

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For NPS use only
received SEP 26 1986
date entered OCT 23 1986

1. Name

historic Paramount Theater

and/or common The Theater Night Club

2. Location

street & number 125 4th Ave. N.E.

N/A not for publication

city, town Austin

N/A vicinity of

state Minnesota

code 22

county Mower

code 099

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Chris P., John J., and James P. Kelly c/o The Theatre

street & number 210 South Water Street

city, town Sparta

N/A vicinity of

state Wisconsin 54656

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Mower County Court House, Register of Deeds

street & number N/A

city, town Austin

state Minnesota 55912

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Statewide Survey of
Historic Resources

has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1984

federal state county local

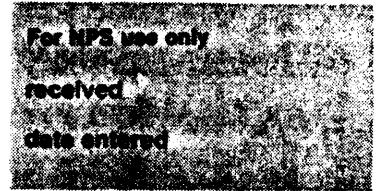
depository for survey records Minnesota Historical Society—Ft. Snelling History Center

city, town St. Paul

state Minnesota

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Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet Description Item number #7 Page 1

itself is flanked by two vertical panels composed of five square panels inset with coats of arms done in a tapestry mode. Two dissimilar balconetes flank the stage area. The one on the east has a curved Baroque arch and an oriel balcony; the one on the west has a shallow triple arcade with gilded grills and twisted columns and was designed originally as an organ loft (but never used as such). The side walls continue the theme of a small town with balconets, projecting gables, towers, battlements and red tile roofs. The ceiling is back-lighted and sky blue. Originally, a switch backstage turned on the heavens--circling cotton-like clouds over a deep blue sky pierced by twinkling stars. The cloud-making machine eventually broke down and the twinkling stars in the ceiling haven't worked since the wiring had to be clipped.

The Paramount was designed by Ellerbe and Company for the new talking pictures. Therefore, there was no place designed for a Wurlitzer Organ. Yet, Ellerbe and the owners (Public Theater chain) hedged their bets by putting in an orchestra pit, dressing rooms and wash basins under the stage, and 14 lines of rigging. Another innovation was the restroom with basin and toilet strategically placed in line with a window looking down on the stage so that movie-goers would not miss part of the show.

The restrooms which were added to the inside of the auditorium have not substantially intruded on the interior, but they are large enough to project into what was once seating space on the main floor at the rear of the auditorium (toward the front facade). They have been sheathed in stucco with half-timbering, but the interior is so dark that they are almost unnoticeable. The main floor of the auditorium was a series of platforms stepping down so that the stage was below grade. Where the seats have been removed on the main floor and balcony, tables and chairs have been installed for night club goers.* These are moveable and do not mar the interior. The original oak banister on the balcony stairs is intact as are the two flanking, winding balcony staircases. When the balcony seats were removed, wrought iron and maple spindle balustrades were added at each balcony level for the safety of night club patrons. These balustrades were not necessary when the balcony was filled with rows of seats. The lobby, minus its triple arcade of small-paned glass windows facing the street, is largely intact. The original terrazzo foyer and lobby floors in rose, grey, and cream 18" square sections with a grey border is intact today inside the front entrance.

* The theatre originally had seating for 1003.

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Paramount Theater

Continuation sheet

Resource Count

Item number

7

Page

2

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received

date entered

The Paramount Theater Nomination
contains 1 contributing building.

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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> theater
<input 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 1929 **Builder/Architect** Ellerbe and Company, Minneapolis

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Paramount Theater, built as Mower County's only "Atmospheric Theater," served as the "first run" house in Austin from its construction in 1929 until 1975 when it was closed and sold. It continues its life today in the heart of the entertainment district in Austin as "The Theater Night Club" featuring live acts. It is the only Spanish Colonial Revival style commercial building in Mower County and is an excellent example of the work of Ellerbe and Company - better known for designing hospital and educational facilities.

The Paramount Theater was built by the Public Theater Company in 1929 to show "talkies." It replaced the previous Park Theater at the same site, which had been destroyed on Tuesday, August 21, 1928 by the largest tornado ever to hit Austin. The Paramount opened on September 14, 1929 to a parade and band with Public officials in attendance. Tours of the new facility were given to one and all. Public officials acknowledged that the theater was one of the best in the country, because it was designed as a theater for talking pictures, an innovation which the Public people bet was not merely a fad.

The building was designed as an "Atmospheric Theater"; that is, as a "magic showhouse" to set the mood of the audience by taking them away from familiar scenes and setting them down in a small Spanish town under a sky filled with moving clouds and twinkling stars. The "houses" in the town all had back-lighted windows and balconies populated in the imagination by exotic and unseen people. Atmospheric theaters were an escapist and glamorous concept almost as old as the moving pictures, dating to around 1909. Today, Austin people in their 20s still wonder what or who is in the town on the walls, indicating that the atmospheric theater idea still holds audiences in its original spell.

This theater building was not typical of the commissions of Ellerbe and Company at the time, a firm better known for larger more institutional projects. Ellerbe and Company designed it eight years after the death of its founder, F. H. Ellerbe. In 1929, the firm was headed by his son, Thomas R. Ellerbe, educated and trained at the University of Minnesota. The building is an excellent example of the Spanish Colonial Revival style, the only commercial building of this style in Mower County. The Spanish Colonial Revival style in commercial buildings found its greatest acceptance in larger cities which sought to become part of the glamor and glitz of Hollywood and southern California. It was a suitable style of architecture for theaters during the 1920s and is typical of this period and type of building.

9. Major Bibliographical References

"Austin Amusement Center" Progressive Austin magazine. (1929, p. 32).
 Karthous, John. "A Brief History of the Austin Theater." Unpublished paper. n.d., n.p.
 Personal interview, Jack and Liz Workman, Austin, Minnesota.
 Undated newspaper article in the Minneapolis Tribune World picture magazine, ca. 1975.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than 1 acre

Quadrangle name Austin East, Minn. 1982

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A 15 502140 4835005
 Zone Easting Northing

B
 Zone Easting Northing

C

D

E

F

G

H

Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property is all that which is located on all of lot 20 and the easterly twenty-five feet of lot 21, Block 33, in the Original Village (now City) of Austin.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Dr. Norene A. Roberts

organization Historical Research, Inc.

date June 3, 1985

street & number 5535 Richmond Curve

telephone (612) 929-2921

city or town Minneapolis

state Minnesota 55410

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

 national state X 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.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Russell W. Fridley

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date 9/19/86

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the
 National Register

date 10-23-86

Melrose Byer
 Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration