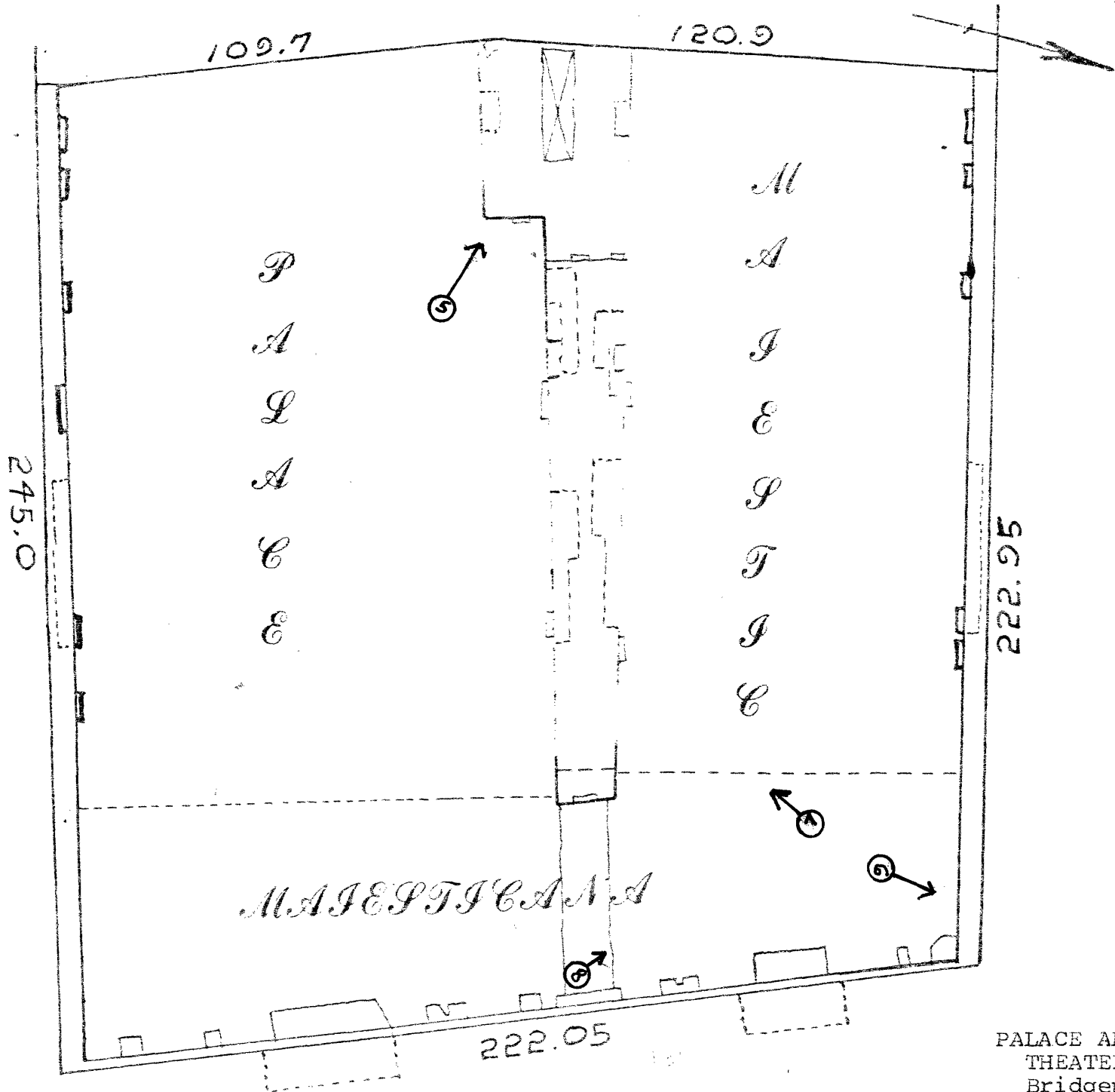


PALACE AND MAJESTIC  
 THEATERS  
 Bridgeport, CT  
 CONGRESS PLAZA REDEVEL-  
 OPMENT AREA  
 Bridgeport, CT

