

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

DEC 26 1989

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Somerville Theatre (preferred)other names/site number Hobbs Building

2. Location

street & number 55 Davis Square

N/A not for publication

city, town Somerville

N/A vicinity

state Massachusetts code MA county Middlesexcode 017zip code 02143

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

- ☒ 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> </u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

Somerville MRANumber of contributing resources previously
listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Valerie A. Taormina
Signature of certifying official Executive Director, Massachusetts Historical Commission,
State Historic Preservation Officer

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- ☒ 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:)

Entered in the
National Register:1/26/90

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture / Theatre

Commerce / Specialty Store, Office

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture / Theatre

Commerce / Specialty Store

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Neo-classical Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation

walls **Brick; stone**

roof

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

This three-story Moderne commercial building, built in 1914, is similar in style and size to the few remaining structures of its age still standing in Davis Square. The numerous uses, in addition to the theatre, for which the building was designed include a bowling alley, cafe, shops, offices and meeting rooms, a plan more complex than that for the other five theatres built in Somerville. This sole survivor of the vaudeville era in Somerville is also the oldest theatre built explicitly as a movie house in the Boston area and was the prototype for Dorchester's landmark Strand Theatre of 1918 designed by the same architects.

The exterior of the Somerville Theatre is somewhat altered although not irreversibly. Only two of the original eight storefronts are still in use. The others are gutted and their doors and windows sealed from inside. Window openings originally blank are now in use and the sash have been replaced over the years, but there is no change in either shape or number of openings. The original marquee is gone as is a large plaque, roof flagpole, and some ornaments from the cornice and parapet over the theatre entrance.

The interior of the theatre has been sadly neglected, but also does not appear to be irreversibly altered. The small lobby, typical of a vaudeville house where the audience came and went, has suffered the most change, probably in the 1960s. Wood paneling and tile sections have been applied over the walls and a dropped ceiling suspended from the original, which is a geometric tile mosaic in blue with bands of silver and gold echoing the floor, a tile mosaic in white with bands of red and black. The theatre interior was originally decorated in a mixed 19th century style, pastel floral medallions with cherubs, and Art Deco/Aztec geometrics were added, probably in 1932. The current scheme is a tan and gilt background highlighted by green triangles, red circular shapes, and black lines and is very unusual. The molded plaster of the proscenium is red and gilt, and the vertical accents of the exterior of the boxes and balcony are picked out in red and green. The balcony still has its original rose brocade panels on the walls and its original half-moon wood and glass doors leading to the lobby. The narrow stage is still framed by red velvet curtains, and a large movie screen forms the rear wall. Aside from these cosmetic changes, a few minor structural changes have also occurred, probably in 1932: the lower boxes on both sides of the stage were removed and

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 1

Somerville Theatre
Somerville, MA

the orchestra pit covered over to provide more seating. Otherwise, the interior is intact.

These changes have not affected the theatre's marvelous acoustics or its virtually unobstructed sightlines. (A few seats in the rear of the mezzanine are blocked by the columns that support the balcony.) These slight alterations probably occurred in 1932, when the theatre reverted to being a movie house and live shows were no longer produced.

(continued)

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National Park Service

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Continuation Sheet**

Somerville Theatre
Somerville, MA

Section number 7 Page 2

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION

While no prehistoric sites are currently recorded on the property, it is possible that sites are present. Three known sites are recorded in close proximity (within one mile) to the property. In general, however, the potential for significant archaeological remains, either prehistoric or historic, is low as a result of extensive development in the area and because the building which has a cellar covers the entire lot.

(end)

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locallyApplicable National Register Criteria ☒ A ☐ B ☒ C ☐ DCriteria Considerations (Exceptions) ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

ArchitectureCommerceCommunity Planning and DevelopmentEntertainmentPerforming Arts

Period of Significance

1914-1939

Significant Dates

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Funk and Wilcox

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Somerville Theatre is significant for the public benefit it has brought, and is still bringing, to Somerville in general and Davis Square in particular. A neighborhood resource with a continuing commitment to the arts, it is the only performance hall of its size remaining in a five mile radius outside of Boston. As a cultural resource the theatre has been the site of a combination of movies and live entertainment from its inception and today stands alone as a representative of the era of Somerville's greatest growth and its history of culture and performance.

