

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

DEC 9

1130
Resub.

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 Ritz Theater

other names/site number Milane Theater/ Helen Stairs Theater/ SE01689

2. Location

street & number 201 South Magnolia Avenue N/A not for publication

city or town Sanford N/A vicinity

state FLORIDA code FL county Seminole code 117 zip code 32771

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Janet Snyder Hartman 12/18/2000
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Florida State Historic Preservation Officer, Division of Historical Resources
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 certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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 See continuation sheet.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Ma J. M. Way 1/29/01

Ritz Theater
Name of Property

Seminole, Florida
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)

- buildings
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include any previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	total

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/ theater

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/ not in use

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Masonry Vernacular

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick
walls Stucco
Brick
roof Metal
other Metal

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.

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 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

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 36) 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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation

Period of Significance

1923 - 1950

Significant Dates

1923

Significant Person

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Scroggs & Ewing (arch); Moughton, Elton J. (assoc. arch)
Gallespie, R.J. (builder)

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of Repository

Ritz Theater
Name of Property

Seminole, Florida
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one

UTM References

(Place additional references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1 7	4 7 3 9 6 0	3 1 8 6 8 2 0
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2			

3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
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 Sidney Johnston, Consultant; Gary V. Goodwin, Historic Preservation Planner

organization Bureau of Historic Preservation date December, 2000

street & number R.A. Gray Building, 500 S. Bronough Street telephone (850) 487-2333

city or town Tallahassee state Florida zip code 32399-0250

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 SHPO or FPO.)

name Ritz Community Theater Project, Inc.

street & number 101 West First Street telephone (407) 323-7322

city or town Sanford state Florida zip code 32771

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 amend 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 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 Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7 Page 1

**RITZ THEATER
Sanford, Seminole County, Florida**

SUMMARY

The Ritz Theater (originally called the Milane Theater) is located at 201 South Magnolia Avenue in downtown Sanford. The hollow-tile-and-brick building rises the equivalent of four stories, it is protected with a built-up roof obscured by a straight parapet, and displays a rectangular shape. The Masonry Vernacular building has stucco walls embellished with diamond-shaped tiles and belt courses. It contains ninety-seven hundred square feet of interior floor space and displays a superior level of craftsmanship. The owner, Ritz Community Theater Project, Inc., is currently rehabilitating the resource to its former glory. Despite some minor alterations, the building retains its early twentieth century character and integrity to a high degree.

SETTING

Seminole County lies in east central Florida with Sanford serving as the seat of government. The population of the county is nearly 350,000, and Sanford is the second largest municipality with 35,000 residents. The primary corridors consist of Interstate 4, U.S. Highway 17/92, State Road 46, and State Road 436. The Green Belt, a toll by-pass through east Orange and Seminole counties, ends in Sanford and provides quick access southward to the University of Central Florida, Orlando International Airport, and various theme parks south of the City of Orlando. The CSX railroad tracks run through the county.

The building occupies the southeast corner of the intersection of Magnolia Avenue and Second Street in downtown Sanford. Both streets are paved with brick. The property stands immediately south of the boundary of the Sanford Commercial District (NR 1976) located north and west of the theater. Several small commercial buildings lie to the south, and an alley separates the theater from commercial buildings to the east. The property to the west is vacant.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Exterior

The front, or west, facade (photographs 1, 2) is symmetrical and is punctuated by a central entrance, flanking bays, and paired and single arrangements of six-over-six, double-hung sash windows. Facade embellishment includes blind arched inset panels over pairs of windows, four diamond tiles, and two slender belt courses. A marquee with supporting chains and decorative escutcheon plates protects the first story. Having deteriorated, the outer metal membrane of the marquee has been removed for repairs, temporarily leaving exposed the original cantilevered supporting steel beams. The north elevation extends along Second Street (photographs 2, 3). It exhibits several openings, including doors at the street level and one that services the balcony, and a single double-hung sash window. A playbill punctuates the wall surface at the northwest corner.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7 Page 2

**RITZ THEATER
Sanford, Seminole County, Florida**

The south elevation (photographs 5, 6) is separated from an adjoining building by a four-foot wide alley. A small, but significant feature along that elevation is a secondary entrance at the southwest corner. The entrance historically permitted African-American patrons access directly into an interior balcony-staircase during the Jim Crow period. Farther east along the south wall are three pairs of doors, which permit emergency exiting from the auditorium into the alley between the theater and the neighboring building. A balcony exit also punctuates the south elevation. A small one-story extension projects from the main body of the building at the southeast elevation (photograph 5).

The rear, or east, elevation (photographs 3, 4) rises the equivalent of four-stories to accommodate the fly. The wall rises uninterrupted with the exception of an offset door at the first floor, which facilitates the movement of stage sets and props from a rear alley into the backstage area.

Interior

First Floor

The first floor contains 6,348 square feet of interior space. Spaces within the floor and their respective areas include the auditorium (3,432 square feet); lobby and vestibule (1,144 square feet); green room (420 square feet); and stage (1,352 square feet). Due to a long-term lack of maintenance and subsequent failure of the roof, most of the original interior features deteriorated. A reconstructed stage and balcony use the same dimensions, profile, and circulation system as the original features.

The main entrance opens into a vestibule that leads into a lobby (photograph 7). South of the lobby stand a lounge and two restrooms (photograph 8); north of the lobby are a concessions and office (photograph 7). Two staircases also radiate from the lobby. The first stands north of the lobby (photograph 14). It is a combination staircase with a central landing supporting quarter-turn and dogleg components; the quarter-turn extends to the balcony, while the dogleg leads to a second-story lobby and restroom facility. The second staircase (photograph 18), a straight stair, stands at the south end of the lobby, adjacent to a side entrance previously discussed.

The main lobby opens into the auditorium (photographs 13, 16). The space is defined by an inclined floor. The balcony, supported by two columns, overhangs the rear sixteen feet of the auditorium. An orchestra pit and proscenium separate the front of the auditorium from the stage (photographs 9, 10). Lacking ornamentation, the proscenium arch consists of a rectangular opening with coved corners. The opening measures thirty feet and the adjacent wings extend ten feet beyond. A passageway under the stage connects the orchestra pit with a hatch center stage and another hatch in the wing at stage left.

A green room (photograph 11) is located in a one-story extension beyond stage left. Two small dressing rooms standing at the southeast and northeast corners of the extension, respectively, support the green room.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7 Page 3

**RITZ THEATER
Sanford, Seminole County, Florida**

Second Floor

The second floor (photograph 19) contains eleven hundred square feet of interior floor space. The northern staircase provides access onto the floor. The staircase opens into a lobby with a wet bar. Restrooms occupy the south end of the second floor.

Balcony

The balcony (photographs 13, 15) contains twenty-two hundred thirty-six square feet of floor space, divided into seating, aisles, and a director's/projection booth. The balcony contains two hundred ten seats. Forty-six of those seats are divided from the bulk of the balcony seats and are located between the leading edge of the balcony and a modest stem wall. The remainder of the seats is accessed from parallel aisles leading to center and aisle seating. The director's booth stands centrally located along the rear wall of the balcony. It measures twenty feet long and nine feet wide. Fixed and sliding glass panels open on the front of the booth, and access is provided at the south end.

ALTERATIONS

Exterior

The alterations to the building do not compromise its original architectural integrity. An entirely new roof was installed in 1998, because the original trusses had deteriorated and partially collapsed. Displaying the same slope as the original roof, the new roof rests below the parapets and is not visible from the street level.

Interior

First Floor

With one insignificant wall change, the lobby and vestibule areas retain their original wall configuration and circulation pattern. The removal of one wall, made to meet code requirements, modifies the original restroom at the southwest corner of the building. Originally, two toilets occupied the space, but now one stands in that location.

The auditorium will contain new seats installed in the original pattern with side aisles.

The stage was reconstructed using as-built architectural renderings. The depth, width, height, and circulation patterns of the stage remains faithful to the original design, including a passageway under the stage that connects the orchestra pit with a hatch center stage and another hatch in the stage-left wing.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7 Page 4

**RITZ THEATER
Sanford, Seminole County, Florida**

The one-story extension at the southeast corner of the building contains the green room. It has been slightly reconfigured to better accommodate the needs of the theater and meet code requirements. The room originally contained a dressing room with sixty feet of interior floor space, two large rooms for a generator and storage, and a narrow hallway. Practical back-stage needs and code requirements compelled a change during rehabilitation. All of the walls have been removed, providing nearly three hundred feet of interior floor space in the green room. New walls installed at either end of the space contain backstage restrooms.

Second Floor

The second floor originally served a private, residential function, and contained some infrastructure. Historically not accessible to theater patrons, the space contained a small apartment with three hundred seventy square feet of floor space. The apartment consisted of a living room, bathroom, and kitchen. Other original spaces on the floor included storage and mechanical rooms for the theater. Alterations to the floor have integrated it into the public part of the building. Although the storage area retains its original configuration, new walls have been introduced elsewhere to provide restrooms and a lobby. Indeed, the second floor has become the primary location for restrooms in the building. No other space in the building could be adapted to accommodate the minimum number of restrooms necessary to meet code requirements. During rehabilitation, the second floor was redesigned to accommodate these outlined functions. A storage area along the east wall of the second floor retains its original configuration.

Balcony

The original balcony joists and flooring deteriorated beyond repair, which invited a few modifications during its reconstruction. To be sure, the original treads, riser, and staging pattern was retained. Changes included a stem wall introduced to provide exclusive seating at the front of the balcony. This modest wall separates the front two rows of seats from the rest of the section. Another change is the slight expansion of the director's booth from its original size to enhance the sight lines between the booth and the stage. Notwithstanding the reconstruction of the entire balcony and these relatively minor changes, the director's booth and balcony retain their original circulation pattern, orientation, and the relationship to one another and to the rest of the theater.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 1

**RITZ THEATER
Sanford, Seminole County, Florida**

SUMMARY

The Ritz Theater, as it has been known since 1936, fulfills criterion A at the local level in the area of entertainment/recreation. Its history is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. First, the development of the theater contributed to Sanford's land-boom growth, one of Florida's most exuberant periods of progress. In addition, the Ritz Theater was one of Sanford's important entertainment centers in the era before World War II. Although movies were the primary form of entertainment and the mainstay of the business, road shows and other live entertainment also amused audiences. The theater symbolizes the strength and presence of the entertainment industry in American culture, even in relatively small towns.

During its historic period, 1923-1950, the theater accommodated live stage shows and motion pictures. Early features at the Ritz included "Sherlock Holmes" with John Barrymore; "Good-Bye Girls" with William Russell; and "Three Ages" with Buster Keaton. Segments of "Good-Bye Girls" were filmed in Sanford, and pupils of Sanford's elementary and high school, and members of Kiwanis Club delighted in pointing out familiar places and faces during the shows. Hits of the 1930s appearing at the theater included "Klondike Annie" with Mae West; Bettie Davis's "Pettrified Forest;" and Charlie Chaplin's "Modern Times." In 1936, the management inaugurated its "March of Progress" season with hits that later received nomination for Academy Awards--"Tale of Two Cities" and "Trail of the Lonesome Pine."

