

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

=====

1. Name of Property

=====

historic name: Saenger Theater

other name/site number: JE0550

=====

2. Location

=====

street & number: SE Corner of W. Second Ave. & Pine St.

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Pine Bluff

vicinity: N/A

state: AR county: Jefferson code: AR 069 zip code: 71611

=====

3. Classification

=====

Ownership of Property: Private

Category of Property: Building

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>0</u>	Total

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

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

\_\_\_\_\_

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#### 4. State/Federal Agency Certification

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As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. \_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Cathryn A. Slate  
Signature of certifying official

2-8-95  
Date

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program  
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

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#### 5. National Park Service Certification

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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): \_\_\_\_\_

Elson H. Beall 3-23-95

Entered in the  
National Register

for Signature of Keeper Date  
of Action

=====

#### 6. Function or Use

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Historic: Recreation and Culture Sub: Theater

Current : Work in Progress

Sub: \_\_\_\_\_

=====  
**7. Description**  
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Architectural Classification:

Classical Revival  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Other Description: N/A

Materials: foundation Concrete roof Ceramic Tile  
walls Brick other Limestone  
\_\_\_\_\_

Describe present and historic physical appearance. X See continuation sheet.

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**8. Statement of Significance**  
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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: local.

Applicable National Register Criteria: C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

Areas of Significance: Architecture  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period(s) of Significance: 1924 - 1937

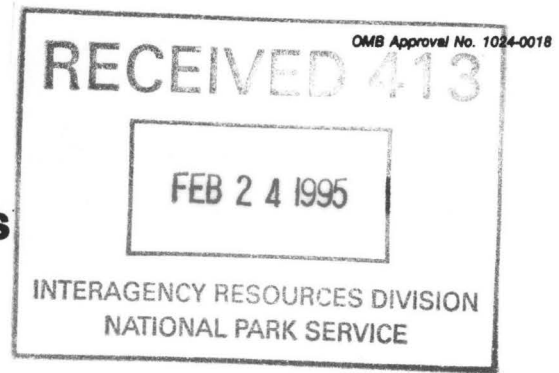
Significant Dates: 1924, 1929, 1937

Significant Person(s): N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Weil, Emile  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.  
X See continuation sheet.



**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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**Summary**

Located on the southeast corner of West Second Avenue and Pine Street in Pine Bluff, the Saenger Theater is a 67 feet by 148 feet movie theater that is approximately four stories in height. Designed by Emile Weil and completed in 1924, the theater features a front facade styled in a Classical/Colonial Revival motif and a highly ornate interior that has been described as of the Florentine style. The interior was redecorated in 1937 and has been reseated to some degree five times since 1924. The Saenger Theater was used until 1975 and is currently unoccupied except for special occasions. It is now owned by the Heckatoo Heritage Foundation which is trying to restore the theater. There are no outbuildings associated with this resource.

**Elaboration**

Located on the southeast corner of West Second Avenue and Pine Street in Pine Bluff, the Saenger Theater is a 67 feet by 148 feet, brick-constructed movie theater that is approximately four stories in height with a taller fly tower at the rear of the building. The structure rests upon a continuous poured concrete foundation and is covered by a flat-decked hipped roof with the sloped portion covered by red clay or ceramic tiles. The front, or northern, elevation contains one central eyebrow dormer that serves as a louvered vent, while the side elevations have three of these dormers.

The Saenger Theater was designed by Emile Weil of New Orleans who was the company's regular architect. The Little Rock firm of Stewart and McGehee submitted the low bid of \$162,000, which did not include electrical work, seating, stage equipment, painting, and decorating. Total cost of completing the structure was estimated at \$180,000. When completed in 1924, the theater could seat 1532 people including four boxes seating 32 patrons.

The front, or northern, elevation is the only styled elevation and reflects the use of Classical Revival components. The first story, however, is indicative of the 1929 Art Deco-style revisions and consists of a central ticket office flanked by triple-leaf, half-moon glazed doors. The doors immediately adjacent to the ticket office, which is currently boarded over, have the half-moon facing the office, while the outer pairs have the half moons oriented toward each other. To the west is a brick wall with a large window opening that is now filled in with wood. Almost all of the wall to the east of the entrance consists of a full-length opening from floor to ceiling that is covered by a wood partition with a single-leaf door. The first story is protected by a flat metal canopy that is supported by eight iron rods.



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**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 2

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Above the entrance, the facade is dominated by three arched window bays, each containing double-leaf, twelve-pane French doors capped with a six-pane transom. A turned balustrade of stone or cast concrete extends across the base of the window bays. The semi-circular arches are outlined in brick and feature stone or cast concrete plinths and keystones. The inside of the arch is lined with another row of bricks and contains a brick-outlined circle in the center set in gray stucco. Within the circle, a musical instrument design is painted in white, while a winged angel depiction is painted within the arch on each side of the circle.