The Somerville Theatre retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, feeling, and association and fulfills National Register Criteria A and C on the Local level. It meets Criterion A as a reflection of the suburbanization of the Davis Square area of Somerville and the evolution of local entertainment from silent movies and vaudeville to a stock theater to, most recently, movies and concerts. The building meets Criterion C as an example of an early 20th century vaudeville theatre with a significant Art Deco and Aztec-inspired interior.

The development of Davis Square is typical of Somerville's growth, which paralleled the development of the railroad. The city began losing its rural character in 1843 when the first tracks of the Fitchburg Railroad were laid. Gradually, pasture land, market gardens, and country estates gave way to residential subdivisions with their own commercial centers. Davis Square was the estate of Person Davis, a grain merchant, and was suburbanized by the twin pressures of, first, the Boston & Maine Railroad Arlington line, which came through in 1870 and then the coming of the electric streetcar in 1889, which converted the area to the transportation hub of a streetcar suburb. This trend is still in effect today as evidenced by the opening of the Davis Square Subway station in 1984 within 50 feet of the location of the original Boston & Maine station.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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 # _____

☒ See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State historic preservation office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Specify repository:

Massachusetts Historical Commission

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Less than one acre

UTM References

A 19 325220 46958000
Zone Easting Northing

B
Zone Easting Northing

C

D

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Occupies entire lot and is bounded on the north by Boston and Maine railroad station, Dover Street to the south, Meacham Road on the west, and Holland Street to the east.

☐ See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

Boundaries follow property lines and are those historically associated with the subject property

☐ See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Betsy Friedberg, NR Director with the Somerville Historical Commission

organization Massachusetts Historical Commission date October 1989

street & number 80 Boylston Street telephone 617-727-8470

city or town Boston state MA zip code 02116

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National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSomerville Theatre
Somerville, MASection number 8 Page 1

As the city grew, centralized commercial squares developed within neighborhoods. The Somerville Theatre is the culmination of the suburbanization of Davis Square. Built by Joseph O. Hobbs, a local businessman, in 1914, the theatre provided commercial, recreational, and cultural uses to the community. The availability of public transportation made the appeal of the theatre broad based. The Somerville was the first theatre built exclusively to show silent movies in conjunction with vaudeville shows. Its opening year was successful but a demand for live performance led to its conversion as a stock house in 1915. For the following seventeen years, the theatre produced a steady stream of plays ranging from comedies (Charley's Aunt) to musicals (Leave it to Jane) to serious drama (Why Women Leave Home). Busby Berkeley acted, directed, and tried out his radical choreography here before going to Hollywood. Nationally recognized artists such as Tallulah Bankhead and Francis X. Bushman appeared in productions as did local performers like the Corbett sisters. Kate Smith made her debut here at the age of 18.

By 1932, the Depression had taken its toll, and stock being no longer profitable, the theatre, under the direction of the Viano family, closed briefly and reopened as a motion picture theatre, again mirroring events elsewhere in the greater Boston area. The Somerville Theatre has been continuously in use as a cultural resource since 1914 and this tradition continues today with the current theatre operator's programming of films and live performance.

(end)

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Continuation Sheet**

Somerville Theatre
Somerville, MA

Section number 9 Page 1

Carr, Jay, Boston Globe, 6/27/84

Dubson, Mike, Mass Media, U. Mass. Boston, 11/18/86

Engle, Edward, The Muse, Boston University Free Press, 3/13/86

Landscape Research, Beyond the Neck. The Architecture and Development of
Somerville, Mass., 1982

Payette Associates Inc. & Interchange, "Architectural Concept, Market Study &
Financial Feasibility Analysis for the Redevelopment of the Hobbs
Building & Somerville Theatre" for Tufts University, 1983

Schneider, Sam, Somerville News, 7/23/86

Viano, Robert, Somerville Journal & Somerville Press, 1/13/66

Letter to Somerville Journal, 10/31/82

Somerville Library Local History File

HIGHLAND A

N

HOLLAND ST.

Davis Square

ON BRANCH - BOSTON AND

23

A

3120

4987

MEACHAM RD

DOVER ST

D'AY ST.

GLOVER CIRCLE

DOVER ST.

HERBER

23.92

10,734

126.42

10.064

129 19

15

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
Office of the Secretary, Boston

Community: Somerville	Form No: 359
Property Name: Somerville Theatre/ Hobbs Building	

Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.