The Ritz Theater has local significance as one of the oldest movie theaters in Sanford and Seminole County. It served as the primary entertainment center in the city between 1923 and its closing in 1978. Movies were the primary form of entertainment, but live dramas, road shows, and beauty contests were held there also. The building has further local significance because it contributed to the physical growth and entertainment industry in Sanford during the Florida land boom.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

Sanford is one of central Florida's oldest communities. It was founded on the southern shore of Lake Monroe in 1871 by Henry S. Sanford. Sanford was an enthusiastic supporter of citrus cultivation and railroads. The town was incorporated in 1877 and three years later, Henry Sanford helped organize the South Florida Railroad. Citrus and truck farms played important roles in the region's history. Chase & Company, a major citrus and vegetable packing firm, was founded there in 1884, and celery was introduced after the devastating freezes ruined the citrus groves in the mid-1890s. Soon Sanford became widely known as the "Celery City." Its population fluctuated greatly during the interval, ranging from 2,016 in 1890, to 1,450 in 1900, and 3,570 in 1910, and rising and falling with the fortunes of the citrus and vegetable industries.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 2

**RITZ THEATER
Sanford, Seminole County, Florida**

Growth in the early twentieth century sparked the creation of Seminole County in 1913. Sanford was designated the seat of county government. County commission actions allocated funding for the construction of bridges and roads, a courthouse, a home for the indigent, a hospital, and a jail. Within several years, Dixie Highway was built through Sanford, forming the alignment of present-day U.S. 17/92. Sanford's commercial center expanded along First Street and the population stood at five thousand in 1915. New farms were created south of the city. The Florida East Coast Railway extended a line through Chuluota and other settlements in the eastern part of the county, where the company sought profits from transporting harvests reaped by growers cultivating crops. In 1920, the Census Bureau counted fifty-six hundred residents in Sanford, which represented over one-half of Seminole County's population.

During the Florida land boom of the 1920s, Seminole County experienced substantial growth. The population reached 14,738 in 1925, and real estate assessments soared to nearly twelve million dollars by 1927. Sanford enjoyed most of that increase. Real estate development, construction, and agricultural production drove the robust economy. Construction spread throughout the city. The commercial area pushed into areas previously occupied by residential neighborhoods, and Sanford shed its one-street business district identity. In 1922, the First National Bank, the I.W. Phillips Building, and Merriweather Building contributed to the boom-time growth. The following year, the Milane Theater, the Meisch Building, the Puleston-Brumley Building, and a new primary school was added to the downtown. By 1925, permits nearly reached two million dollars, pushed upwards by the development of the expansive Hotel Forrest Lake that overlooked the St. Johns River. A bulkhead was constructed along the banks of the river to help create a system of parks and a warehouse district. New residential subdivisions claimed former groves and farms when the city government extended the municipal limits southward. Still, the number of farms increased from five hundred and seventy-three, to eight hundred and ten between 1920 and 1925. Groves and farm acreage reached 13,020 acres in 1927. That year, the economy began a downward spiral as the land boom of the 1920s collapsed.

Although Sanford residents enjoyed a relatively diversified economy, the population began to fall, hitting 10,100 in 1930. The full brunt of the Great Depression made its impact in the early 1930s, when hundreds of properties went into foreclosure and several banks failed. The expansion of the government sector, increasing tourism, and bumper vegetable and citrus harvests helped to buoy the economy. In 1937 alone, some 3,325,000 crates of celery were shipped out of Florida, most from Seminole County farms. The Sanford Armory was developed, in part, with financial assistance from the Works Progress Administration (WPA), a New Deal program implemented by the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. By 1940, although the county's population had expanded to 22,304, little new growth had occurred in Sanford.

During the 1940s, Sanford enjoyed renewed prosperity, with the population reaching 12,497 in 1945. Naval Air Station (NAS) Sanford was commissioned in 1942 to train Navy pilots in Hellcat, Ventura, and Wildcat aircraft. Following the war, the New York Giants professional baseball team utilized the former NAS as a spring

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 3

**RITZ THEATER
Sanford, Seminole County, Florida**

training facility. Many servicemen stationed in Florida during the war returned with their families at its close to take up residence.

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

The Milane Amusement Company developed the Ritz Theater, which originally was known as the Milane Theater. Incorporated in 1922, the company derived its name by combining parts of the names of its president, Frank L. Miller, and vice-president, Edward F. Lane. A pioneer resident, Frank Miller served on Sanford's first city council, and later as city judge. Edward Lane, known as the "man who knows Sanford best," was born in Sanford in 1891, and graduated from Rollins College. A realtor and insurance businessman, Lane was considered "Sanford's best promoter for growth and development." In the early-1920s, Miller and Lane developed several subdivisions in Seminole County.

Miller and Lane constructed the Milane Theater near the height of Sanford's 1920s boom. Neither man had any previous experience in the construction or management of theaters, but they invested in the venture in response to the need for a building specifically designed and constructed as a theater. Sanford already had at least two buildings that inadequately addressed the entertainment needs of residents. An aging opera house had been constructed in 1910, but the small auditorium could not accommodate large audiences, set changes, or large-screen movies. The Princess Theater, an undersized commercial building that had been adapted for showing movies, operated in the Hynes Block. It seated only about two hundred people. Miller and Lane's vision was to outfit their new theater with modern cinematography equipment, a fly sufficient for containing overhead lighting and sets, and an auditorium large enough to accommodate seven hundred patrons.

