

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

- 6

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 CORDOVA THEATER
Other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 135 N. Grand Avenue not for publication
city or town Pullman vicinity _____
State Washington code WA county Whitman code 075 zip code 99163

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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.)

[Signature] 2/4/04
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

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 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:)

[Signature] 3/18/04
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not incl. previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Non-Contributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

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

Movie Theaters in Washington State from 1900 to 1948

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Functions or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION & CULTURE: Theater

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION & CULTURE: Theater

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th & 20th CENTURY REVIVALS:

Spanish Colonial Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls BRICK

roof ASPHALT

other STUCCO, CERAMIC TILE, GLASS, WOOD, MARBLE, IRON

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property.)

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

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.)

- X 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.
X 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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1927-1950

Significant Dates

1927

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Whitehouse & Price, (Architects)

Berg, Carl R. (Interior Decorator)

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property.) SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.) 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 Engineering
Record#

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property Less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM References on a continuation sheet.)

UTM grid with 4 columns: 1 (Zone: 11, Easting: 4 86 119, Northing: 517 52 41), 2, 3, 4.

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property.) See continuation sheet.

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected.) See continuation sheet.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Linda Yeomans, organization Historic Preservation Planning & Design, date 10 November 2003, street & number 501 West 27th Avenue, telephone (509) 456-3828, city or town Spokane, state WA, zip code 99203

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 the SHPO or FPO.)

name Kenworthy Limited Partnership, street & number 510 1/2 South Main Street, PO Box 8308, telephone (208) 882-3033, (208) 664-6418, city or town Moscow, state ID, zip code 83843

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CORDOVA THEATER
Whitman County, Washington

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

Built in 1927, the Cordova Theater is a fine representation of the property type, "Palace-Era Theaters," as described in the National Register Multiple Property Documentation Nomination (MPD), *Movie Theaters in Washington State from 1900 to 1948*. As explained in the MPD, palace-era theaters represented the zenith of movie theater design and reflected distinctive styles and decorative concepts that were derived from previous traditional prototypes.¹ The Cordova Theater illustrates this phenomenon and is an excellent example of the Spanish Eclectic style. The theater also depicts the Art Deco style, a non-traditional theater design concept, as evidenced in the 1950 addition of a prominent marquee which projects outward from the façade of the building. The theater is highly visible and is located on Grand Avenue in the central business district of downtown Pullman, Washington. With few alterations and still in use as a movie house, the Cordova Theater is well preserved and retains excellent interior and exterior architectural integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

CURRENT APPEARANCE & CONDITION

Site

The Cordova Theater is located on the west 55 feet of Lots 3 and 4, and all of Lot 5 on Block 47 in the addition called the Original Town of Pullman in Whitman County in Eastern Washington. Like the other commercial buildings that surround it, the Cordova Theater is sited with no setback from the sidewalk as it faces east at address number 135 North Grand Avenue. The building is sandwiched between two adjoining buildings that share common party walls with the theater to the north and south. The west, rear elevation of the building abuts a narrow alley and a steep basalt bluff that is located behind the building. The theater is built on the entire space provided by Lot 5 and on the west 55 feet of Lots 3 and 4. It follows an L-shaped footprint where the east-west oriented leg of the building measures 28 feet wide by 100 feet deep on Lot 5, and the north-south oriented leg measures 55 feet by 88 feet on the west halves of Lots 3 and 4 (see site plan).

Exterior

The vault-form Cordova Theater is a two-story brick masonry building with a flat roof of built-up tar. A small pent roof defines the building's façade. The roof is supported by a massive decorative cut beam, which spans the width of the façade and rests on four decorative scroll-sawn brackets. The pent roof is covered with red-colored composition shingles. The façade of the theater on the second floor is clad in heavily textured, white-painted stucco. The first floor at street-level is clad in aggregate marble panels. The south, west, and north elevations of the building are clad in common brick. The building is supported by a poured concrete foundation.