Staple to Inventory form at bottom

SOMERVILLE'S THEATERS - EARLY 20TH CENTURY

<u>Address</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Years Operating*</u>	<u>Current Use</u>
79-83 Broadway	Hurst's Broadway	1916 - 1920	retail/warehousing
81 Broadway	Broadway (1850 seats per Sanborn map, 1928)	1924 ? - 1940 +	
303 Broadway	Capitol	1940 +	Star Mkt. pkg. lot
306 Broadway	Pearson's Winter Hill (Odd Fellows Hall on Sanborn map, 1928)	1918 - 1920 + 1924 ? - 1933 +	vacant lot
318 Broadway	Broadway Winter Hill (building, not theater on Sanborn map, 1928)	1910 - 1914 1915 - 1917	storefronts/lodge used as nightclub?
707 Broadway	Ball Square (per Sanborn map, 1928 - entrance in Somerville, theatre in Medford - now parking lot)	1924 ? - 1940 +	small storefront?
1156 Broadway	Teele Square	1924 ? - 1940 +	storage
55 Davis Square (Hobbs Building)	Somerville	1914 - present	movie & concert theatre
138 Cross	(Somerville) Orpheum	1918 - 1940 +	pumbling supplier formerly church
50 Day St.	Day Street Olympia Lowes E M Davis Sq.	1914 - 1933 + 1940 +	City parking lot
151 Highland Av.	Central	1924 ? - 1940 +	Highland Bottle Redemption Center
156 Highland Av.	Highland Ave. (Knights of Columbus building, per Sanborn map, 1928)	1918 - 1920 ?	Anthony's Function Hall
372 Somerville Av	Star (building but not theater on Sanborn map of 1928)	1908 - 1914	Petrosillos' bldg.?
4 Union Square	Union Square Strand	1914 - 1920 + 1925 - 1933 +	pkg. lot
Warren Ave/nr Bow	Olympia	1914 - ?	Goodyear pkg. lot
8 Warren Ave.	Union Square (closed per 1928 Sanborn map)	1924 - 1933 +	

*based on City Directories: 1905 - 1940 (missing years: 1921-1923, 1934-1939)

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National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number _____ Page _____

Multiple Resource Area
Thematic GroupName Somerville MPS
State Middlesex County, MASSACHUSETTS

Nomination/Type of Review

Date/Signature

71. Tufts, Peter and Oliver, House
Entered in the
National Registerfor Keeper Melrose Byrum 9/18/89

Attest _____

72. Warren, H., House
Entered in the
National Registerfor Keeper Melrose Byrum 9/18/89

Attest _____

73. West Somerville Branch Library
Entered in the
National Registerfor Keeper Melrose Byrum 9/18/89

Attest _____

74. Williams, Charles, House
Entered in the
National Registerfor Keeper Melrose Byrum 9/18/89

Attest _____

75. Williams, Charles, Jr., House
Substantive Reviewfor Keeper Beth L. Savage 9-18-89

Attest _____

76. Williams, F.G., House
Entered in the
National Registerfor Keeper Melrose Byrum 9/18/89

Attest _____

77. Worthen, Daniel, House
Entered in the
National Registerfor Keeper Melrose Byrum 9/18/89

Attest _____

78. Wright House
Entered in the
National Registerfor Keeper Melrose Byrum 9/18/89

Attest _____

79. Wyatt, George, House
Substantive Reviewfor Keeper Beth L. Savage 9-18-89

Attest _____

80. Somerville Theatre

~~Entered in the
National Register~~~~Substantive Review~~for Keeper Melrose Byrum 1/20/90~~Entered in the
National Register~~

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Somerville Theatre
NAME:

MULTIPLE Somerville MRA
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: MASSACHUSETTS, Middlesex

DATE RECEIVED: 12/26/89 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 1/09/90
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 1/25/90 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 2/09/90
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 89002330

NOMINATOR: STATE

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

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

COMMENT WAIVER: N

☒ ACCEPT ☐ RETURN ☐ REJECT 1/26/90 DATE

Entered in the
National Register

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

RECOM./CRITERIA _____
REVIEWER _____
DISCIPLINE _____
DATE _____

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

CLASSIFICATION

☐ count ☐ resource type

STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

FUNCTION

☐ historic ☐ current

DESCRIPTION

☐ architectural classification
☐ materials
☐ descriptive text

SIGNIFICANCE

Period Areas of Significance--Check and justify below

Specific dates Builder/Architect
Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

☐ summary paragraph
☐ completeness
☐ clarity
☐ applicable criteria
☐ justification of areas checked
☐ relating significance to the resource
☐ context
☐ relationship of integrity to significance
☐ justification of exception
☐ other

BIBLIOGRAPHY

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

☐ acreage ☐ verbal boundary description
☐ UTM's ☐ boundary justification

ACCOMPANYING DOCUMENTATION/PRESENTATION

☐ sketch maps ☐ USGS maps ☐ photographs ☐ presentation

OTHER COMMENTS

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to

Signed _____ Phone _____

Date _____



Somerville Theatre / Hobbs Building
55 Davis Square
Somerville, MA
MRA

Photographer: Frankie Lieberman
Feb. 1989

Roll 17: #4 (Somerville survey 1988)

Main facade



Somerville Theatre
55 Davis Square
Somerville, MA
MRA

Photographer: Frankie Lieberman
Feb. 1989

Roll 17: #6

Facade detail

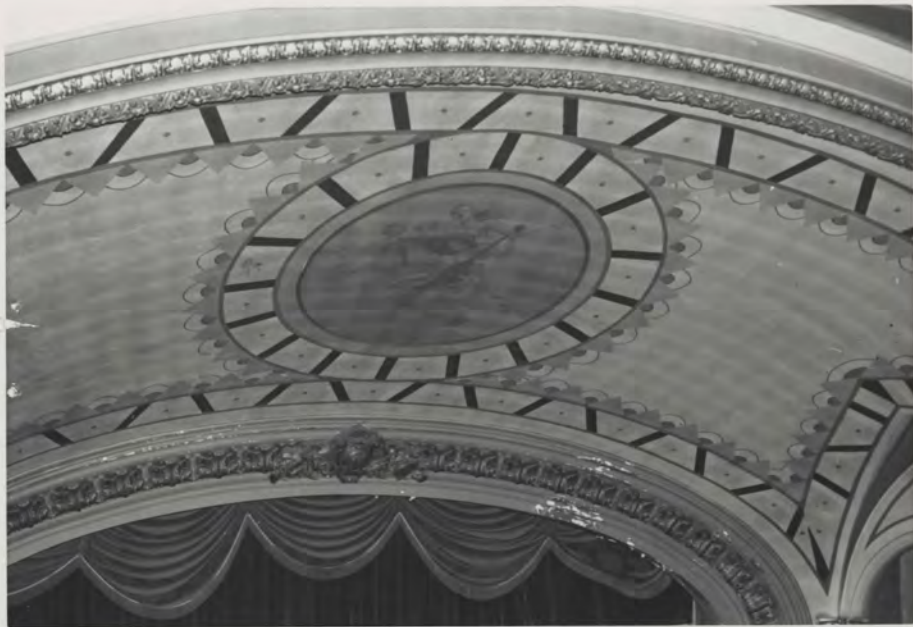


Somerville Theatre
55 Davis Square
Somerville, MA
MRA

Photographer: Frankie Lieberman
Feb. 1989

Roll 17: #8

Box seats



Somerville Theatre
55 Davis Square
Somerville, MA
~~MA~~

Photographer: Frankie Lieberman
Feb. 1989

Roll 17: #19

Ceiling above proscenium.



SOMERVILLE THEATRE, HOBBS BUILDING, WEST SOMERVILLE, MASS.

Somerville Theatre / Hobbs Building
55 Davis Square
Somerville, MA
MAA

Photographer: Frankie Lieberman
Feb. 1989

Roll 17: # 24 (from Somerville survey 1988)

photocard ca. 1920



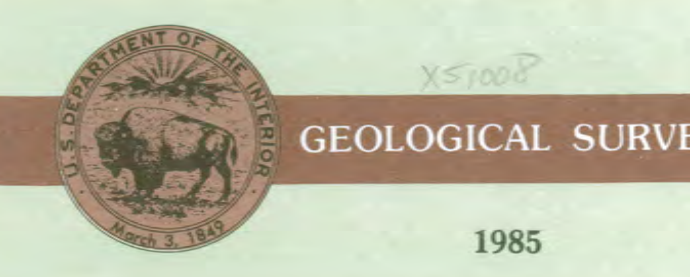
Boston North MASSACHUSETTS

1:25 000-scale metric
topographic map



7.5 X 15 MINUTE QUADRANGLE
SHOWING

- Contours and elevations in meters
- Highways, roads and other manmade structures
- Water features
- Woodland areas
- Geographic names



