

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC Mars Theatre  
AND/OR COMMON Dennis H. Long Center for the Performing Arts

**LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER 111 North <sup>6th</sup> Sixth Street  
CITY, TOWN Lafayette VICINITY OF  
STATE Indiana CODE 018 COUNTY Tippecanoe CODE 157  
NOT FOR PUBLICATION CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT Second

**CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME City of Lafayette  
STREET & NUMBER 20 North Sixth Street  
CITY, TOWN Lafayette VICINITY OF STATE Indiana

**LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Tippecanoe County Courthouse  
Office of the Recorder  
STREET & NUMBER 20 North Third Street  
CITY, TOWN Lafayette STATE Indiana

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE Lafayette Historic Building Inventory  
DATE 1976  
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Lafayette Redevelopment Commission  
CITY, TOWN Lafayette STATE Indiana  
\_FEDERAL \_STATE \_COUNTY  LOCAL

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Mars Theatre is a semi-detached rectangular building of late Georgian Revival design completed in 1921. Its overall dimensions are 141 feet, 4 inches by 69 feet, 4 inches. The building is approximately four stories high, 53 feet, 5 inches above grade at its street facade (west elevation). Interior areas total approximately 22,500 square feet on various levels and are laid out in the traditional proscenium arrangement. Areas in front of the proscenium wall consist of an auditorium, lobby, foyer, ticket office and advertising room on the first level. A second or mezzanine level consists of a lounge, toilet rooms, offices, a vault and passage-way to the balcony area. A sign shop is at the third level under the balcony. A projection booth is at the fourth level. A basement below the foyer/lobby areas house the heating plant, ventilation equipment and fuel storage. A single space behind the proscenium wall encloses the fly tower, stage and wing areas to each side, and contains a fly gallery and gridiron. A basement area below the stage is occupied by 15 dressing rooms and toilet facilities.

Footings, foundation walls, and floor slabs are constructed of reinforced concrete. Above grade, the primary structure consists of a steel frame made up of built up 'I' shaped columns and trusses and built up sections for horizontal members. Exterior and proscenium walls are constructed of load bearing brick of varying thicknesses. The proscenium opening is framed by reinforced concrete columns and beams. Flat roofs at three different levels cover the theatre. A secondary roof structure of steel channels and ribbed metal panels topped with 2 inch concrete deck supports a built-up bituminous covering.

### EXTERIOR

The principal, west elevation faces Sixth Street and is constructed of coarsely stippled brick in running bond pattern. This facade is divided horizontally into three zones by a series of bands running across the entire elevation. The street level is defined by a limestone base at the sidewalk and a molded belt course, also of limestone, below the second story window sills. A large window to either side of the main entry is distinguished by molded limestone enframingent and cornice and crowned with vasiform finial with garlands which engages the belt course above. Flat arches with pronounced keystones of limestone occur over entrances at each end of the elevation.

The second and third story level contain two rows of five windows. The lower row, corresponding to the mezzanine level, consists of large vertical openings with brick arches having limestone keystones and springers. Tympania of these openings are filled with stucco panels each containing a shield with garlands and inscribed with an "M". The upper row of windows, corresponding to the third level sign shop, are much smaller and square in form with molded limestone enframingent and broken scrolled pediments with vasiform finial.

# 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 checked="" 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 1921

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Builder: Kemmer Construction Co.  
Arch: Nicol, Scholer and Hoffman

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Mars Theatre is historically significant in the commercial and cultural development of Lafayette. The theatre was the focus of much local pride in that it was conceived, designed, and built by local residents. Architecturally the Mars is a significant example of late Georgian design and represents the work of a local architectural firm which achieved statewide prominence. Theatrical significance results from historical associations with famous performers and significant local events.

## ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Mars Theatre is the oldest remaining theatre in Lafayette. It is also one of the community's most prominent examples of late Georgian Revival architecture. Conceived to be the equal of contemporary theatres in major urban centers, the Mars was typical of much early twentieth century American theatre design which was based both on centuries of evolution of the proscenium stage and a concern for accommodating the demands of a rapidly developing motion picture technology. Due both to its size and the quality of design and execution of its classical detailing, the auditorium ranks as one of the community's most significant interior spaces. Since the Mars was built before the advent of electrical sound systems the acoustics of the auditorium space are superb.<sup>1</sup>

In February of 1920, Herbert H. Johnson, general manager of the Luna Amusement Company, proposed the development of a modern theatre to accommodate vaudeville, legitimate stage productions and motion pictures. The Luna Company was a local organization which owned three other theatres in the midwest: The Luna Theatre in Lafayette, Indiana, the Lyric Theatre in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and the Luna Theatre in Kankakee, Illinois. Construction of the \$250,000 theatre was financed through the sale of "capital stocks" offered to local residents.<sup>2</sup>

The Mars was designed by the Lafayette architectural firm of Nicol, Scholer and Hoffman. This partnership was formed in 1920 and lasted until 1925 when Walter Scholer acquired proprietorship. The firm's work achieved prominence in the midwest and included such significant local examples as The Purdue University Campus Plan (1923), Albert A. Wells Memorial Library (1926) 638 North Street, and the U.S. Post Office (1931) 300 Ferry Street.<sup>3</sup> Construction of the Mars Theatre began July 5, 1920. The Kemmer Construction Company served as general contractor and had built large architecturally significant structures in Lafayette prior to 1920: Lafayette Life Building (1919), First Merchants National Bank (1918) at 300 and 316 Main Street respectively, and Lafayette Loan & Trust Building (1912) at 133 North 4th Street. Materials for the theatre were furnished for the most part by local merchants who were proud to be identified with the building of the Mars.<sup>4</sup>



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An enlarged limestone belt course occurs above the top row of windows functioning more or less as a multi-fasciated architrave to the cornice above. This band has three panel areas: a large framed central panel inscribed with "Mars Theatre" and two smaller panels, one to each side centered over the flat arched entry at street level, containing garlands in relief. Below these small panels a frame of brick, set in relief, with outer and inner borders in header and soldier positions respectively, runs vertically between the upper and lower belt courses to frame and terminate the large second and third floor wall area.

Above the upper belt course is a metal cornice of the Corinthian Order. A deep parapet area extends above this cornice terminated by a molded limestone cap with a vertically projecting rib terminated near each end by limestone scrollwork.

INTERIOR

The auditorium is 67 feet, 4 inches wide by 105 feet 6 inches long. Floor to ceiling height at the proscenium wall is 46 feet, 3 inches. The main floor follows a straight slope dropping 6 feet, 9 inches from the back wall to the orchestra pit. Seating is laid out in the 'traditional' plan with two center aisles and side aisles along the walls. Seating capacity totals 1205 with 628 seats on the main floor and 577 in the balcony area.

This space is divided into four bays by a series of pilasters which encase the steel columns along the north and south walls. The pilasters and wall areas between them are enframed with wide plaster moldings enriched with acanthus leaves. These bay divisions are expressed on the ceiling by a series of narrow and wide panels running the entire width of the auditorium and trimmed with moldings identical to those on the walls.

The bay adjacent to each side of the proscenium opening contains, at the main floor, a doorway providing access to the stage and stairway to the second level, a small balcony at the second level and an organ loft and sounding chamber above. This bay is separated from the main floor seating area by a balustrade, elliptical in plan, constructed of large turned balusters and topped with a wide upholstered rail. The first level doorway is flanked on each side by window openings which are filled with a grillwork of turned wood balusters. The entire window/doorway assembly is trimmed with wood architrave moldings with the doorway openings being accentuated by opposing wood brackets attached to the lintel and jambs.

Two large plaster consoles, enriched with acanthus leaves and scrollwork are attached to the balcony soffit above the first floor window openings. The wall area, from the balcony floor up to the level of the proscenium opening, contains a complete Corinthian Order in the form of a pair of pilasters to each side of the balcony doorway. The balcony area is enclosed with a low solid wall reflecting in plan the elliptical form of the balustrade on the floor below. The base of this wall is trimmed with deep plaster moldings and topped with an upholstered rail. Three "M" medallions with garlands are attached to the outside of this wall, one on center and one at each corner.

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Two removable grills fill the remaining wall area of this bay above the entablature providing a cover for the organ lofts. The lower grill is enframed in an archivolt molding spanning the width of the bay. Grill elements are turned wood balusters arranged in a sunburst pattern. The upper grill is also of wood with elements arranged in a diamond pattern and containing a large "M" medallion with garlands.

The three remaining bays on each side of the auditorium are adorned with a shield with an "M" and garlands. The pilaster areas contain grills at various levels which function as outlets for the heating system.

The proscenium opening is framed by deep paneled areas on the jambs and lintel areas and trimmed with plaster moldings. Above this opening, an entablature, carried on brackets of a design similar to the balcony consoles, runs the entire width of the proscenium wall. The wall area above this entablature is enframed with an enriched plaster molding of a design identical to that of the side walls. A large shield with an "M" is centered in this panel over the proscenium opening and is set on a raised slab and flanked with garlands.

The auditorium walls are terminated by a deep band encircling the proscenium wall and side walls. This band consists of upper and lower plaster moldings and engages the pilasters on the side walls. The area of the band between these moldings contains a series of open arches which reflect colored light from a fixture trough behind. An arched cove area above the band establishes a transition between wall and ceiling planes.

The ceiling panel in the bay adjacent to the proscenium wall is filled with a grill to accommodate the "typhoon" ventilation system. This grill is constructed of turned wood balusters of a design identical to the grill work on the pilasters and first floor windows of the auditorium wall. Each of the other wide ceiling panels contains a plaster rosette with thimble center at each corner and engages the panel moldings.

All of the original balustrades associated with the stairways to the mezzanine, exit stairways at the front of the building and stairways to the balconies at the proscenium wall are retained. These are constructed of paired cast iron balusters square in section, carrying oak handrails. Newel posts are capped with a vasiform finial of cast iron projecting above the handrail.

ALTERATIONS

Although the Mars Theatre has not been altered structurally, both interior and exterior changes have taken place. Between 1921 and 1927 a two story electrified sign was added to the facade. This sign was subsequently replaced and a 1958

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photograph shows the present marquee. The installation of the marquee required the removal of the original canopy which was suspended over the sidewalk at the main entrance and the removal of the iron railing above the canopy which extended across the elevation in front of the second story windows. Metal pediment shaped elements were also attached to the lower belt course flanking the marquee on each side. Windows at the first level have been converted to display cases with the loss of their original mullions. Metal grill-like shutters and lighting fixtures have been attached to both sides of these windows and lighting fixtures have been placed above the door lintels at each end of the elevation. The brick facade at the street level, between the base and lower belt course, has been painted white, with the limestone base and moldings trimmed in black. A flagpole, which originally sat on top of the parapet wall, centered on the west elevation, has also disappeared.

In 1950-51 a concession stand and carpeting were added to the lobby. This required modification of the original wall which separated the lobby and auditorium spaces. In plan, this wall is divided into three segments by the aisle doorways. In elevation, each segment originally had a wainscot under four rectangular glazed openings. A transom area above these openings contain four semicircular arch openings corresponding to the opening below. Transom areas above the doorways contained basket arch openings to accommodate the extra width. All of these arches were originally glazed with three panes in a radial pattern. To accommodate the concession stand, the last two rows of chairs of the center seating section were removed and a portion of the center wall segment below the transom bar razed. The wall segments to each side have two mullions removed and reglazed with two panes. All glazing and radial mullions in the arch openings above the windows and doorways have been removed but their deep archivolt moldings, wood trim and plaster cornice above remain.

In 1964 the original five sets of double wood doors and transoms at the exterior entrance to the foyer were removed. A ticket booth was installed in the center opening and aluminum framed glass doors were installed in the other four doorways. A matching set of wood doors and transoms at the wall separating the foyer and lobby were also removed and replaced with aluminum framed glazed doors.

The foyer walls which enclosed the original ticket office and advertising rooms had their plaster cast in simulated stone masonry construction of running bond pattern and given a 'caen stone' finish. Ticket window openings were enframed with a projecting pedimented lintel and base with wood architrave moldings. In the 1964 remodeling, these walls were covered with simulated marble panels and aluminum framed display cases. However, the original bronze grills, sash, and glazing of the ticket windows remain intact as well as the plaster cove moldings at the ceiling with their light troughs and "M" shields and garlands.

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Other alterations that occurred in 1964 included the installation of new lighting fixtures in the auditorium. The mezzanine level also received new lighting fixtures and had its lounge and toilet facilities renovated. The light trough in the fascia at the front of the balcony was covered with flush wood panels but the original plaster moldings remain. The walls surrounding the balconies at the proscenium wall have had their cast iron uprights and wood railings removed. Portions of the wood grillwork and the pilasters at the rear of the auditorium space have been removed to accommodate loudspeakers.

The seating in the Mars has been replaced several times. In 1937, all of the original chairs in the auditorium were replaced. The seats on the main floor were subsequently replaced in 1946 and 1963.

None of the original interior finishes remain but, from published descriptions and architectural drawings, these finishes did not seem to follow the prevailing preferences for dark somber color schemes and heavy fabrics. The original seats in the boxes and balcony were upholstered in gold leather while those of the loges and main floor were believed to be upholstered in green leather. The floors were originally covered with a lightly patterned Wilton carpet.

Both the console and the pipes of the Wurlitzer Hope-Jones Unit Orchestra Organ, installed in the theatre in 1924, have been removed. This was a 3 manual, 11 rank model and considered to be one of the finest theatre organs of the 1920's. In 1960, the instrument was purchased by Al Mason of Lavonia, Michigan for his personal use. Mr. Mason was former president of The American Theatre Organ Society. After his death, the organ was sold to the City of Marion, Ohio and in 1978 installed in the restored Palace Theatre there.

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Opening night, April 19, 1921 was a major social event.<sup>5</sup> But the commercial and cultural impact of the Mars lasted well beyond that event, promoting the development of the central business district as, "a magnificent theatre, brilliantly illuminated, had much to do with converting the Sixth and Main Street vicinity into the center of night life in Lafayette and a busy corner at day."<sup>6</sup>

In 1977 the Mars was donated to the City of Lafayette by Irving Long, president of Fourth Avenue Amusement Company, Louisville, Kentucky which had acquired the theatre in 1963. The Mars has been renamed the Dennis H. Long Center for the Performing Arts in memory of Mr. Long's father, a graduate of Purdue University. In 1979, under the auspice of the Tippecanoe Arts Federation and with financial assistance from the Indiana Arts Commission and the National Endowment for the Arts, a feasibility study was conducted to assess the potential for restoration and reuse of the Mars both as a performing arts and multi-use center.

THEATRICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Mars Theatre is of local theatrical significance both for its historical associations with famous actors, actresses, and theatrical art as well as being a major focus for local talent, performances and events within the community. The theatrical history of the Mars closely followed national trends in artistic, technological, and economic developments in the performing arts.

The opening night performance at the Mars was a Broadway musical featuring Ed Wynn's *Carnival* with Ed Wynn as "The Perfect Fool." The first vaudeville performance also took place in 1921 and featured Little Lord Roberts in "Santa's Toy Shop"; Nora Allen as "The Society Vocalist"; The Cromwells in "Whirlwind Jugglers"; Gordon & Healy in "Wedded Bliss"; Ward & Raymond in "Hello"; and the Buch Brothers in "Spilling the Beans." During its early years as a vaudeville and legitimate theatre, the Mars hosted many famous performers such as Al Jolson, Ruby Keeler, Bob Hope, The Marx Brothers, Ethel Merman and Will Rogers. Accompaniment for many of these performances was provided by the Mars's own orchestra.

Other art forms and activities that were frequently performed at the Mars were: movies, newsreels, the semi-annual fashion shows by the Loeb and Hene Department Store, the Purdue Little Theatre, and Purdue Harlequin Club. In the early 1920's 2-5 minute photo plays were shown between live performances and used mostly as "fillers." An organist or pianist would play the accompaniment for the movies and the theatre purchased a Lyon & Healy Baby Grand piano, a Lane Upright piano, and a \$15,000 Seeburg-Smith United organ for this purpose. In 1924, a Wurlitzer Hope-Jones Unit Orchestra Organ was installed, replacing the Seeburg-Smith instrument. Eventually, recordings were made by the motion picture companies which eventually included some dialogue. The first feature film to use recorded music and dialogue was "The Jazz Singer" starring Al Jolson. This movie played at the Mars on April 19, 1929.

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During the late 1930's and early 1940's the popularity of vaudeville waned and movies began to be more prominent. Vaudeville eventually became passe' and the Mars Theatre was used strictly as a movie theatre. It enjoyed popularity as a movie house through the years and only in the past few years has it closed periodically because of a shortage of films and the emergence of wide screen cinemas being built exclusively for modern movie productions.

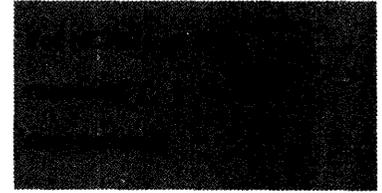
With the acquisition of the Mars by the City, the theatre has become the home of the Lafayette Symphony Orchestra and the Tippecanoe Arts Federation. Various live musical performances and plays, film festivals, public meetings, and conferences occur frequently at the theatre.

Footnotes:

1. William F. Theobald, Tippecanoe Civic and Cultural Center. Mars Theatre Feasibility Study (Lafayette, Indiana 1979), p.13.
2. Advertisement of stock sales, Lafayette Journal Courier, May 19, 1920, p.9, col. 4 thru 8.
3. The Ohio Architect, Engineer and Builder, Vol. XXIII January 1914, No. 1.
4. Advertisements, Lafayette Journal Courier, April 18, 1921, p. 10 thru 13.
5. Milton Pollitzer, "Admiring Throngs At New Theatre Opening," Lafayette Journal Courier, April 20, 1921, p. 1, col. 1 thru 3.
6. Kathy Matter, "Theatre's Debut a Gala Event," Lafayette Journal and Courier, November 13, 1977, p. C-1, col. 1 thru 3.

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Kemmer Construction Co., Inc. Charlotte, N.C.: Builders Brochure Co., 1967.

Nicol-Scholer & Hoffman Architects, "Mars Theatre Basement Floor Plan," sheet No. X-1; "First Floor Plan," sheet No. 2; "Balcony Plan," sheet No. 3; "Longitudinal Section," sheet No. 5; "Details & Sections," sheet No. 5, Lafayette, Indiana 1920.

Pollitzer, Milton "Admiring Throngs at New Theatre Opening", Lafayette Journal Courier, April 20, 1921, p.1, col. 2-3.

"Sixth Anniversary Week", Lafayette Journal Courier, April 16, 1927, p.1, col. 1-8

Theobald, William F., Tippecanoe Civic & Cultural Center: Mars Theatre Feasibility Study. Lafayette, Indiana: no publisher given, 1979.

Walter Scholer and Associates, Inc. -- Architects, Lafayette, Indiana: no publisher given, no date given.