The east façade of the Cordova Theater is the focal point of the building and features decorative *bas-relief* work rendered in plaster. Designed to produce the effect of letters on a partially unfurled banner, the appellation

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"CORDOVA" is featured on the banner, which is centered on the façade just below the pent roof. At the ends of the banner are decorative shields with swords in *bas-relief*. Two ornamental plaster medallions appear just below the banner: one medallion is positioned below the north end of the banner, and the other medallion is located below the south end of the banner. The medallions feature *bas-relief* faces in profile that may be interpretations of Greco-Roman theater gods or other thespian deities. Between the two medallions is a half round arched clerestory window, which is embellished with turned mullions and ornamental wrought-iron filigree work. Below the clerestory window is the front entrance of the building at street level. The front entrance system is composed of a contemporary aluminum frame with two pairs of glass-and-aluminum-sash doors capped by transom lights. Two wood-framed, glass-covered display boxes flank the entrance. Poster art depicting current and future cinematic films featured at the theater are advertised in the boxes.

The most dominant feature of the façade is a massive Art Deco-style marquee that projects ten feet over the sidewalk at the front entrance of the building. The marquee is attached to the façade of the building just above the front entrance doors and almost completely covers the original round arched clerestory window. It follows a triangular footprint as it projects outward. Letters spell "CORDOVA" on the north and south sides of the marquee. Made of metal, glass, and plastic, the marquee is framed and backlit with neon lighting, and was designed to advertise movies which were shown in the theater.

Vestibule Interior

The interior of the building has over 6,800 total square feet.² The front entrance opens to a vestibule featuring a ticket booth that is located in the center of the room. Made of wood, the ticket booth is original and features an elaborate octagonal design with glazed ceramic tile floor molding around the base, wood paneled wainscoting, and seven glazed panels above the wainscot. The eighth panel is a wood door that opens for entry into the ticket booth. The eight segments of the octagonal booth are divided and highlighted by spiral pilasters. The top of the booth is capped on each of the eight sections with ornamental finials depicting the letter "C", which is a cipher that signifies the word "Cordova" in the theater's name. The vestibule is finished with a newer marble floor, painted sheetrock walls, and a dropped ceiling of acoustical tiles. Two pairs of original wood-paneled doors open for access into the theater's lobby.

Lobby

The lobby of the theater has heavily textured stucco walls and ceilings, which is an original design feature of the theater. The floor is covered in a combination of marble and thick wall-to-wall carpet. The focal points of the lobby are a contemporary concession booth, which is located on the north wall, and an original grand staircase, which is located on the south wall. The staircase is distinguished with an ornamental wrought-iron balustrade. Original wrought-iron filigree wall sconces and ceiling lights illuminate the lobby with a soft amber glow while the concession stand is lit with bright recessed lighting. From the lobby, a corbelled arch opens to a central foyer.

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Foyer

The foyer has an irregular rectangular footprint with a long convex curved wall to the north (the auditorium is on the other side of this wall). The foyer has a low ceiling (7.6 feet high) with decorative (false) corbelled wood ceiling beams and crown molding. The wood beams are colored a burnished ebony and feature stencil designs painted in gold-leaf. The crown molding is highlighted with a twisted rope design and is painted dark red. Like the lobby, the ceiling and walls in the foyer are clad in heavily textured stucco. The floor is covered with thick carpet. Original lighting emits a low amber glow and includes wall sconces and flush-mounted ceiling fixtures. The ceiling fixtures duplicate the octagonal shape of the ticket booth and are made of decorative wrought-iron bases with amber glass shades. Two corbelled entry ways are located on the south wall of the foyer and open to separate restrooms for men and women. An eight-panel door opens to an office on the west wall of the foyer. Two corbelled entry ways, which are located on the convex curved north wall of the foyer, open to the theater's auditorium. The corbelled entrances are protected with dark red velour, floor-length drapes that hang from turned wooden drapery rods. The rods are supported by twisted-rope brackets.

Lounge & Loges

The lobby's grand staircase leads to the second floor of the building. The second floor features a lounge, four balcony loges designed for private theater viewing, and a central projection room. The lounge and loges are finished like the lobby and foyer of the theater, and include a low 7.6-foot-high ceiling, heavily textured stucco-clad walls and ceiling, crown molding and stenciled ceiling beams, original light fixtures and wall sconces, and heavily draped corbelled entrances that open to the loges and the projection room. A door at the east end of the lounge opens to a storage room.

Auditorium

Located on the first floor of the theater, the shoe-box style auditorium is large, measuring 53 feet wide and 88 feet deep. It has a barrel-vaulted cathedral ceiling which measures 21 feet high at the highest point. The auditorium holds 609 Art Deco-style theater seats, which are designed with bow backs and upholstered seat cushions, and are anchored to the floor. Loge seating is dedicated to the first three rows of seats at the back of the auditorium. The loge seating is anchored to a raised step, which is a few inches above the theater floor, and is separated from the remaining theater seats by a wrought-iron balustrade with decorative grille work. The floor of the auditorium is made of poured concrete and gradually slopes down a total of four feet in elevation from the level of the foyer to a stage and proscenium arch at the north end of the auditorium. Elevated four feet above the lowest point of the auditorium floor, the stage is also made of poured concrete. A movie screen is suspended in the stage area along with a massive, floor-length waterfall curtain. Two exit ways with concrete ramps that rise to exterior doorways and open to a parking lot adjacent north of the building, flank the stage. They are topped by a second-floor organ loft and fan room, which are embellished with decorative wood and metal lattice grille work, and waterfall curtains with tie-backs.

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The ceiling in the auditorium is covered with heavily textured stucco and features wood trusses with decorative corbels made of plaster. The trusses, which are finished in a burnished ebony color, are highlighted with decorative stencils painted in red, blue, green, white, and gold-leaf. The stencils depict stylized birds and floral designs. The walls of the auditorium are clad in stucco and wood wainscoting, which is covered with thick squares of carpet.

One of the most striking features of the auditorium is the original lighting. Six large theater chandeliers are suspended from the ceiling between the ceiling trusses. The design of the chandeliers mimics the octagonal footprint displayed in the design of the ticket booth and small octagonal ceiling lights, which are located in the lobby and foyer. The auditorium chandeliers have wrought-iron filigree bases and frames and are covered with orange-red and amber-colored parchment paper. The paper is painted with designs that depict various shields. Colors used in the shields range from red and green to blue and black. Providing a low level of illumination to the auditorium, the chandeliers emit a diffused light that bathes the room in a warm glow of red, orange, and amber-colored hues.

ORIGINAL APPEARANCE & SUBSEQUENT MODIFICATIONS

A black and white photograph taken in 1933 reveals the original exterior facade design of the building before the 1950 marquee was installed (see photo).³ The original facade design featured stucco cladding on the first and second floors, a glazed ceramic tile bulkhead, a round arched clerestory window with decorative grille work, a name banner and two medallions executed in *bas-relief* plaster, two wrought-iron and glass carriage-house style light fixtures, and two cabinets in which movie playbills and advertisements were displayed. The cabinets were framed in wood with glass doors and were each capped with broken pediments. The original front entrance to the theater featured two pairs of multi-paned wood-paneled doors. The pent roof was originally covered with glazed ceramic tiles as revealed in the photograph; the tile was removed in the early 1970s and the pent roof was re-covered with red composition shingles.

A newspaper article in the *Pullman Herald*, which was dated February 24, 1928, described the Cordova Theater just before its grand opening:

Entering in front and going through the theater, the first thing which strikes one's eye is the name "Cordova" in burnished gold letters above an arched entrance in wrought-iron grille work. Immense show frames are on either side [of the front door]. The vestibule is octagonal, with an elaborately decorated ticket office in the center. A bracket lamp

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is placed on either side of the vestibule. Just over the panel doors a wrought-iron balcony with leaded glass in the background adds distinctive charm to the structures. Bright colored [ceramic] tiling surrounds the base of the walls.