The facade to either side of the three windows is identically arranged and consists of a narrow four-over-four, double-hung window adjacent to the window bay and an exterior niche between the two brick pilaster shafts. The stone or cast concrete niche is outlined with brick and features a decorative urn. The niche is capped by a semicircular arch similar to those on the center windows. The next level above is defined by a cast concrete gargoyle head with a crown. The mouth is open as if in a mocking laugh, and garlands are draped at each side of the head. This level also contains a double-hinged, eight-pane casement window above each exterior niche. The fourth level reveals three double-hinged, eight-pane windows in the center of the facade and the four modified Corinthian pilaster capitals with a stylized "S" relief. Between the pilasters on each end is a marble disc tondo that reflects an enclosed relief portrait of a "classic" head.

A full-length simple entablature course of stone or cast concrete separates the final level, which is fenestrated by nine short double-hinged, six-pane casement windows. Eight stone/cast concrete diamond-shaped inserts divide the windows (individually, except for the outer two windows on each end). A more elaborate entablature with a dentil course effectively crowns this facade.

The west elevation consists of the original "colored" ticket window near the north end. The ticket window was closed and sealed in the 1960's but still features the ornate metal canopy roof that is suspended from two iron rods. Otherwise, the first story of this elevation contains three double-leaf exit doors and one loading door near the south end. Three additional sets of double-leaf doors are located at different levels of the exterior metal staircase, which remains minus the ground access section. The rear, or southern, elevation is not fenestrated, and the eastern elevation is largely obscured by the adjacent building. A matching exterior staircase and a few casement windows are visible on this elevation from the northeast corner of the theater, however, the theater and the adjacent structure share a party wall at the rear of the buildings.

Alterations to the exterior have been confined to the first-story and the marquee. Originally, French doors were located in the center of the facade and the ticket office was positioned to the west. In April, 1929, the front doors were removed and a ticket office was placed in the front center of the lobby, and the current Art Deco doors were installed on either side. Later, the

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 3

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former ticket office was remodeled into a concessions stand, and the brickwork may have been covered with ceramic tile at this time (now removed).

There have been only two known marquees on the theater. A 1932 photograph reveals a tall, upright marquee with removable letters that was placed on top of a flat canopy with the consequence of obscuring the majority of the three window bays. In 1940, Paul Jones, the manager of the Saenger Theater, announced that a new marquee would be built with an improved neon sign. This marquee remained on the theater until it was acquired by the current owners, who removed the marquee down to the original canopy.

Regarding the interior, the Saenger Theater is very similar to the 1927 Weil-designed Jefferson Theater in Beaumont, Texas. David Naylor in his *Great American Movie Theaters* described the Saenger as a "Florentine-style picture palace," and indeed the interior is highly decorative with a prodigious use of plaster ornament.

The interior was redecorated in 1937 by John Oehrlie, who may have been working for noted Arkansas decorator, Paul Heerwagen, at the time. Otherwise, the theater was reseeded about four times between 1924 and 1962. Around 1935, a row of seats in the rear of the balcony were removed to enlarge the sound equipment room and 15 seats were lost. In 1940, the lower floor seats were replaced with the "latest metal type spring cushion seats" which were placed two inches further apart, causing a further loss in seating capacity. In addition the boxes were sealed to accommodate the new air conditioning system. Another change occurred in 1962 when the Commonwealth Theater company, which leased the theater at the time, reseeded the theater and again placed the seats further apart (to the forever gratitude of tall people). As a result, the lower floor contained seats for 636 people, the dress circle, 72, the white balcony, 276, and the "colored balcony," 232, for a total of 1216 seats in the theater.

When the Commonwealth Company abandoned the Saenger Theater in 1975, the entire ground floor seating was removed. In the past year, the Heckatoo Heritage Foundation, which acquired the building in 1985, has replaced the seating with chairs taken from a North Little Rock theater. It must be noted, however, that a few of the original ornate cast-iron seats with a "S" centerpiece remain.

There are no outbuildings associated with the theater.

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National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 1

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**Summary**

The Saenger Theater in Pine Bluff is being nominated under Criterion C with local significance as the best example of a motion picture palace of its era in Pine Bluff.

**Elaboration**

The southeast corner of West Second Avenue and Pine Street has been the focal point of entertainment in Pine Bluff since 1912 when O.C. Hauber converted an old store building on the site into a movie theater, which he dubbed, naturally, "Hauber Theater." In May, 1920, Hauber sold the theater to the Bohlinger Amusement Company of New Orleans for \$40,000. The Bohlinger Company in turn sold the theater two months later to the Saenger Amusement Company also of New Orleans. This company, a subsidiary of Paramount, also owned the Best and Orpheo Theaters in Pine Bluff. The theater was later renamed "Saenger," and in October, 1922, the company announced plans to remodel the theater to accommodate stage performances in addition to movies at a cost of \$30,000. Unfortunately, the theater burned in November 1922 when a plumber left a lighted candle next to a leaky gas meter that he was testing.

In response to this development, the Saenger Company asked assistance from the wealthy Simmons estate and several business firms in Pine Bluff to build a modern theater that could provide the city with "high-class road attractions." Pine Bluff had not really had a facility equipped to accommodate live performances by the many traveling theatrical troupes since the Elk Theater burned in 1915. After a few months of negotiations, Saenger firm signed an agreement with the Simmons estate, and the Pine Bluff Chamber of Commerce agreed to sell 1,000 tickets at \$10 each for the opening performance. The architect's plans were published in the *Pine Bluff Commercial* on June 7, 1923.