They acquired the site of the former Star Theater, which had been built as an opera house about 1885, and had stood abandoned several years. Georgia architects Scroggs & Ewing of Augusta, were hired to help make plans for the new entertainment center. Scroggs & Ewing joined Sanford architect Elton J. Moughton for the project. In November 1922, after the plans were completed, Miller and Lane hired Jacksonville contractor R.J. Gallespie to supervise the construction of the building. The only other documented work in Florida done by Scroggs & Ewing is the Davenport City Hall, a public building executed in the Mediterranean Revival genre in northeast Polk County.

Elton J. Moughton began his architectural career in Sarasota, Florida, then moved to Pennsylvania, followed by a brief period in Birmingham, Alabama. In 1919, he worked in Ocala, Florida, and then, in 1922, opened a practice in Sanford. Over the decades that followed, he prepared the plans for many of Sanford's buildings, including the Great Atlantic & Pacific Store, Sanford City Hall, Sanford Public Library, Sanford Armory, Sanford Fire Station, Seminole County jail, Seminole County Home, and Seminole Memorial Hospital. Church projects consisted of the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church, Congregational Christian Church, First Christian Church, and Holy Cross Episcopal Church. Sanford's Masonic Temple and Hotel Forrest Lake were

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 4

**RITZ THEATER
Sanford, Seminole County, Florida**

among his largest buildings, and Orange City's City Hall (Volusia County) was one of his few projects outside of Seminole County. During World War II, Moughton served as head of the building section of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the construction of military bases in Florida and Georgia.

Although most of R.J. Gallespie's work was in northeast Florida, he was no stranger to Sanford. In 1922, he completed the Meisch Building on First Street. By then, Gallespie had completed several projects in Jacksonville, including the West Riverside Elementary School and a two-story commercial block in the Jacksonville Terminals area. Jacksonville landmarks attributed to Gallespie's craftsmanship include the Scottish Rite Masonic Temple; Jacksonville's Police Headquarters; Olmstead Brothers Motor Company Building; and Auto Hotel & Laundry Building. He also built several schools, including Orange Park Elementary in Clay County. The Sunday School Building of the First Baptist Church, a six-story masonry building, was among the largest projects of Gallespie's career.

When completed in July 1923, Sanford's Milane Theater seated 823 patrons, contained a four-story fly, and included a proscenium arch and orchestra pit. Live dramas and movies were well attended. The editors of the *Sanford Daily Herald* proclaimed the building as "a much needed asset in the City Substantial," and boasted that "this city now has a real theater and one of which the city can well feel proud."

On August 2, 1923, news of the death of President Warren G. Harding did not dampen the enthusiasm of Sanford's residents to attend the theater's opening that night. The management entertained a full house with a concert before the show, followed by the comedy "Lazy Bones," Pathe News, and, then, an eleven-reel feature film "Enemies of Women." The film had first appeared at New York City's Central Theater in April 1923. On opening night, manager Brockholm and Mr. Witherspoon comprised the orchestra, which supplied music for the film. The local Reizenstein-Wagner orchestra provided music during the opening numbers. The theater was an immediate success. It, however, adversely affected the smaller opera house and movie theater in town, both of which eventually went out of business.

Management and lease changes occurred soon after the Ritz Theater opened. George W. Brockholm of Tampa initially managed the Milane Theater, and F.E. Farmer worked as the projectionist. Then, in 1925, the Milane Amusement Company leased the theater to Sanford Enterprises, Inc. Following a series of lease assignments, the management of the theater was assumed by E.J. Sparks Enterprises, a subsidiary of the Saenger-Sparks Theater, Inc. of New York. The Saenger-Sparks Company negotiated a twenty-year lease agreement with the Milane Company. Annual rent was established at \$8,112. In 1925, as part of a change in the lease, Brockholm was replaced by Joseph Marentette of Atlanta, who had previously managed theaters in Atlanta for E.J. Sparks Enterprises, Inc. Marentette consolidated the management of the Milane and the Princess theaters, the latter having been acquired by Sparks Enterprises in 1925. Initially, Marentette hoped to renovate the Princess Theater, but lagging attendance compelled him to reduce the Princess to two shows each week. He also improved the Milane Theater, purchasing lenses for the Simplex projection equipment, and installing a new

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 5

**RITZ THEATER
Sanford, Seminole County, Florida**

proscenium curtain, aisle carpeting, and moldings. Another significant event in the theater ownership occurred in December 1933, when the Milane Amusement Company sold the property to Lake Mary investors Frank and Stella Evans. The Evans changed the name of the Milane to the Ritz in 1936 and established an affiliation with national movie theater chains, Saenger-Sparks Theater, Incorporated and later Paramount Pictures Corporation. Marentette however, continued to manage the Sanford theater until his death in 1944.

Early in its history, the management of the theater had come under the control of a subsidiary company of movie-and-theater magnate Adolph Zukor. Established in the 1920s, this long-term management lease was indicative of the growth and consolidation within the industry during one of America's great economic booms. The successful negotiation by the owners of the Milane Theater with the nationwide film distributor is significant, for it represents the commitment of resources by a national theater chain even in relatively small communities.

The company negotiated contracts with many major motion picture producers, including Paramount and MGM, and smaller upstarts, such as King Brothers and Walt Disney Studios. Walt Disney's "Snow White" appeared in January 1938, several months after its release in New York. Other hits of the 1930s shown at the Ritz included Rudyard Kipling's "Captain Courageous;" Shirley Temple in "Heidi;" Pearl Buck's "The Good Earth;" Gene Autry in "The Big Show" and "Rootin' Tootin' Rhythm;" Bing Crosby and Martha Ray in "Double or Nothing;" Clark Gable and Myrna Loy in "Manhattan Melodrama;" and Fred Astaire, Gracie Allen, and George Burns in "A Damsel in Distress."

To help sustain the business, Marentette periodically upgraded the theater's equipment. In 1937, the theater purchased new "Peerless Magarc" projection apparatus from the J.L McCauley Company. New sound equipment was also installed, prompting the management to claim the Ritz had the "Best Pictures--Best Sound--Best Project."

Although films remained the primary forms of entertainment at the Ritz, the theater's management hosted other forms of diversion. In 1931, the "Miss Seminole County" contest was held at the theater. Twenty-three girls from throughout the county competed in a "beauty revue," which consisted of a "pajama parade" and "swim suit parade" on separate evenings. Dorothy Haynes of Sanford won the contest. The management sent Haynes on an all-expense-paid two-day trip to Clearwater, Florida, where she competed at the local woman's club in the "Miss Florida" contest. The 1935 season included a film of a fifteen-round prizefight between Max Baer and James J. Braddock, which had been fought earlier in the year at Madison Square Garden. Live road shows included "Major Bowes Amateur nights." Bowes traveled throughout the South in the 1930s, performing at various theaters, including Jacksonville's Florida Theater, the Polk in Lakeland, and Tampa Theater. Local talent appearing at the Ritz included Lum & Abner's Pine Ridge Silver Cornet Band, which featured musical numbers played with a churn, jugs, scythes, and other barnyard and farmhouse implements. After winning central Florida's amateur contest, Bobby Franklin of Leesburg pleased audiences with tap dance numbers.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 8 Page 6

**RITZ THEATER
Sanford, Seminole County, Florida**

During World War II, the theater management used its newspaper advertisements to encourage the purchase of U.S. Savings Bonds and showed official government propaganda and war clips, such as the "Battle of Midway." Paramount's "For Whom the Bell Tolls" with Gary Cooper and Ingrid Bergman, "Objective, Burma" with Errol Flynn, and "Marine Raiders" with Pat O'Brien and Robert Ryan were popular war-genre films. Walt Disney's box office smash "Three Caballeros" appeared in 1944. Servicemen at NAS Sanford received discounted tickets of thirty cents each. Normally, adults paid forty cents and children nine cents. After Marentette's death in 1944, various people managed the theater, including Leonard Francoeur, Robert Harris, Milton Hawley, Ezra Kimbrell, William Lovelace, and Herbert Roller.

In the 1950s, America's fascination with television placed new strains on the movie industry, which responded with huge concave screens, three-dimensional effects, and improved sound systems. Sanford's Ritz struggled to retain its viability in the 1960s and closed in 1978, after failing to compete with the new multiplex theaters. It stood vacant until 1984, when it reopened as the Showtime Cantina. Four years later, the building again was taken out of service as a movie house. It remained vacant and without maintenance or repairs until the mid-1990s, when Ritz Community Theater Project, Inc. acquired the property and began rehabilitation in 1998.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 9 Page 1

**RITZ THEATER
Sanford, Seminole County, Florida**

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Major Bibliographical References

Bawden, Liz-Anne. ed. *The Oxford Companion to Film*. New York: Harper & Row, 1976.

Commercial and Financial Chronicle, 9 January 1926; 20 April 1929.

Halliwell, Leslie. *Halliwell's Film Guide*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991.

Konigsberg, Ira. *The Complete Film Dictionary*. New York: Harper & Row, 1987.

Lakeland Evening Ledger, 8 June, 13 September 1926.

Maddex, Diane. ed. *Built in the USA*. Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1985.

Mirabile, Lisa. ed. *International Directory of Company Histories*. Chicago and London: St. James Press, 1992.

New York Times, 1 April 1923; 29 January 1924; 10 April, 26 August 1925; 25 April 1930; 8 February 1932; 11 June 1976.

Pevsner, Nikolaus. *A History of Building Types*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976.

Porter, John. ed. *Moody's Manual of Investments*. New York: Moody Investment Company, 1928.

Sanford Herald, 20 June, 7, 12 July, 16, 24 November 1922; 28 July, 2, 3, 4, 18, 30 August 1923; 13, 24, 29 June, 15 July 1925; 4 January 1926; 24 June, 6 July 1931; 25 June 1935; 15, 18 January, 28 February 1936; 31 July, 14, 28 August, 12 September, 2, 4, 11, 25 October, 18 December 1937; 27, 29 January 1938; 5 January 1943; 29 November, 18 December 1944; 7 May, 17 August, 17 September 1945; 17 October 1955; 19 December 1963; 21 July 1972.

Seminole County Courthouse. Sanford, Florida.

Corporation Book 1, p. 304-306.

Corporation Book 2, p. 71.

Deed Book 40, p. 283.

Deed Book 42, p. 392-395.

Deed Record 76, p. 333-336.

Deed Book 80, pp. 322-323.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 9 Page 2

RITZ THEATER
Sanford, Seminole County, Florida

Vero Beach Press-Journal, 10 July 1936.