The foyer is completely carpeted and furnished with high-backed wrought-iron chairs upholstered in Spanish red brocade and duco. On either side of the lobby are nicely equipped restrooms. The main auditorium is in two sections, the loges and main seating space being separated by grille work. Carpeted stairs lead from the foyer to a lounge on the balcony, from which four party rooms [loges] branch. These rooms, planned to seat five persons each, are furnished with loose chairs in keeping with the rest of the house. A Robert Morton pipe organ, valued at \$12,000, is one of the outstanding features of the equipment. The drapes are in Spanish red velour hung on turned poles. Iron grilles with a built-out balcony effect are placed on either side of the stage. Underneath each grille is an emergency exit. Picturesque shields on parchment and framed in more wrought-iron characterize the Spanish atmosphere of the lighting.

The [theater] seats are leatherine, with duco finish. The loges are equipped with winged seats. The operator's room has two Powers six-beam projectors with Peerless reflectors valued at over \$300 each. A store room, a generator room, and...office at the left of the foyer complete the Cordova.⁴

In 1932 a single-story brick building was built adjacent to the north elevation and the east elevation of the L-shaped Cordova Theater (see site plan). In 1938 the building was enlarged with a second floor. A pair of interior wood doors were installed in the party wall between the two buildings on the first floor in the vestibule of the theater in 1932. The doors were removed in 1958 and the north wall of the vestibule was refinished with painted sheet rock.⁵

In 1950 an Art Deco-style marquee with neon lighting was installed on the facade of the theater over the round arched clerestory window. In 1954, the ceiling was lowered over the concession stand in the lobby, a new concession stand was installed, the stage was widened to accommodate a larger movie screen, the carpet was

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replaced, and most of the original theater seats were replaced with Art Deco-style theater seating. In 1966, the vestibule, which originally had a domed ceiling and a second-floor balconette on the west wall, was remodeled with a flat ceiling, and the balconette was covered with plywood. On the second floor, the room above the vestibule was finished as a cocktail lounge. Access to the cocktail lounge was through a second-floor door located between the theater and the adjoining two-story building. In 1966 the original front doors of the theater were replaced with contemporary-compatible metal and glass units, the vestibule floor and part of the lobby floor were covered in marble tile, and the first-floor exterior on the façade was clad with aggregate marble panels.⁶ Except for street-level changes to the exterior, those described modifications to the vestibule, and the addition of a 1954 concession stand, the Cordova Theater exhibits high architectural integrity.

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SUMMARY STATEMENT

Beginning in the early 1900s, motion pictures swept the entertainment industry, upstaging the popularity of vaudeville and stage plays throughout the United States. Movie houses built specifically to showcase motion pictures were erected in a frenzy of activity across the country. The Cordova Theater, which was built in 1927 in Pullman, Washington, illustrates this phenomenon and characterizes the particular floor plans, stylistic designs, materials, decorative lighting, and building trends that were popularized with the construction of American motion picture movie houses. As an embodiment of this phenomenon, the Cordova Theater is an excellent example of the property type, "Palace-Era Theaters," as described in the National Register Multiple Property Documentation Nomination (MPD), *Movie Theaters in Washington State from 1900 to 1948*. The theater depicts defining features of the Spanish Eclectic and Art Deco styles as evidenced in the building's form, design, materials, workmanship, and architectural details. The theater possesses high artistic value and represents the work of Whitehouse & Price, one of Eastern Washington's most prominent architectural firms. During its period of significance from 1927 to 1950, the Cordova Theater represented a significant social aspect of community life and served as a cultural and social center for Pullman, and as a gathering place for nightlife. The theater united citizens of the community by playing to the masses, and cut through social, economic, and political barriers to deliver entertainment. In the context of motion picture theaters built in Pullman, Washington, and in the areas of significance, "architecture" and "entertainment/recreation," the Cordova Theater is architecturally and historically significant and meets the registration requirements of the MPD for the property type, "Palace-Era Theaters." Still in use today as a motion picture cinema, the Cordova Theater has continually shown motion pictures for 76 years and is the oldest and longest-running movie house in Pullman. It is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Pullman, Washington

Nestled in the rolling wheat fields of southeastern Washington State, Pullman was established in the late 1800s and grew quickly due to the large production of excellent wheat and grains in the area, the founding and development of Washington State College (now called Washington State University), and the convergence of railroads that passed through the area. Today the town of Pullman has over 24,000 residents and boasts an "abundance of outdoor recreation, theater and arts...and an excellent educational system." It is regarded by many as the center of the Palouse Country and home to Washington State University, Washington's first land grant university.⁷

Motion picture houses were popular in Pullman in the early 1900s and included such theaters as the Star (built in 1910), the Pullman (built in 1915, later called the Beck Theater), the Grand (built in 1915), and the Liberty Theater (built in 1919). Eventually most of the movie houses in Pullman were owned and managed by Peter William Struppler, a local real estate investor and theater entrepreneur. Struppler was born in Uniontown,

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Washington on December 22, 1889, and came to Pullman in the 1920s. He lived and worked in Pullman and was regarded by many as one of the town's most influential theater owners. He and his wife, Ruth F. Struppler, resided in their home in Pullman at 407 Paradise Street.⁸

The Cordova Theater

By 1923 only the Grand and the Liberty theaters were open in Pullman. At this time Struppler started to streamline his theater operations and began to make plans for a luxurious movie theater that would accommodate state-of-the-art motion picture technology, and would seat a large population of theater patrons. He began to plan a movie house that would put him on top of the motion picture business in Pullman. The theater that he enthusiastically promised would "be the best in the Inland Empire and modern in every detail."⁹

In 1927 Struppler put his plans into action. Whitman County warranty deeds indicate that on January 20, 1927 P. W. Struppler bought Lots 3, 4, and 5 on Block 47 in the Original Town of Pullman plat for a reported \$8,000. The lots were purchased from the Moore family, who had extensive commercial and agricultural holdings around Pullman, Walla Walla, and Moscow, Idaho. In August, Struppler secured a mortgage for \$25,000 to begin work on the construction of the Cordova Theater. An anticipatory article in the *Pullman Herald*, dated February 4, 1927, heralded the coming of the new theater and exclaimed:

Mr. Struppler plans to erect a building at a cost of \$20,000, which will be equipped with the very latest in motion picture theater equipment and to seat between 700 and 750 persons. When erected and fully equipped, the structure will represent a capital outlay of between \$40,000 and \$60,000.

Applauding Struppler and his new theater project, the *Pullman Herald* declared that "Mr. Struppler has proven himself [to be] one of the most successful theater operators in the Northwest, and his firm confidence in the future of Pullman as a show town is evidenced by his decision to invest thousands of dollars to give this city the best show house in the Inland Empire."¹⁰

One year later on February 24, 1928, the *Pullman Herald* headlined the opening of Struppler's Cordova Theater:

NEW AND ELEGANT "CORDOVA" OPENS ITS DOORS WEDNESDAY

**Master Decorator Says Structure Is
Nicer Than Any [Motion Picture] House on the Coast**

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The theater premiered with a showing of MGM's "The Student Prince," which starred Ramon Novarro and Norma Shearer. The doors opened at 6:40 pm and the show started at 7:00 pm. Men, women and children were charged 50-cents each but after the opening night, children under twelve could watch movies in the theater for 25-cents. The grand opening of the Cordova Theater drew a capacity house:

Approximately 900 persons attended the opening shows at the new Cordova Theater, Pullman's elegant new \$100,000 moving picture emporium... The grandeur of the new show house and its splendid appointments occasioned much surprise among those who were present on the opening night, the theater undoubtedly ranking with the best in the Northwest.¹¹

According to the March 2, 1928 edition of the *Pullman Herald*, the erection of the Cordova Theater was a "milestone in Pullman theater history." The article dubbed Pullman a "strictly 'Up-to-Date' city" as "evidenced by its new movie theater, the Cordova..." P. W. Struppler was publically thanked in the newspaper for the "heavy investment" he made, and was honored as a city benefactor for "making Pullman 'Up-to-Date' as far as an amusement house is concerned."

As soon as the theater opened, motion picture movies were shown to sold-out audiences. Some of the first movies shown in the theater included "A Texas Steer," starring Will Rogers; "The Pioneer Scout," starring Fred Thomson, and "What Price Glory," starring Victor McLaglen, Edmund Lowe, and Dolores Del Rio.

In 1929 the *Motion Picture News*, an international journal of the motion picture industry, garnered widespread notoriety for Pullman and the Cordova Theater. The journal described the Cordova Theater as "Pullman's magnificent picture house" and called Struppler a "well-known West Coast exhibitor." The journal carried a full-page photographic layout of the theater and extolled it as "an especially fine example of the *de luxe* type of picture playhouse applied to the small capacity theater." The journal went on to say that the Cordova Theater was "strictly modern in plan and appointments" and had a "notably handsome and attractive appearance." In response to the journal article and various other newspaper and newsletter articles, the April 19, 1929 edition of the *Pullman Herald* happily concluded that the Cordova Theater was responsible for "many columns of valuable publicity for Pullman."¹²

Always committed to providing the very best motion picture entertainment, P. W. Struppler installed a high-tech sound and projection system in the Cordova Theater in 1929. At that time advanced motion picture technology eclipsed the popularity of silent movies with the advent of "talkies." Now the actors could be heard

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as well as seen on the big screen. Theater organs, an important aspect of silent picture production, were no longer needed and soon became obsolete. As a result the Cordova's \$12,000 Robert Morton pipe organ was removed from the auditorium of the theater, stored on campus at Washington State University, and in 1962 was given to the university by Struppler and his wife Ruth.¹³

Struppler's Restaurant

In an early example of mixed use development, Struppler built in 1932 a one-story building adjacent to the Cordova Theater. The building was designed by Whitehouse & Price, the same architectural firm that designed the Cordova Theater. The adjoining one-story building was made of brick and was built with two doors that opened into the vestibule of the theater. Struppler called the new building "Struppler's Restaurant" and appointed his brother, Harry Struppler, the restaurant's manager. The restaurant quickly became a popular spot and in 1938 Whitehouse & Price designed a second-story addition to the restaurant building. The addition was built and revealed a Spanish Eclectic-style façade that was architecturally compatible with the Spanish Eclectic-style façade of the adjoining Cordova Theater. The north end of the restaurant building's first floor was leased to the Pullman Chamber of Commerce while the south end of the first floor and the entire second floor were occupied by Struppler's Restaurant. The expanded restaurant was a handy amenity for theater goers who were only too happy to pay for "dinner and a movie." Under P. W. Struppler's management, the Cordova Theater and Struppler's Restaurant proved to be two of the most successful businesses in Pullman as evidenced by their longstanding popularity with students at the university, the people of Pullman, and the surrounding Palouse Country. Finally, after achieving success as an entertainment and movie mogul in Pullman, P. W. Struppler and his wife Ruth sold the theater and restaurant and retired to Phoenix, Arizona in 1955.¹⁴

Milburn Kenworthy

On February 12, 1958 Milburn Kenworthy purchased the Cordova Theater and Struppler's Restaurant for \$85,000.¹⁵ Since 1918, the Kenworthy family has been regarded as one of the most respected theater owners in Moscow, Idaho. They owned and operated several Moscow theaters, including the Kenworthy Theater (previously called the Strand), the Idaho and Liberty Theaters, and the Crystal Theater. In 1935 Kenworthy built a motion picture house, which he named the Nu Art Theater. Significantly impacting the social life of the Moscow area, Milburn Kenworthy's theaters dominated the motion picture industry in Moscow from the 1920s through the 1960s.¹⁶

Today the Kenworthy family continues to own and manage the Cordova Theater and the adjoining Struppler's Restaurant building in Pullman. Struppler's Restaurant was in operation from 1938 to 1958 and after that, was leased by various restaurant owners. From 1965 to 1979 the restaurant was leased to Carter Babcock and was called the Royal Restaurant or Carter's Royal Restaurant, and from 1979 to 1990 the eatery was called Alex's Restaurant. In 1971 the façade of the restaurant building was remodeled with a contemporary style and new materials when part of the first floor was leased by Whitman County Mental Health. Today the first floor of the

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building is occupied by various businesses, and the second floor is vacant. In contrast, the adjoining Cordova Theater retains most of its original design and has survived the advent of home television in the 1960s as well as the construction of smaller chain theaters in suburban shopping malls in the 1970s and 1980s. Attesting to its popularity in the Pullman community and to the successful management by Struppler and the Kenworthy family, the Cordova Theater continues to operate as a movie theater.¹⁷

HISTORICAL & ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Cordova Theater is historically significant for its association with the development of motion picture movie theaters in Pullman, Washington. The Cordova Theater is architecturally significant as a fine example of the property type, "Palace-Era Theaters," and conveys designs, materials, workmanship, and building trends that were specifically adapted during the 1920s and 1930s for the construction of motion picture palace-era theaters.

MPD Registration Requirements

To be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, the Cordova Theater must meet the general registration requirements in the MPD for palace-era movie theaters and must convey its historic character in both physical and associative ways. General registration requirements include the following:¹⁸

- Documented history of the property within the context of the film entertainment industry.
- Often times designed by theater designer/decorator, architect, or architectural firm.
- Style or mix of styles applied to the design of the theater to provide a unique environment.
- Prominent façade or marquee.
- Design treatment of theater as whole.
- Exterior and interior architectural integrity.
- "Palace-Era Theater" form and plan: Part of a commercial complex.

Documented History

The Cordova Theater first meets the MPD's registration requirements as evidenced by the theater's documented history in the context of motion picture theaters in Pullman, Washington. After more than seven decades of operation, the Cordova Theater is the oldest and longest-running motion picture theater in Pullman and continues to operate today in its original intended use. The MPD explains that construction of palaces and palace-era theaters reflected the general trend in the 1920s and 1930s to exhibit film entertainment in a luxurious environment. Throughout the nation, the peak construction years were from 1925 to 1930. The largest urban areas erected the largest and most elaborate plans, but in smaller jurisdictions like Pullman, "projects similarly impacted the economy, and palace designs modified to the locale and population were executed by notable architects or from their plans" (p. F:6) Built in 1927, the Cordova Theater was erected

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during this peak construction period, and was designed by the prestigious Spokane architectural firm of Whitehouse & Price.

Whitehouse & Price, Architects

Harold Whitehouse and Ernest Price were the founders and principle architects of one of Spokane's most prolific architectural firms. The firm remained in operation for over 50 years until Price's retirement in 1964. The project list for Whitehouse & Price is vast and includes almost 2,500 entries for residential and commercial buildings. In addition to designing over 40 churches in the Spokane region, the firm was responsible for nearly 200 school designs and 16 fraternity and sorority houses, which were built on college campuses throughout Washington State, Idaho, Oregon, and Montana. Whitehouse & Price employed many architectural traditions in their designs but "revival styles" dominated their palette. One of the best residential "revival" examples is the Rosebush House which resembles designs of French farmhouses built during the 1700s and 1800s. The firm's most distinguished commercial structure is St. John's Cathedral, patterned after European Gothic cathedrals. In Spokane, Whitehouse & Price designed many notable buildings, including the Hutton Settlement, Chamber of Commerce Building, City Ramp Garage, Culmstock Arms Apartments, Lincoln Building, and the Spokane Coliseum. In conjunction with architect R. C. Reamer, Whitehouse & Price were responsible for the Fox Theater in Spokane, an excellent example of the Palace Theater type embellished in the Art Deco style.¹⁹