At the time of construction, the new Saenger Theater was situated in the heart of the Pine Bluff business district. All six banks of the city were within one block, and the Citizens Bank Building (now known as the National Building) across the street to the west was the tallest structure in the city. Other 1920's downtown business in the vicinity of the Saenger Theater included department stores, dry goods shops, cotton buyers, wholesale grocery firms, produce dealers, drug stores, automobile dealers, mortuaries, jewelers, a candy shop, a shoe repair shop, real estate offices, a tobacco wholesaler, two newspaper plants, an ice plant, furniture stores, a plumbing shop, and a black barber shop catering to the white trade. The upper floors of many of these establishments provided offices for doctors, dentists, and lawyers. Public transportation to the theater from all neighborhoods of the city was provided by the West Second Street electric streetcar line.

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**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 2

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The mid-1920's were the pinnacle for the quintessentially American architectural genre, the motion picture palace. These structures were usually designed to imitate the palaces of the Old World; however, the nature of the film business added complexities never encountered before by architects. The Saenger Theater in Pine Bluff is a good example of the Saenger Amusement Company's high style theaters which were constructed throughout the country. It was designed by the architect, Emile Weil, who was the Saenger Amusement Company's regular architect. Weil was responsible for, among others, the Saenger Theater in Pensacola, Florida, the Saenger (Perot) Theater in Texarkana, Texas, and the flagship of the chain, the Saenger Theater on Canal Street in New Orleans.

Weil designed the Texarkana and Pine Bluff theaters in the same year, and both are designed in the Classical/Colonial Revival vein. Consequently, the two theaters share many exterior features including a clay tile hipped roof with eyebrow dormers, a projecting cornice with dentil course, and the use of pilasters. The Perot Theater, however, is substantially wider and differs by having six decorative Corinthian pilasters and three elaborate broken-pediment window groupings. In comparison, the Saenger Theater exhibits a more restrained exterior, but one that is still far more exuberant than the conventional commercial buildings that were constructed in Arkansas in the 1920's. The Saenger Theater is unquestionably the best example of a historic movie theater in Pine Bluff and, for its size, scale, and appointments, is rivalled in Arkansas by only the Rialto Theater in El Dorado (NR 8/21/86) and perhaps the Kempner Theater in Little Rock. As such, the Saenger Theater in Pine Bluff is being nominated under Criterion C with local significance.

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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  X   See continuation sheet.

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 #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- X   State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- X   Other -- Specify Repository: Heckatoo Heritage Foundation

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## 10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property: Less than one

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing      Zone Easting Northing

A	<u> 15 </u>	<u>591740</u>	<u>3787700</u>	B	<u>  </u>	<u>  </u>	<u>  </u>
C	<u>  </u>	<u>  </u>	<u>  </u>	D	<u>  </u>	<u>  </u>	<u>  </u>

Verbal Boundary Description:    See continuation sheet.

The west 72 feet of Lot 1, Block 34, Old Town Pine Bluff, Arkansas.

Boundary Justification:    See continuation sheet.

This boundary includes all of the property historically associated with this resource that retains its integrity.

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## 11. Form Prepared By

=====

Name/Title: Patrick Zollner, Architectural Historian

Organization: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program Date: February 7, 1995

Street & Number: 323 Center, 1600 Tower Bldg. Telephone: (501) 324-9880

City or Town: Little Rock State: AR ZIP: 72201

**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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**Bibliography**

Information submitted by James Leslie, June 1994.

Leslie, James W. "Entertainment Center Soon May Pass From Scene." *Pine Bluff Commercial*. April 30, 1975.

Naylor, David. *Great American Movie Theaters*. Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1987.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Saenger Theater

MULTIPLE  
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: ARKANSAS, Jefferson

DATE RECEIVED: 2/24/95 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 3/07/95  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 3/23/95 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 4/10/95  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 95000348

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 3.23.95 DATE Entered in the  
National Register

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

RECOM./CRITERIA \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_ DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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





Saenger Theater  
Pine Bluff, Jefferson Co., Ark  
Photo by P. Zollner  
November 1994  
Neg. on file at AHPP  
View of front elevation  
from the northeast





Saenger Theater  
Pine Bluff, Jefferson Co., Ark.  
Photo by P. Zollner  
November 1994  
Neg. on file at AHPP  
View of western elevation  
from the southwest





Saenger Theater  
Pine Bluff, Jefferson Co., Ark  
Photo by P. Zollner  
November 1994  
Neg. on file at AHPP  
View from the southwest







Saenger Theater  
Pine Bluff, Jefferson Co., Ark  
Photo by P. Zolner  
November 1994  
Neg. on file at AHP  
View of rear elevation from  
the southeast