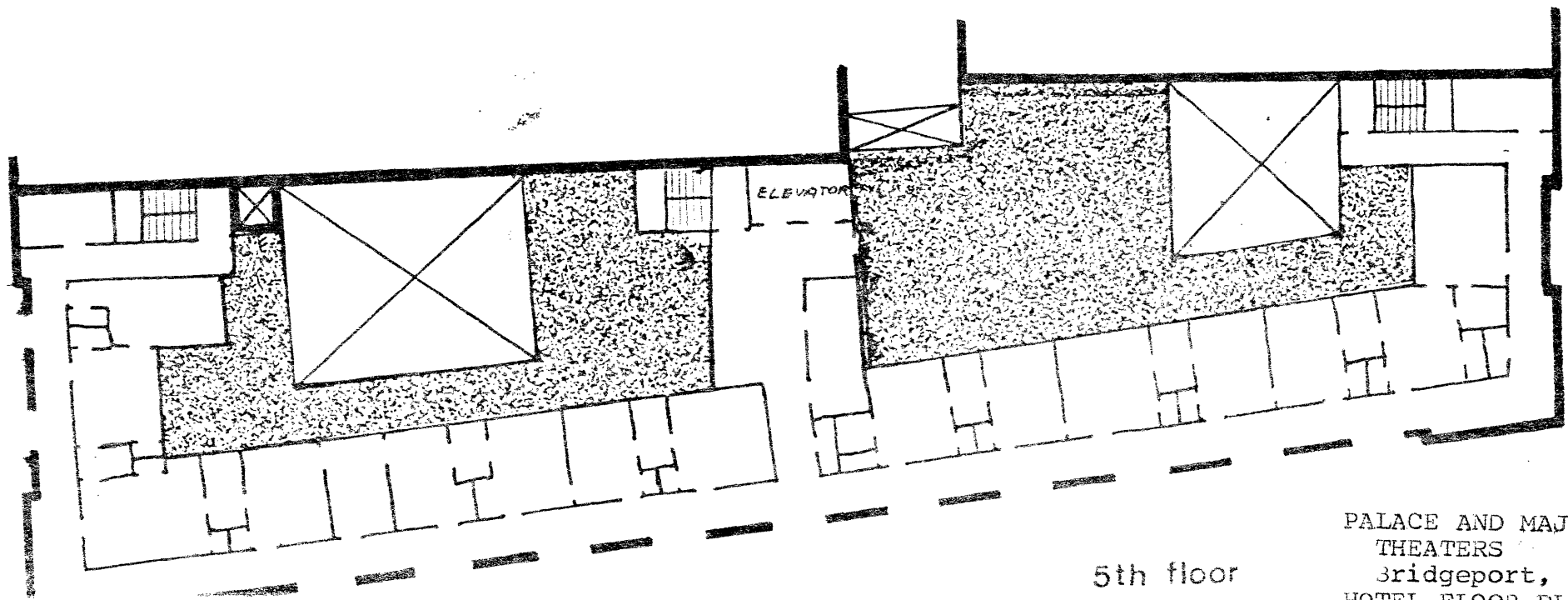
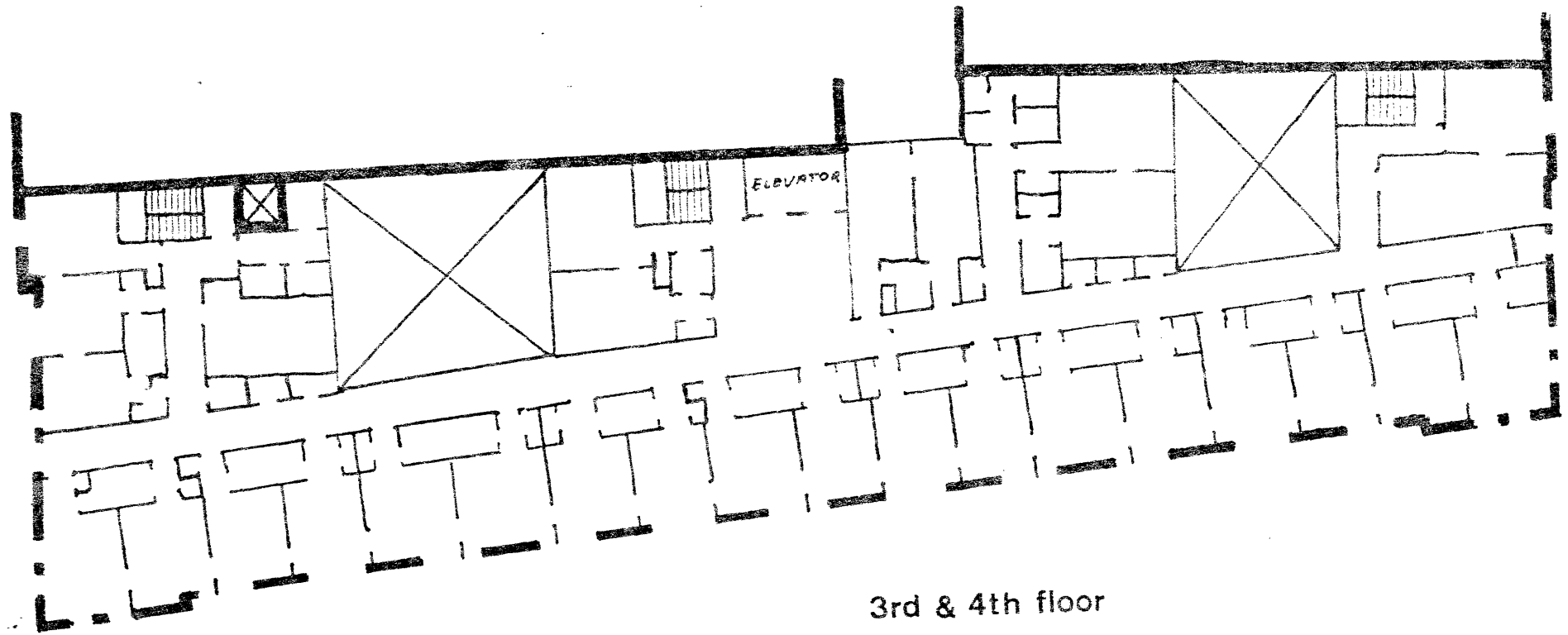




PALACE AND MAJESTIC THEATERS  
Bridgeport, CT  
CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT  
Bridgeport, CT OCT 2 1951



PALACE AND MAJESTIC  
 THEATERS  
 Bridgeport, CT  
 PLAN OCT 2 1978



PALACE AND MAJESTIC  
THEATERS  
Bridgeport, CT  
HOTEL FLOOR PLANS