

*PH 1017 1967*

# DATA SHEET

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED **MAY 2 1975**  
DATE ENTERED **JUN 18 1975**

## 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 Lakewood Theater

AND/OR COMMON

### 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

*n E of Madison in town of Lakewood  
on bank of Lake Wesserunsett*

CITY, TOWN

NOT FOR PUBLICATION  
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE Maine

VICINITY OF Lakewood  
CODE 23

COUNTY 1st Hon. David Emery  
Somerset  
CODE 025

### 3 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 Ms. Katie Denis

STREET & NUMBER P.O. Box 99

CITY, TOWN Skowhegan

VICINITY OF STATE Maine

### 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Somerset County

STREET & NUMBER Registry of Deeds

CITY, TOWN Skowhegan,

STATE Maine

### 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

# 7 DESCRIPTION

<b>CONDITION</b>		<b>CHECK ONE</b>		<b>CHECK ONE</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED	DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED			
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED				

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Lakewood, ~~America's oldest summer theater~~, is located in an attractive wooded setting on the shore of Lake Wesserunsett in Madison, Maine. Begun as a spiritualist meeting hall in 1882 and converted into a skating rink in 1884, the building became a summer theatre in 1898. Its framework served as the core of the present theatre, which was constructed in the Colonial Revival style during the winter of 1925-26. Remodelled at a cost of \$30,000, Lakewood Theater was described in the Lewiston Journal of January 1, 1927 as a "Modern show house with excellent stage, dressing rooms, property room, and scene painting space."

Lakewood Theater is rectangular in shape, stands two and a half stories high, and has a gable roof. The building possesses a concrete foundation and is of frame construction with a combination of matched boarding and clapboarding on the exterior.

The facade or north wall of the theater is composed of a main section which is flanked on either side by a recessed wing. The center of the main section's first story is devoted to a large recessed doorway with two folding doors. This recessed area is enframed by a simple molding with cornerblock treatment. To its left is a three-part window, while a series of three ticket windows are located at the right. The second story of the main section has three symmetrically placed three part windows. Fronting the main section is a two story portico which is composed of six square piers supporting a flat roof. The piers bear elongated recessed panels in the Greek Revival manner, while the balustrade features a diamond-shaped motif. Behind the balustrade on the facade of the gable roof is a Palladian window. The two side walls of the main section have a three part window on each of the two stories.

The main section of Lakewood Theater is flanked on either side by a recessed wing. The facade or north wall of each wing has a double door on the first story and two single windows on the second. The side or east and west walls of the wings have two three-part windows and a door on the first story and three three-part windows on the second story. The remainder of each of the two walls of the theater is blank, with the exception of a first story double exit door.

A loading platform extends across the south or rear wall of the building. The first story contains a series of different sized doors, some used as actors' entrances and others for the loading and removal of scenery and stage properties.

The gable roof runs the entire length of the theater. It is flanked on either side by a monitor which provides additional space to the half story. Astride the peak of the gable is a large metal exhaust ventilator.

The main entrance of Lakewood Theater opens directly on to a foyer which leads to the first floor seating. Entrance to the second floor balconies is gained by a broad straight staircase in each of the two wings. The three second floor balconies are located on the north, east, and west sides of the theater, while the stage is found on the south wall. The building's woodwork is carried out in a restrained (See Continuation Sheet)

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Colonial Revival manner. Foyer and staircase walls are hung with dozens of autographed pictures and playbills commemorating the theater's many famous performers.

The stage itself is forty-three feet wide and thirty-six feet deep. The property room, constructed off stage left and the area off stage right allow ample storage space for both movable scenery and a painting frame forty feet long and fifteen feet high. A large wooden plank area with wooden catwalks forms the grid area above the stage floor. A hallway separates the stage from the eight dressing rooms behind it and provides a crossway to the stage on the left and right sides. Behind the property room lies the "green room" or actor's lounge, complete with fireplace and two entrances to the stage. The theater includes a heating and ventilating plant, with the former necessary during the early summer and the latter essential during the middle and end of the season.

As John B. Oblak noted in his recent history of Lakewood Theater, "The exterior decor today still is white colonial with green trim. Its impressive pillared front and high peaked roof sit nestled among the trees of the Maine woods."

# 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 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 checked="" 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 1882,1884,1898,1925

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

In order to stimulate passenger traffic, many trolley car systems at the turn of the century participated in the development of amusement centers in scenic locations along their lines, particularly at terminal points. This was the great age of the trolley car and this form of transportation became, for a time, a major recreational outlet.

Such a park was developed in 1895 in Lakewood Grove on the shore of Lake Wesserunnett by the Somerset Traction Company of Skowhegan, Maine. Along with other amusement features it established in 1898 the Lakewood Theatre which between 1925 and 1941 became the most important summer theatre in the country. It is now a renowned and important east coast "package" theatre, meaning that it presents theatrical productions done by touring professional companies headed by well known personalities.

Its rise to prominence was begun by Herbert L. Swett, a young man who, in 1901, became manager and began to develop an organization and physical plant that was to become the premier summer theatre for two decades with the longest continuous record of summer seasons in America. From the '20's until World War II it was the major tryout theatre for potential Broadway productions and became known as "Broadway in Maine."

The war caused a temporary cessation of productions in 1943 and 1944 but from 1945 to the present the Lakewood Theatre completed the transition so typical in summer theatres from a resident stock company to the "package" system with a new cast each week.

The theatre and resort aspects of Lakewood are closely related; the theatre making the resort unique and the attractions of the resort making it possible to bring fine actors to Maine and draw theatre patrons to Lakewood Grove for forty-five years. This felicitous partnership has made Lakewood the subject of much attention by the press and noted theatre critics and commentators.

Famous names in the annals of the American stage have been intimately connected with the history of Lakewood. In 1925 Howard Lindsay became director and helped to create through his talents and New York contacts the national reputation which the theatre achieved. Stars like Dorothy Stickney and Walter Hampden began to grace the Lakewood Stage to be followed by George M. Cohan, Cornelia Otis Skinner, Vincent Price, Ethel Barrymore and many others who acted with the resident company.

Lakewood also was the scene of premiere performances of many later Broadway hits including "Life With Father."

(See continuation Sheet)

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

John B. Oblak Bringing Broadway to Maine, Terre Haute, 1971

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 2

UTM REFERENCES

*UTM OK  
HL*

A | 19 | 438579 | 4964300

B | | | | | | | | | | | |

C | | | | | | | | | | | |

D | | | | | | | | | | | |

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 Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr., Architectural Historian  
Frank A. Beard, Historic Preservationist

ORGANIZATION Maine Historic Preservation Commission

DATE April 14, 1975

STREET & NUMBER 31 Western Avenue

TELEPHONE 207-289-2133

CITY OR TOWN Augusta, Maine

STATE

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL  STATE  LOCAL

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.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE *James H. Mundy*

TITLE *State Historic Preservation Officer*

DATE *April 30, 1975*

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

*D. Mundy* DATE *6/8/75*

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST: *D. Mundy* DATE JUN 17 1975

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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In recent years its stage has been graced by a host of stars and personalities from Broadway and Hollywood. The trolley cars have long since passed from the scene but the footlights at Lakewood continue to illuminate the theatrical tradition they began.

No other playhouse more justly deserves the reputation of being the first summer theatre in America. It was the wellspring of a theatrical tradition now firmly implanted on the American cultural scene.