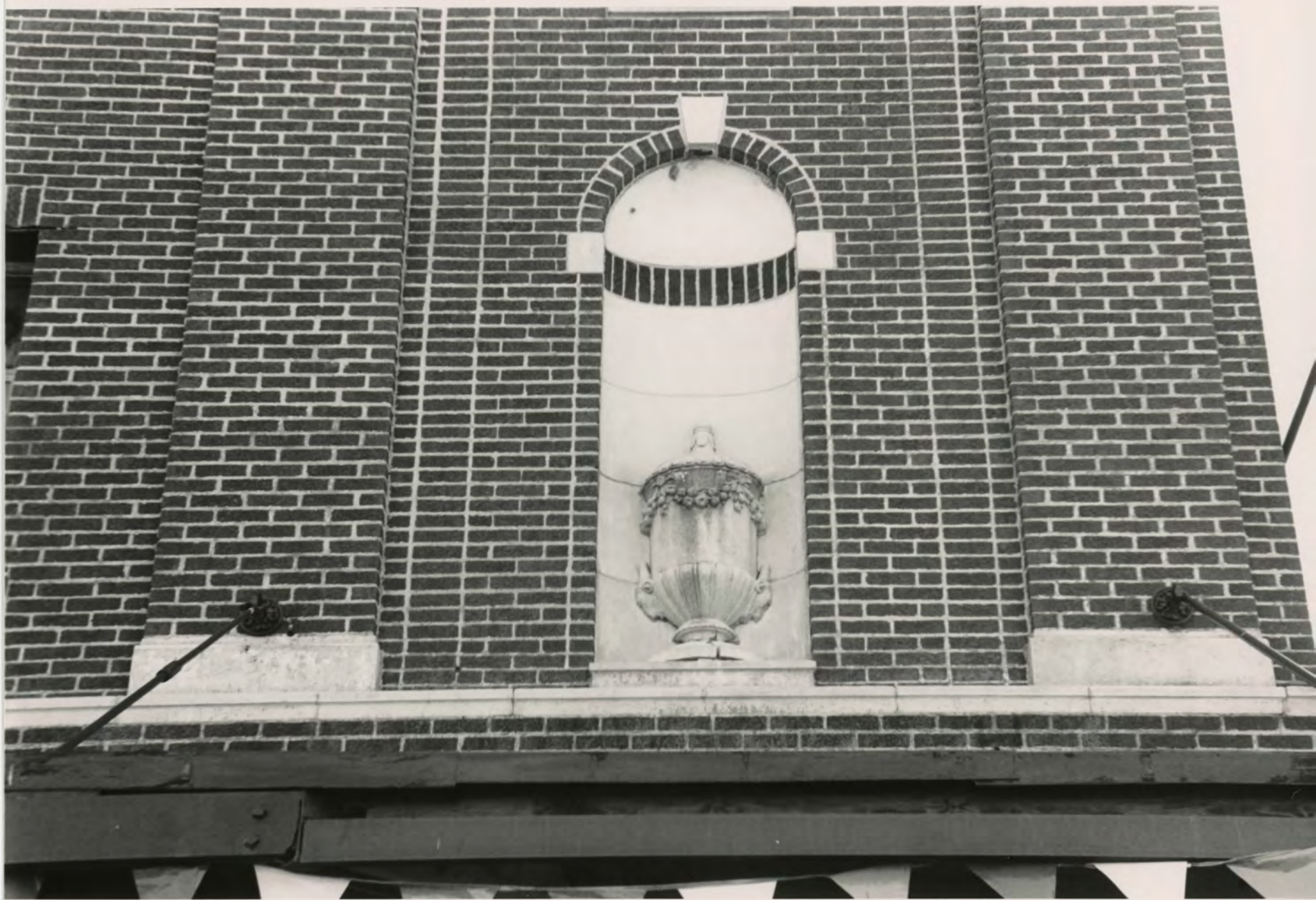


Saenger Theater  
Pine Bluff, Jefferson Co., Ark.  
Photo by P. Zollner  
November 1994.  
Neg. on file at AHPP  
View of front facade from  
the north