Produced by the United States Geological Survey
in cooperation with Massachusetts Department
of Public Works
Control by USGS, NOS-NOAA, and Commonwealth of
Massachusetts agencies
Compiled by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs
taken 1978. Field checked 1979. Map edited 1985
Supersedes Boston North and Lexington 1:25,000-scale
maps dated 1971
Selected hydrographic data compiled from NOS chart 13272 (1982)
This information is not intended for navigational purposes
Projection and 1000-meter grid: Universal
Transverse Mercator, zone 19
10,000-foot grid ticks based on Massachusetts coordinate
system, maintained since 1927 North American Datum
To place on the predicted North American Datum 1983
move the projection line 6 meters south and
41 meters west as shown by dashed corner ticks
There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of
the National or State reservations shown on this map

CONTOUR INTERVAL 3 METERS
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929
CONTROL ELEVATIONS SHOWN TO THE NEAREST 0.1 METER
OTHER ELEVATIONS SHOWN TO THE NEAREST 0.5 METER
DEPTH CURVES AND SOUNDINGS IN METERS
DATUM IS MEAN LOW WATER
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO DATUMS IS VARIABLE
SHORELINE SHOWN REPRESENTS THE APPROXIMATE LINE
OF MEAN HIGH WATER
THE MEAN RANGE OF TIDE IS APPROXIMATELY 2.5 METERS

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS

CONVERSION TABLE		DECLINATION DIAGRAM	ADJOINING MAPS		
Meters	Feet		1	2	3
1	3.2808		1	2	3
2	6.5617		4	5	6
3	9.8425		7	8	9
4	13.1234				
5	16.4042				
6	19.6850				
7	22.9659				
8	26.2467				
9	29.5275				
10	32.8084				
To convert meters to feet multiply by 3.2808 To convert feet to meters multiply by 0.3048		OTM grid convergence (GM) and 1983 magnetic declination (MD) at center of map Diagram is approximate			

FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092

Topographic Map Symbols

Primary highway, hard surface	.....
Secondary highway, hard surface	.....
Light-duty road, hard or improved surface	.....
Unimproved road, hard or improved surface	.....
Unimproved road, soil	.....
Route marker: Interstate, U. S., State	.....
Railroad: standard gage, narrow gage	.....
Bridge: drawbridge	.....
Footbridge, overpass, underpass	.....
Build-up area: only selected landmark buildings shown	.....
House: barn; church; school; large structure	.....
Boundary:	
National, with monument	.....
State	.....
County, parish	.....
Civil township, precinct, district	.....
Incorporated city, village, town	.....
National or State reservation, small park	.....
Land grant with monument; found section corner	.....
U. S. public lands survey: range, township, section	.....
Range, township, section line: location approximate	.....
Fence or field line	.....
Power transmission line, located tower	.....
Dam; dam with lock	.....
Cemetery, grave	.....
Campground, picnic area; U. S. location monument	.....
Windmill; water well; spring	.....
Mine shaft; prospect; adit or cave	.....
Control: horizontal station; vertical station; spot elevation	.....
Contours: index, intermediate, supplementary, depression	.....
Distorted surface: strip mine, lava, sand	.....
Bathymetric contours: index, intermediate	.....
Perennial lake and stream, intermittent lake and stream	.....
Rapids, large and small; falls, large and small	.....
Submerged marsh; marsh, swamp	.....
Land subject to controlled inundation; woodland	.....
Scrub; mangrove	.....
Orchard; vineyard	.....

A pamphlet describing topographic maps is available on request

Somerville Theater
55 Davis Square
Somerville, MA
19 325220 4695800



DEC 19 1989

December 19, 1989

Carol Shull
National Register of Historic Places
Department of the Interior
National Park Service
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, DC 20013-7127

Dear Ms. Shull:

Enclosed please find the following nominations:

Somerville Theatre, 55 Davis Square, Somerville (Middlesex County),
Massachusetts;

The Vendome and the St. Ives (HPCA #s 11136MA and 11137MA), 17-19 and 21-23
Chandler Street, Worcester (Worcester County) Massachusetts.

There has been no owner objections for the above mentioned properties.

The nominations have been voted eligible by the State Review Board and have
been signed by the State Historic Preservation Officer. Owners were notified
of pending State Review Board consideration 30-75 days before the meeting and
were afforded the opportunity to comment. Comments received to date are
attached to the nomination form.

Sincerely,

Anne E. Tait
Acting National Register Director
Massachusetts Historical Commission

Enclosure: