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

# **National Register of Historic Places Inventory**—Nomination Form

code

received SEP 2 6 1986 date entered OCT 23 K

<u>N/A</u> not for publication

code

099

For NPS use only

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

### Name 1.

historic Paramount Theater

and/or common The Theater Night Club

#### 2. Location

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

Austin

**Ownership** 

\_ public

x private

N/A in process

**Public Acquisition** 

being considered

\_ both

Mower

Minnesota

N/Avicinity of 22

no

state 3.

city, town

Category

\_\_\_ site

\_ district

\_\_\_\_ structure

\_\_\_ object

 $\frac{x}{2}$  building(s)

Classification

Status <u>x</u> occupied unoccupied \_ work in progress Accessible

county

**Present Use** agriculture museum commercial \_ park educational \_ private residence \_x\_ entertainment \_ religious  $\underline{X}$  yes: restricted government scientific \_\_\_ yes: unrestricted industrial transportation military other:

### **Owner of Property** 4.

name Chris P., John J	., and James P. Kelly c/o Th	e Theatre
street & number 210 S	outh Water Street	
city, town Sparta	N/A vicinity of	state Wisconsin 54656
5. Location of	f Legal Description	
courthouse, registry of deeds, e	tc. Mower County Court House	, Register of Deeds
street & number N/A		
city, town Aus	tin	state Minnesota 55912
6. Representa	ation in Existing Su	rveys
Statewide Survey Nitle Historic Resource		been determined eligible? yes _X_ no
<b>date</b> 1984		federalX_ state county local
depository for survey records	Minnesota Historical Society-F	t. Snelling History Center
city, town	St. Paul	state Minnesota

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# 7. Description

Condition		Check one	Ch
excellent	deteriorated	unaltered	<u> </u>
_ <u></u>	ruins	<u>X</u> altered	
fair	unexposed		

N/A

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Paramount Theater is a two and a half story concrete fire-proof structure facing south on 4th Avenue N.E., a half block from Main Street N. in Austin. The front facade is faced in red and tan party-colored brick laid in American Bond with limestone trim. Lateral and rear exterior walls are a soft common cream-colored brick laid in American Bond. It has a partial basement with restrooms under the lobby and the roof is tar and wood.

The building was designed in the Spanish Colonial Revival style popular in the 1920s. With the exception of the front entry offset to the west, the front facade is symmetrical in arrangement. Ornamental features include a central window encased in a ceramic-tile field within a pseudo-Baroque frame. The Baroque theme is carried through to the stone coping in the parapet The parapet configuration is inspired by its prototype, the Church of Jesus in Rome, Italy, made popular by the success of the Jesuit Order in the New World. Below the central window at the ground floor is a triple-arched stone arcade with stone sill and wrought iron grill work. Two bands of decorative glazed ceramic tiles define the storys. The upper band of tiles is surmounted by a molded stone running course. The lower band is wider and includes patterned brickwork surrounding milti-colored (gold, cream, and black) squares and circles of ceramic tiles. The main entry has two sets of double glass and wood doors with the ticket office set between them. The ticket office is faced in black polished marble panels.

As originally designed, the three small front facade windows on the second floor had vertical iron grilles over the window openings; a pseudo-balcony of iron grill work in the central ceramic-tile field at the same height as the lower decorative tile band; and small-paned windows in the front doors and triple-arcade. The arcade has been stuccoed over where once the windows stood. The grill on the central field of tile is now hidden behind a larger projecting marquee. With the exception of these minor changes, the front facade is intact.

In 1975, the Paramount Theater closed. It stood empty until a bar and night club/bar was installed in the interior. This required removing the theater seats and adding restrooms and a free-standing bar in the middle of the auditorium. This renovation did not damage the interior walls, stage, procenium, or floor levels. The original carpeting is still in the balcony section, with access on flanking staircases at the rear of the auditorium. In 1980, the current owners purchased the building and turned it into The Theater Night Club. They have made no changes not already made to the building to convert it in the late 1970s.

The Paramount Theater was designed as an "Atmospheric Theater" in keeping with the best movie houses of the day. The interior auditorium is largely intact: the original procenium around the stage area is intact and in excellent condition. It is executed in a pseudo-adobe with mock red tile roofs and tournelles to look like a Spanish town. The motif is carried down the side walls and through the balcony area to the rear of the auditorium. The stage

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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 (Publie 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. 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.



The Paramount Theater Nomination contains <u>1</u> contributing <u>building</u>.

## 8. Significance

1400–1499 1500–1599 1600–1699 1700–1799 1800–1899	Areas of Significance—C archeology-prehistoric archeology-historic agriculture architecture art commerce communications		music philosophy politics/government	e religion science sculpture social/ humanitarian theater transportation other (specify)
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 Companybetter 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" <u>Progressive Austin</u> 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 <u>Minneapolis Tribune World</u> picture magazine, ca. 1975.

# **10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of nominated property <u>less than 1 acre</u> Quadrangle name <u>Austin East</u>, Minn. 1982 UTM References

Quadrangle scale <u>1:24000</u>

angle scale \_\_\_\_\_

A 15 Zone	502140 Easting	41835005 Northing	B Zone	Easting	Northing
cLi	LLILI		▫∟∟		
E			F		
GL			нЦ		

### 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 sta	ates and counties for prope						
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. F	Form Prepared	d By	/				
name/title	Dr. Norene A. Robert	S					
organizatio	n Historical Research,	Inc.			date	June 3, 1985	
street & nur	5535 Richmond Curve	: 			telephone	(612) 929-2921	
city or town	Minneapolis				state	Minnesota 55410	
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