Wells, John, and Robert Dalton. *South Carolina Architects, 1885-1935*. Richmond: New South Architectural Press, 1992.

Wood, Wayne. ed. *Jacksonville's Architectural Heritage*. Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1989.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 10 Page 1

**RITZ THEATER
Sanford, Seminole County, Florida**

Verbal Boundary Description

The legal description of the property is lot 9 & the N 12-ft of E 30 ft of lot 10, BLK 4 TR 2, Town of Sanford, Plat Book 1, and Pg. 58.

Boundary Justification

The boundary encloses the property associated with the above-referenced legal description, which is the historic location of the Ritz Theater.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number PHOTOS Page 1

**RITZ THEATER
Sanford, Seminole County, Florida**

PHOTOGRAPHIC INVENTORY

1. 201 South Magnolia Avenue
2. Sanford (Seminole County), Florida
3. Sidney Johnston
4. 1999
5. Historian, DeLand, FL
6. Oblique view showing front (west) facade and south elevation, facing northeast
7. Photograph number 1 of 19

Numbers 1-5 are the same for the remaining photographs.

6. Oblique view showing front (west) facade and north elevation, facing southeast
7. Photograph number 2 of 19

6. Oblique view showing north and east elevations, facing southwest
7. Photograph number 3 of 19

6. Oblique view showing north and east elevations, facing southwest
7. Photograph number 4 of 19

6. Oblique view showing south elevation, facing north
7. Photograph number 5 of 19

6. View showing south elevation, facing east
7. Photograph number 6 of 19

6. View showing vestibule, lobby, concessions, office, and northern staircase, facing north
7. Photograph number 7 of 19

6. View showing lobby and southern staircase, facing southeast
7. Photograph number 8 of 19

6. View showing stage, orchestra pit, and passageway beneath stage, facing southeast
7. Photograph number 9 of 19

6. View showing stage, orchestra pit, and passageway beneath stage, facing northeast
7. Photograph number 10 of 19

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number PHOTOS Page 2

**RITZ THEATER
Sanford, Seminole County, Florida**

-
6. View showing stage left wing and entrances into the green room, facing south
 7. Photograph number 11 of 19

 6. View showing stage left wing, entrance into the green room, and entrance between stage left and auditorium, facing southwest
 7. Photograph number 12 of 19

 6. View showing auditorium and balcony, facing west
 7. Photograph number 13 of 19

 6. View showing northern staircase from balcony, facing west
 7. Photograph number 14 of 19

 6. View showing balcony and director's booth, facing southwest
 7. Photograph number 15 of 19

 6. View showing auditorium and stage from the balcony, facing southeast
 7. Photograph number 16 of 19

 6. View showing director's booth, facing north
 7. Photograph number 17 of 19

 6. View showing southern staircase from balcony, facing west
 7. Photograph number 18 of 19


 6. View showing second-floor lobby, facing south
 7. Photograph number 19 of 19

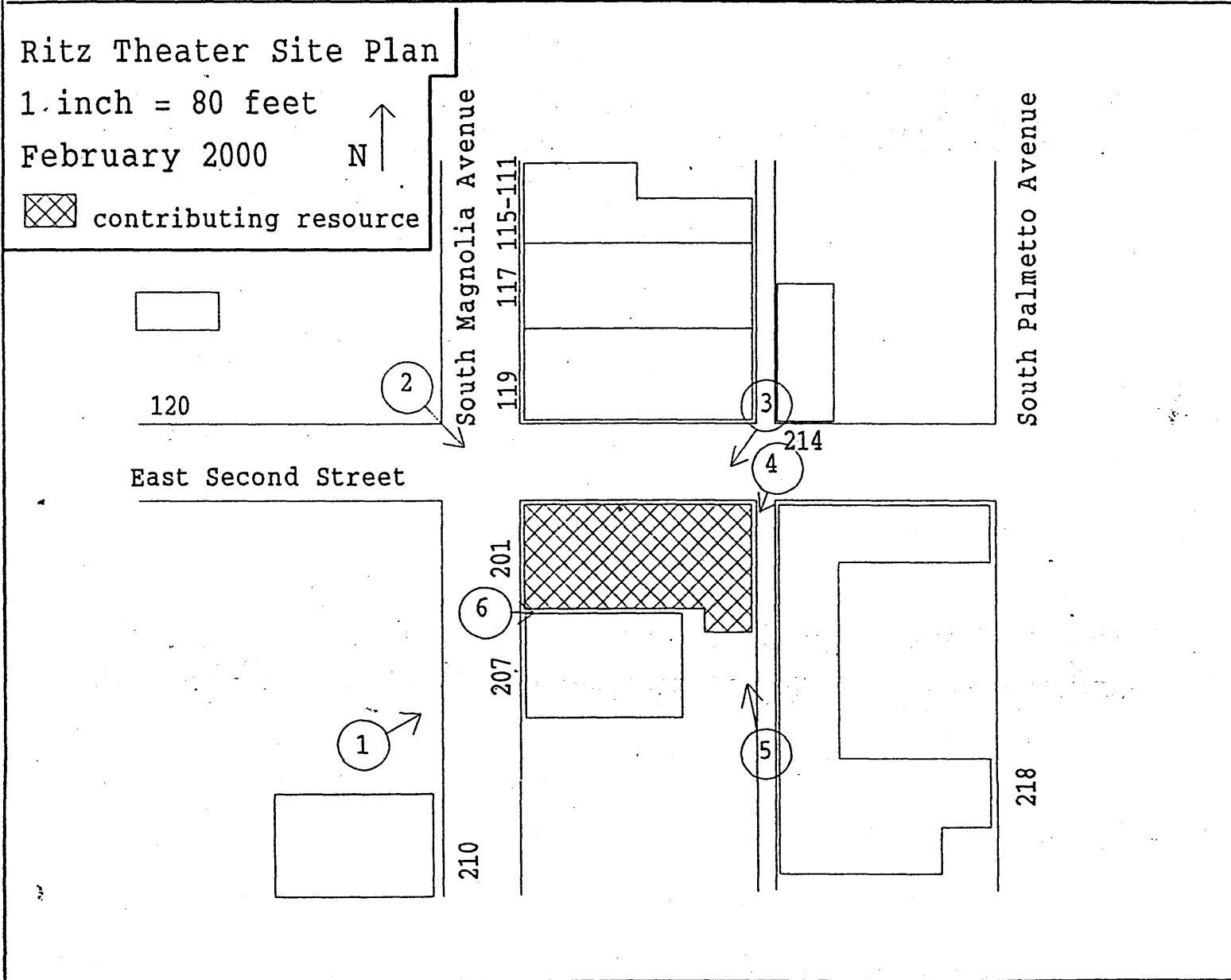
Ritz Theater Site Plan

1 inch = 80 feet

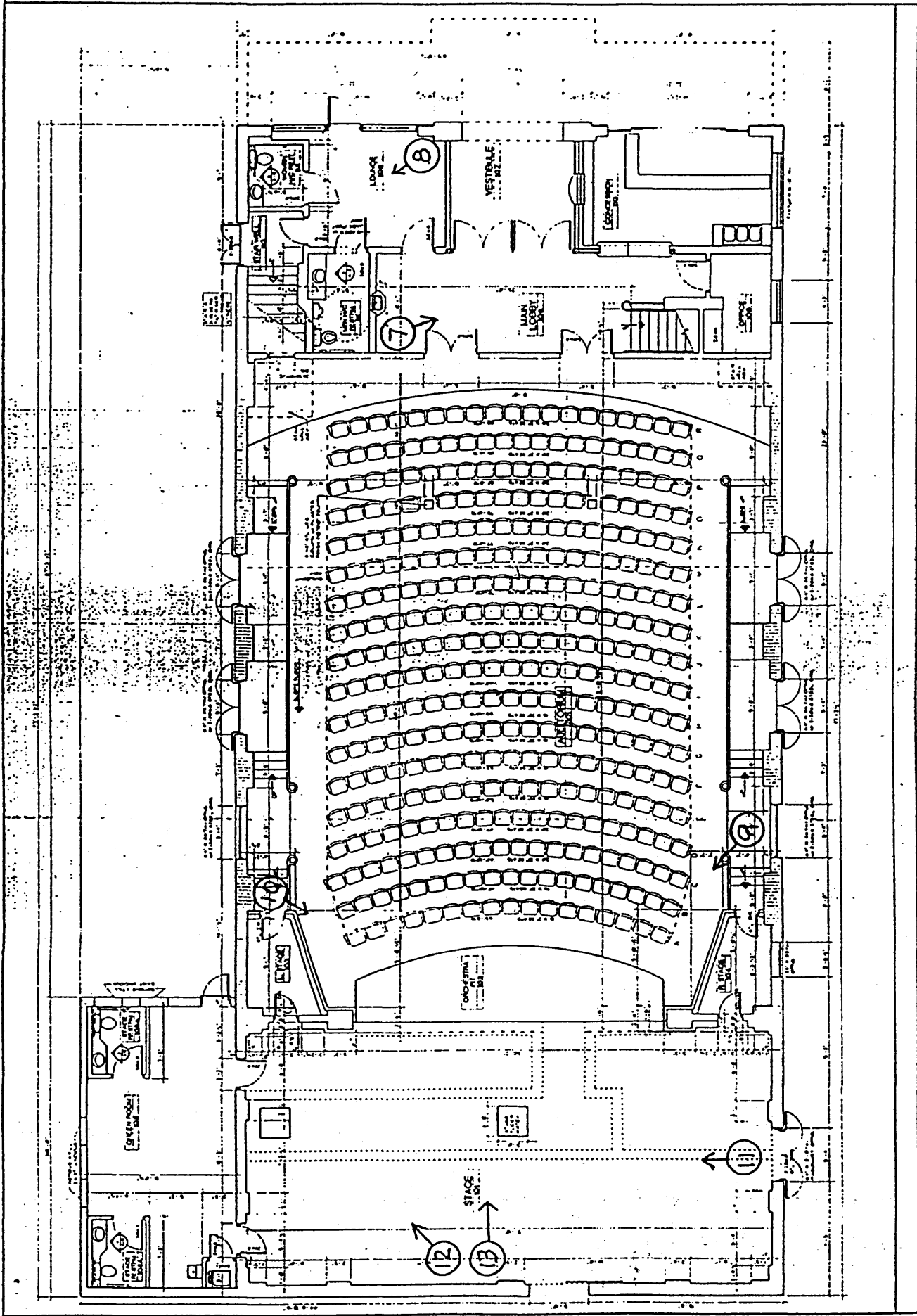
February 2000



 contributing resource

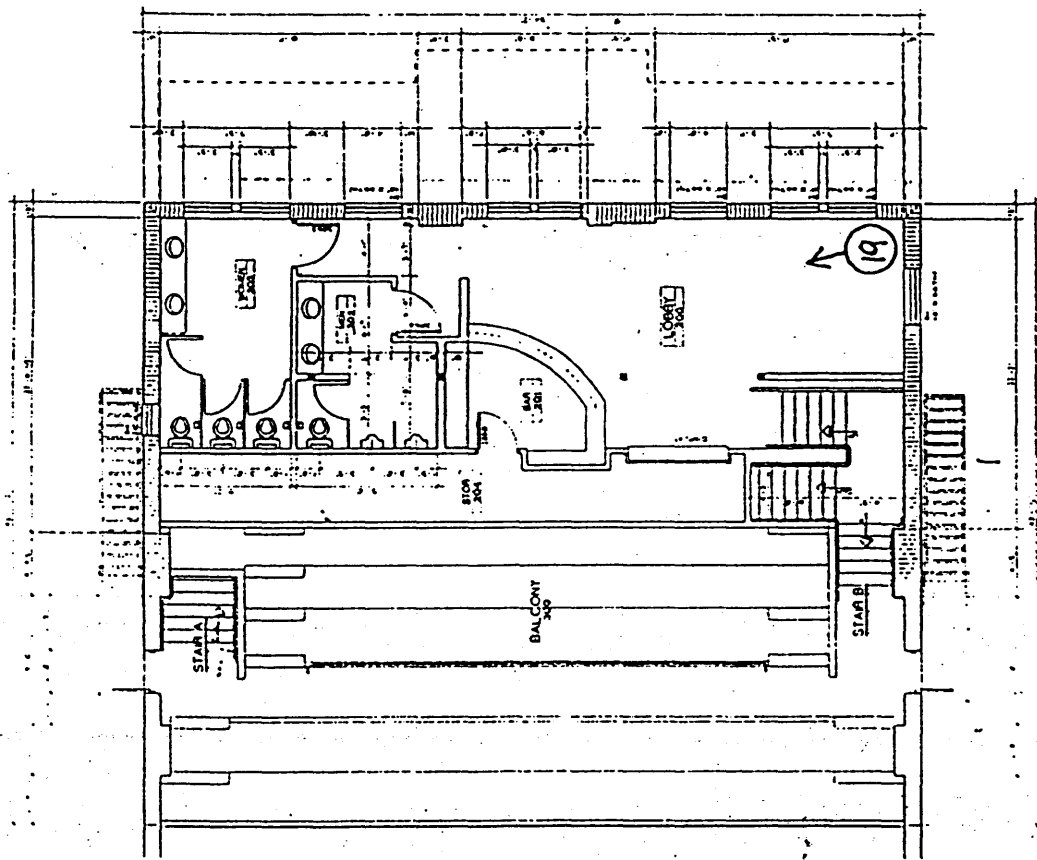


Sanford, Seminole County, FL

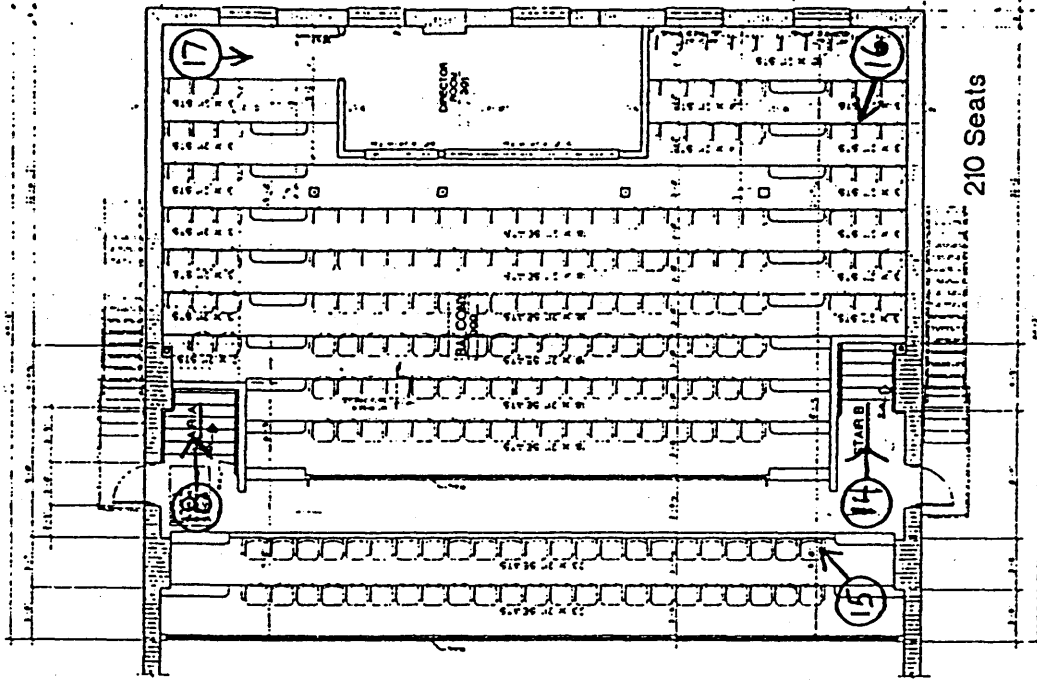


Sanford, Seminole County, FL

Ritz Theater
 First Floor Plan
 one inch=fifteen feet



Second Floor Lobby



Balcony

Ritz Theater
 one inch = fifteen feet
 N ↓