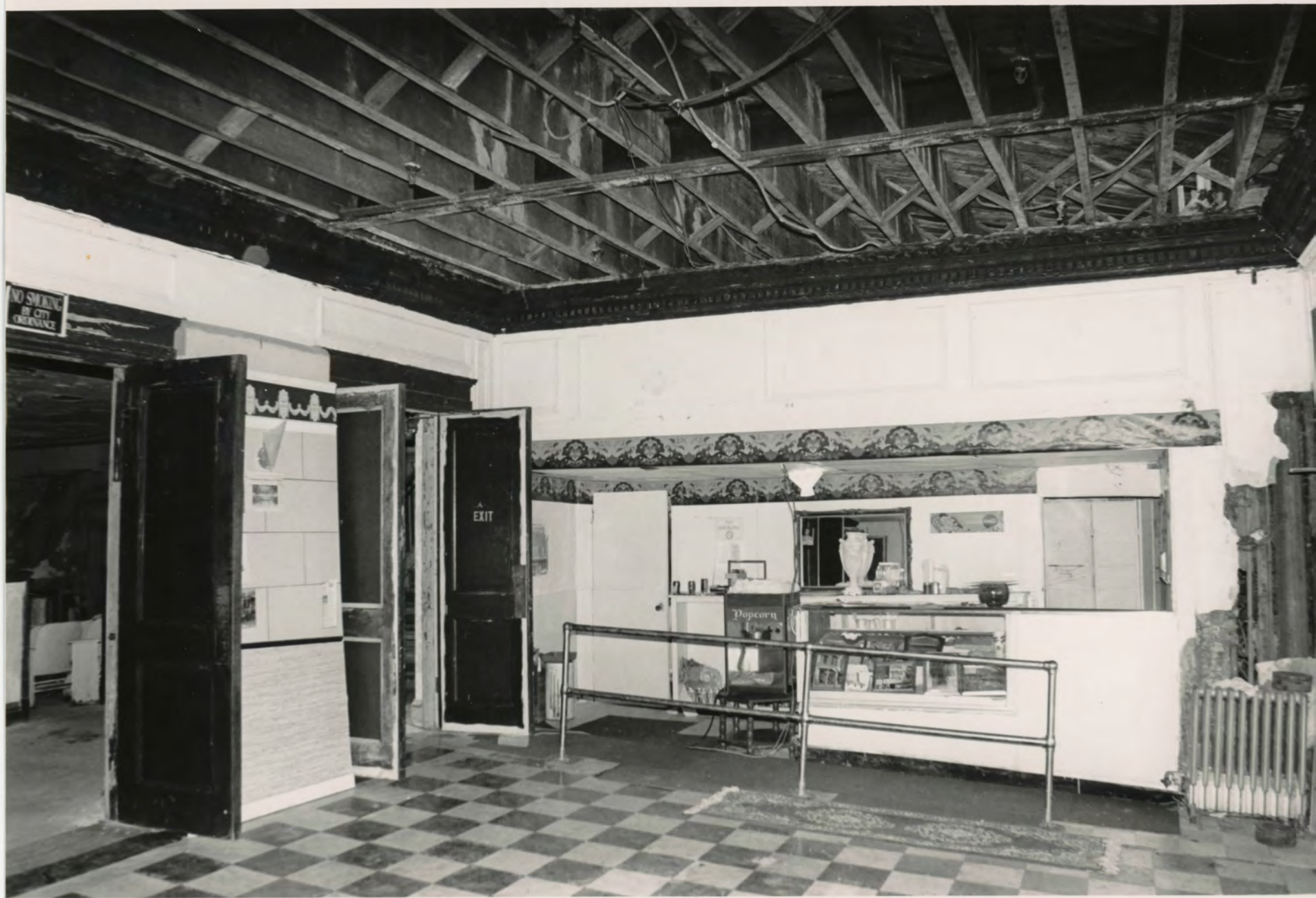
Saenger Theater  
Pine Bluff, Jefferson Co., Ark.  
Photo by P. Zollner  
November, 1994  
Neg. on file at AHPP  
View of upper facade detailing  
from the north





Saenger Theater  
Pine Bluff, Jefferson Co., Ark.  
Photo by P. Zollner  
November 1994  
Neg. on file at AHPP  
View of exterior niche  
from the north





