

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

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**SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD**

**NRIS Reference Number:** 90002191      **Date Listed:** 2/04/91

<u>Avalon Theater</u>	Grand Forks	North Dakota
<b>Property Name</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>State</b>

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**Multiple Name**

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This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

<u>Beth Boland</u>	<u>2/4/91</u>
<b>Signature of the Keeper</b>	<b>Date of Action</b>

=====

**Amended Items in Nomination:**

Section number 8

Eligible under Criterion A (Entertainment/Recreation) and Criterion C (Architecture).

Architect is Emil Jensted.

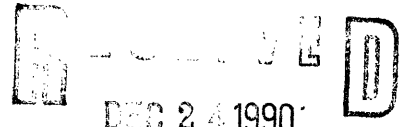
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**DISTRIBUTION:**

National Register property file  
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

2171

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

NATIONAL REGISTER

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 Avalon Theater  
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 210 Towner Avenue Box 53  not for publication  
city, town Larimore  vicinity  
state North Dakota code ND county Grand Forks code 035 zip code 58251

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<u>1</u>	<u>      </u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>      </u>	<u>      </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>      </u>	<u>      </u> structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>      </u>	<u>      </u> objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>      </u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:  
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

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.

James E. Sperry 11/20/90  
Signature of certifying official James E. Sperry, State Historic Preservation Officer (North Dakota) Date

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. Beth Boland 2/4/91
- 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 the Keeper

Date of Action

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
Theater

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
Recreation and Culture  
Theater

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

Art Deco

foundation Poured Concrete  
walls Brick  
roof Wood  
other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Located in the commercial district of Larimore facing Tower Avenue to the east, the Avalon theater presents a simple cubic facade with subtle Art Deco detailing. The building is two stories high and features two small windows above the marquee that illuminate the projector and cry rooms. An original overflow seating area, located over the lobby is now used for sound and lighting equipment. The lobby measures 16 feet x 16 feet. A space located north of the lobby is another room measuring 16 feet x 16 feet, originally intended for restrooms. This space is now awaiting conversion to restrooms as originally intended. The foyer measures 8 feet x 32 feet and contains the stairs, found at the right, which lead to the second level or basement.

The theater's Art Deco facade with neon marquee is distinguished in a block of similarly scaled buildings. Aside from some cosmetic deterioration of stone, brick and metal, the building's features are in entirely original condition. The store front space is equally disposed to accommodate entry space and office space. The ticket booth, located at left facade, protrudes outward and is surrounded by orange and black structural glass both above and below. The booth is flanked on either side by paired entry doors, the outermost of which contain glass framed by Deco style semi-circle surrounds. The innermost doors contain rectangular double panes of glass. The right facade is balanced by a single glass paneled door and office window.

Directly beyond the store front, the Deco style marquee predominates. Designed and erected by Cook Sign of Fargo, the marquee is still functional, although the neon, paint, and indirect lighting on the attraction board are in need of refinishing and repair. On the three-sided white marquee, the name "Avalon" is affixed centrally in red lettering and accented with neon. The name Avalon is repeated at each side above the marquee. The balance of the facade is composed of red and brown brick, delineated just above the marquee by a two courses of concrete and egg and dark molded brick. The facade terminates without detail, except for a semi-circular parapet projection.

The lobby and foyer have been altered only slightly. Doors have been added at the juncture of the foyer and show hall. The show hall itself was originally 32 x 80 feet, and set 350 people. Ninety-three seats were removed to accommodate a stage for theatrical productions. A false ceiling also installed at this time, did not conceal any significant architectural features - the original ceiling having been finished in plain 2 x 4 fiberboard. Interior walls are sheathed in fibered board incised with

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number   7   Page   1  

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simple Art Deco geometry, most stylistic of which is the chevron-incised frieze. Interior lighting fixtures and seating repeat the Deco styling. Center aisle chairs, bought in 1939, are flanked by chairs originally purchased in 1937 before the construction of the Avalon, and installed in the Grand Theater. These chairs feature simple Art Deco motifs in the metal and in the fabric, as do the tubular wall lights and geometric lines incised into the fiberboard walls.

The back row of seats features ear phones which had been provided "for those who are hard of hearing, and may be had by applying at the box office or the ushers." Located beneath the lobby are two restrooms, as well as the original coal stoked furnace, now converted to oil. In 1988, two dressing rooms and a tunnel allowing artisans access from the dressing rooms to the stage, were added. Technological innovations included the "Artic Nu Air" conditioning system, still operational beneath the original stage, and the Western Electric Microphonic Sound System aided by horns located on stage.

The foundation of poured concrete features a basement occupying one half of the floor space beneath the crawl space. The main floor is concrete poured on wire mesh, and supported by a steel I-beam. The general contractor for the theater was Emil Jensted, Larimore, with brick work executed by Dave Tingum Sr. also of Larimore. Rygg electric of Northwood was awarded the wiring contract; Stonehouse Plumbing of Larimore received the plumbing contract. Thompson Yards of Larimore supplied the necessary building materials.