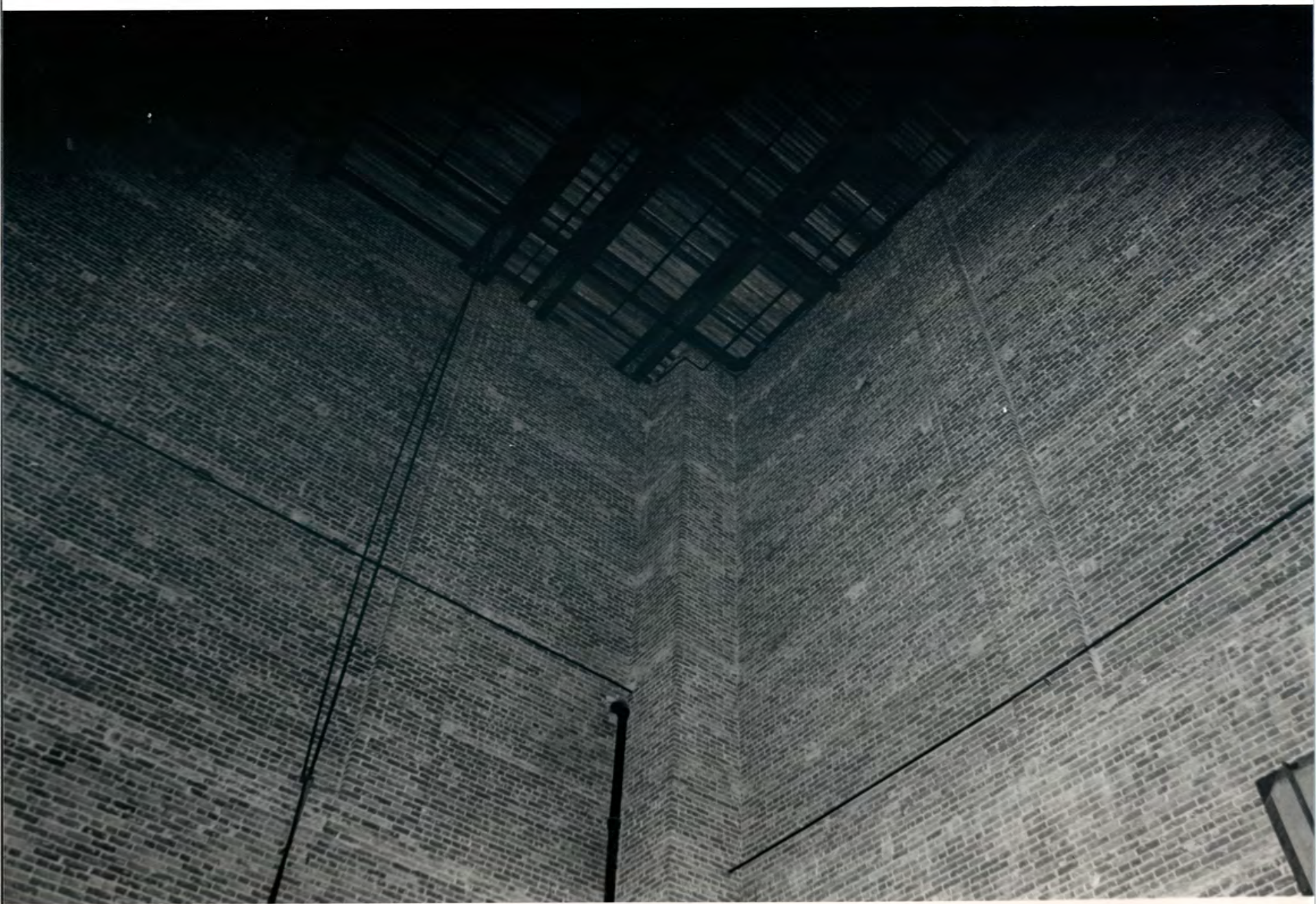
Saenger Theater  
Pine Bluff, Jefferson Co., Ark.  
Photo by P. Zolner  
Nov. 1994  
Neg. on file at AHPP  
View of front lobby





Saenger Theater  
Pine Bluff, Jefferson Co., Ark  
Photo by P. Zollner  
November 1994  
Neg. on file at AHPP  
View of interior from  
the stage (south end)





Saenger Theater  
Pine Bluff, Jefferson Co., Ark.  
Photo by P. Zolner  
November 1994  
Neg. on file at AHPP  
View of fly tower







Saenger Theater  
Pine Bluff, Jefferson Co., Ark.  
Photo by P. Zollner  
November 1994  
Neg. on file at AHPP  
View of stage from  
the north balcony





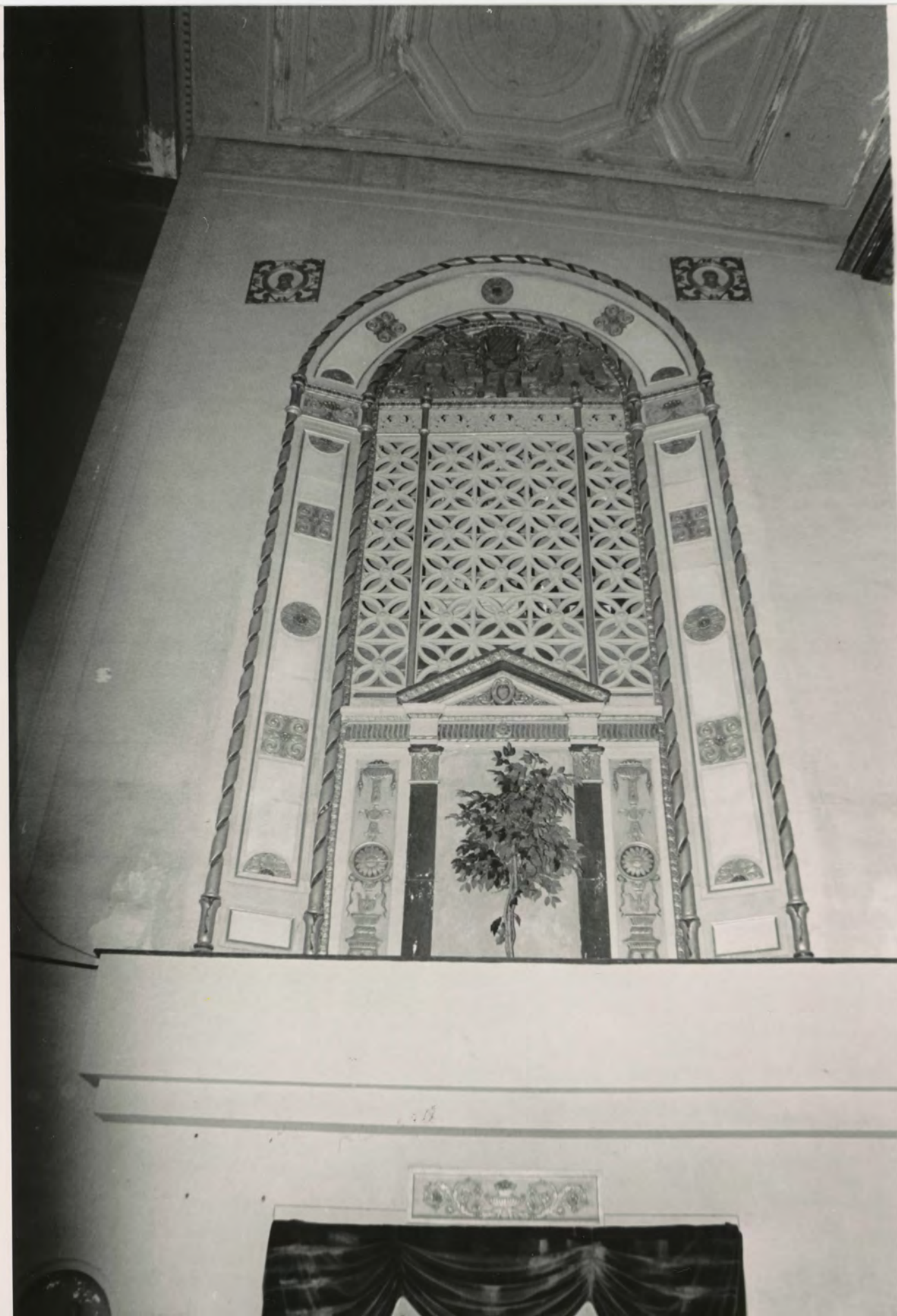
Saenger Theater  
Pine Bluff, Jefferson Co., Ark.

Photo by P. Zollner

November 1994

Neg. on file at AHPP

View of plaster work  
above stage entablature  
from the North





Saenger Theater  
Pine Bluff, Jefferson Co., Ark.  
Photo by P. Zollner  
November 1994  
Neg. on file at AHPP  
View of arched box seat  
surround





Saenger Theater  
Pine Bluff, Jefferson Co., Ark.  
Photo by P. Zollner  
November 1994  
Neg. on file at ATPP  
View of interior plaster  
capital



EXIT



Saenger Theater  
Pine Bluff, Jefferson Co., Ark  
Photo by P. Zollner  
November 1994  
Neg. on file at AHPP  
View of interior doors







Saenger Theater  
Pine Bluff, Jefferson Co., Ark.  
Photo by P. Zollner  
November 1994  
Neg. on file at AHP  
View of ceiling from balcony





Saenger Theater  
Pine Bluff, Jefferson Co., Ark.  
Photo by P. Zollner  
November 1994  
Neg. on file at AHPP  
View of ceiling plaster





Saenger Theater  
Pine Bluff, Jefferson Co., Ark.  
Photo by P. Zollner  
November 1994  
Neg. on file at AHPP  
View of plaster work  
on balcony frieze







Saenger Theater  
Pine Bluff, Jefferson Co., Ark.  
Photo by P. Zollner  
November, 1994  
Neg. on file at AHPP  
View of interior niche urn





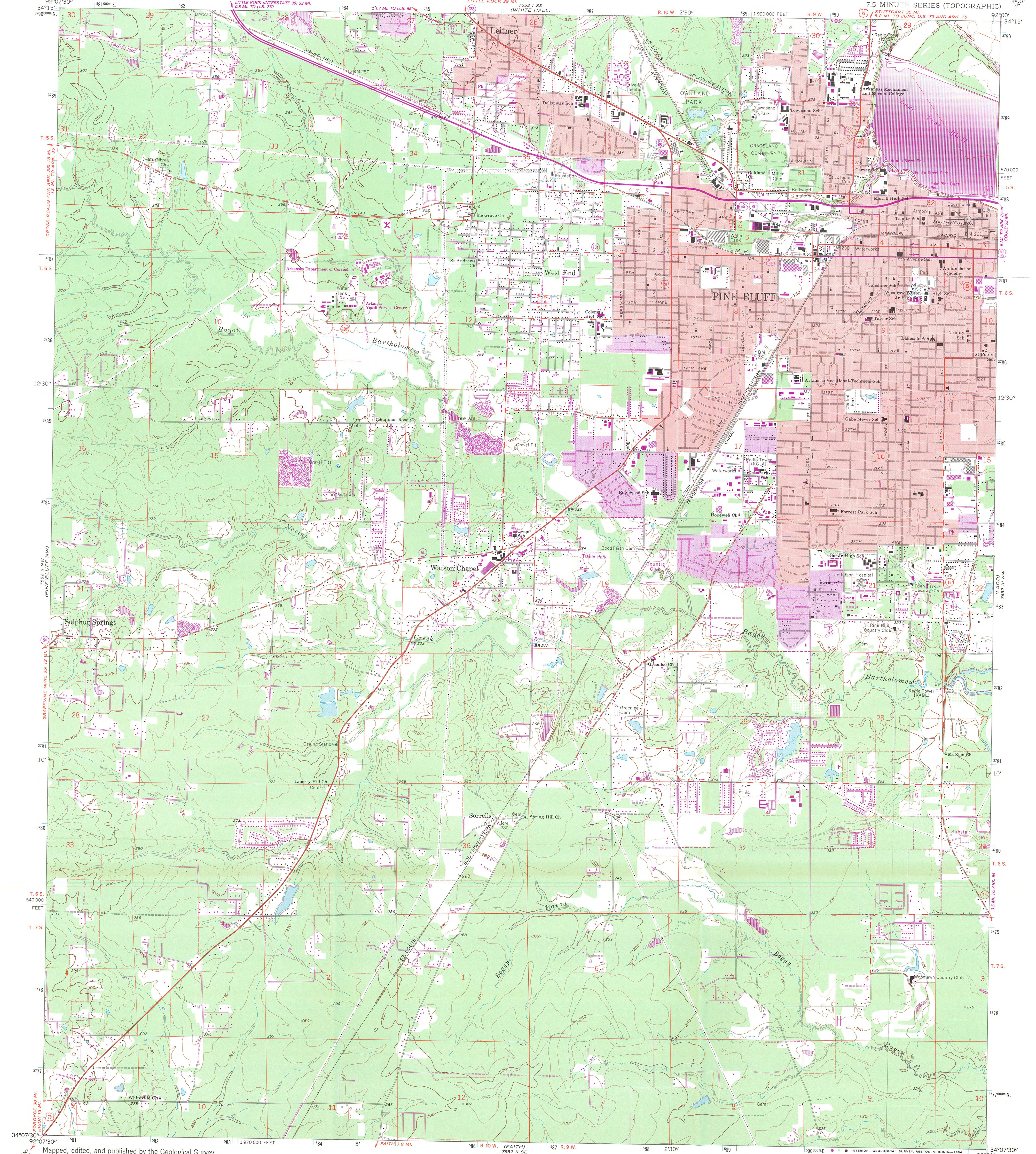
Saenger Theater  
Pine Bluff, Jefferson Co., Arkansas  
Photo by Patrick Zollner  
November 1994  
Neg. on file at AHPP  
View of original seating  
on main floor.



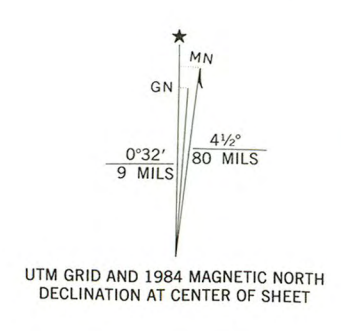
UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

Saenger Theater  
Pine Bluff, Jefferson Co., Arkansas  
UTM: 15/591740/378700

PINE BLUFF QUADRANGLE  
ARKANSAS-JEFFERSON CO.  
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)



Maped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS and USCGS  
Planimetry by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs  
taken 1961. Topography by planimetric surveys 1961-62  
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
10,000-foot grid based on Arkansas coordinate system, south zone  
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,  
zone 15, shown in blue  
Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown  
To place on the predicted North American Datum 1983,  
move the projection lines 9 meters south and  
13 meters east as shown by dashed corner ticks



THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092  
AND ARKANSAS GEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS 72204  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

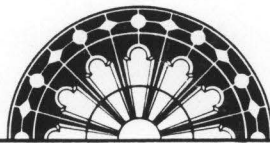


ROAD CLASSIFICATION  
Heavy-duty ——— Light-duty ———  
Medium-duty ——— Unimproved dirt ———  
U.S. Route ——— State Route ———

PINE BLUFF, ARK.  
34092-B1-TF-024

1962  
PHOTOREVISED 1984  
DMA 7552 II NE-SERIES V 884

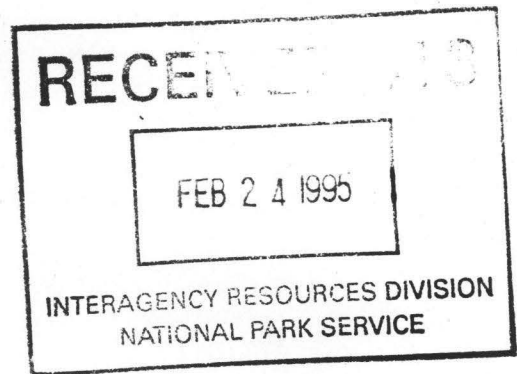




ARKANSAS  
HISTORIC  
PRESERVATION  
PROGRAM

February 8, 1995

Carol D. Shull  
Chief of Registration  
United State Department of the Interior  
National Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service  
800 North Capitol Street, Suite 250  
Washington, D.C. 20002



RE: Amendment to the Washington-Willow Historic District  
Fayetteville, Washington County

✓ Saenger Theater  
Pine Bluff, Jefferson County

Marion Colored High School  
Sunset, Crittenden County

Dear Carol:

We are enclosing for your review the nomination of the above referenced properties. The Arkansas Historic Preservation Program has complied with all applicable nominating procedures and notification requirements in the nomination process.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Cathy Buford Slater  
State Historic Preservation Officer

CBS:br

Enclosures