The building is still used as a movie theater and the original projectors are still present, although the light source on the main projector has been modified. Since the stage was added (along with suspended stage lighting), the building has been used for choral and theatrical presentations. Although the stage, suspended ceiling and new carpet have been added, and interior walls painted, the building remains largely intact. The theater's primary source of significance, the Art Deco styling has survived unaltered.

**8. Statement of Significance**

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

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Period of Significance

Significant Dates

Architecture  
Entertainment/Recreation

1938-1940

1938

Cultural Affiliation

Significant Person

Architect/Builder

Emil Jesten, Builder

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

The Avalon Theater is nominated under Criterion C as a rare surviving expression of Art Deco/Moderne theater architecture built during the Depression. Distinguished by a high level of integrity of both exterior and interior architectural features, the theater is part of a vanishing genre of small town movie houses. The Avalon is also the only remaining building in Larimore designed in the Art Deco mode.

The stylistic significance of the Avalon is gained from the geometric character of the Art Deco entry doors, from the original marquee which dominates the facade, and from the interior wall treatment, fixtures and seats which compliment the Art Deco facade. Architectural survey data, compiled by the State Historical Society of North Dakota, verifies the low survival rate of such movie houses statewide. To date, only one other theater of similar design has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Delchar Theater, located southeast of Larimore in Mayville, presents a facade of similar materials and massing, although its construction date of 1927, and subsequent addition of the marquee in 1945, make it less of an Art Deco period composition than the Avalon. The Delchar's only reference to the Deco style is, in fact, the neon lighted marquee that was added in 1945. The interior of this theater, repainted in 1955, also lacks the period integrity of the Avalon.

Built by Frank J. Ujka in 1938-39, the Avalon theater replaced the Grand Theater which he had previously operated across the street. The Avalon was built on the former site of the Arnold Block, which burned in 1922 and was not re-built. The theater opened on April 28, 1939 with "Broadway Serenade," to begin uninterrupted service as a movie theater until the early 1980s. Upon opening, the Larimore Pioneer reported "that it is one of the most modern in the state; none are better equipped with the most modern sound and comfortable chairs than the Avalon." Then-noteworthy features included a parabolic poured concrete floor that enabled good viewing from any seat, an "Artic Nu Air" conditioning system, a cry room viewing area for mother with "fussy babies," and a back row of seat equiped with ear phones for the hard-of-hearing.

See continuation sheet

**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: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property less than one acre

UTM References

A 

1	4
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6	0	2	8	6	0
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5	3	0	6	4	6	0
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 Zone Easting Northing

C 

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B 

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 Zone Easting Northing

D 

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The property boundaries fall within Block 77, occupying the north 7 feet of Lot 15, and the north 2/3 feet of Lot 16.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

Boundaries are defined by the property's urban legal location.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Dennis McCoy  
 organization N/A date November 3, 1990  
 street & number RR #1 Box 121 telephone (701)326-4268  
 city or town Northwood state ND zip code 58267

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 1

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Until the early 1980s, when the building fell into disrepair, the theater showed movies continuously. Around 1980, Earl and Myrl Sickles, retired off-broadway directors and set designers who had since moved to Larimore, rented the theater, reconditioned the building and began showing movies again. After purchasing the theater in 1987, they moved 93 seats, added a stage, installed a new screen, suspended ceiling, and new roof, and rented the building to the Larimore Community Entertainers for their live performances.

Since that time, sold out performances such as Cinderella, Oliver, Wizard of Oz, and Tom Sawyer have been staged. Plays based outside Larimore have also been presented including, Our Town, Forty Carots and Plain People (from Fargo). Other users of the building have included choral groups and the Judy Rae School of Dance. Its multi-purpose role in the community has been extended to serve town meetings and the Larimore High School drama department.

Between 1938-39, news of the theater project occupied the front page of the Pioneer for months. A 1939 Pioneer article alludes to the "hard times" in which the theater's opening took place. That such a relatively expensive and sophisticated venture was undertaken in a small community during the Depression speaks of the owner's confidence in Larimore's future, or perhaps of his determination to provide a kind of "entertainment therapy" in the face of distressing times.

As a period type, the Avalon has a continuity of function as an entertainment center. Unlike earlier theaters, which began as vaudeville and live stage facilities and later converted to "moving picture" houses, the Avalon was erected as a movie theater and serves in that capacity even today. Both the exterior and the interior make the Avalon diagnostic of Art Deco theater design in small-town North Dakota. With its continued service as both a movie theater and live performing arts center, the building's survival is a commentary on its past, present and future contributions to the cultural and entertainment environment of Larimore.

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 9 Page 1

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April 27, 1939. Front Page, column 1.  
May 4, 1939. Front Page.