Spanish Eclectic Style

The Cordova Theater illustrates both traditional and non-traditional decorative concepts described in the MPD: "Traditional decorative concepts represent the treatments derived from a familiar and classically oriented style" (p. E:8). The Cordova Theater illustrates this idiom well as an excellent example of the Spanish Eclectic style. The Spanish Eclectic style borrows decorative details from the entire history of Spanish architecture, including Moorish, Byzantine, Gothic, and Renaissance inspiration. Identifying features of the style include a low-pitched or flat roof, red tile roof covering, a prominent arch or arched window placed over the front entrance, stucco wall surfaces, corbelled arches, spiral columns, patterned ceramic tiles, wood-paneled doors, decorative window grilles of wood or iron, balconies, and wrought-iron balustrades.²⁰ As described in Section 7 of this document, the Cordova Theater characterizes these elements on the exterior and the interior. Whitehouse & Price's design for the Cordova Theater is a "revival" of previous architectural traditions and captures the essence of Spanish and Moorish influences through decorative details of the Spanish Eclectic style. Interior decoration of the theater was attributed to Carl R. Berg, a "master decorator" who represented the National Theater Supply Company in Seattle. As reported in various *Pullman Herald* newspaper articles, the total cost for construction of the Cordova Theater was initially estimated to reach \$40,000 to \$60,000, but when the doors opened for the theater's premiere, the actual cost had doubled to \$100,000.²¹

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Art Deco Style, Atmospherics, and Prominent Façade & Marquee

The Cordova Theater also depicts *non-traditional* decorative concepts as evidenced in its dominant façade marquee and use of atmospheric lighting within the interior of the building. The marquee, built and installed in 1950, is an excellent example of the Art Deco style, a depiction of stylized geometric forms. With a triangular footprint that projects outward from the theater's façade, the marquee is accentuated and outlined with multi-colored neon tube illumination, a popular lighting treatment in the 1940s-1950s.

For palace and palace-era theaters, "non-traditional styles mirrored the unrestrained exuberance of the 1920s and the fascination with the mysteries of exotic and ancient cultures. Aptly named 'atmospherics and exotics,' these styles tantalized audiences, heightened their senses, and enhanced their movie-going experience... Given economic parameters, designers met the challenge of providing the sensation of atmosphere with creative lighting devices."²² This design treatment is masterfully crafted in the Cordova Theater. The cinema's interior is bathed in amber-colored atmospheric lighting, which is evidenced in diffused, low-level illumination provided by decorative wall scones and ceiling fixtures that are located in the lobby, foyer, lounge, and auditorium. The atmospheric lighting effectively stimulates the senses through subliminal manipulation, rendering a mysterious aura throughout the theater. This is especially felt in the auditorium where grand chandeliers are suspended from the vaulted ceiling. Producing soft, shadowed shapes and a rich, red glow through orange parchment shades, the large chandeliers render a hushed silence and create an exotic atmosphere, dramatically transporting theater goes to another world.

Design Treatment of Theater as a Whole

The entire design of palace-era theaters was created to stimulate patronage. The strongest "eye-catching" architectural element of the Cordova Theater was the original 1927 façade design, which is executed in the Mediterranean-inspired Spanish Eclectic style. The architectural tradition is uncommon in the Pacific Northwest and is particularly rare in Pullman, Washington. The addition of the theater's Art Deco-style marquee in 1950 also served to "catch the eye" of prospective theater goers.²³

Pedestrian-friendly public areas of palace-era theaters were arranged with thoughts to traffic patterns, and controlled the movement of customers beginning with a large recessed vestibule and prominent ticket booth. The MPD states that the lobby of these theaters was usually spacious with a grand staircase that served as a focal point. An inner foyer often separated the main lobby from the auditorium. The auditorium was usually large with stadium seating, a stage, and a proscenium with a movie screen and curtains, and a backstage that held mechanical equipment. Other spaces common to palace-era theaters included lounges, management offices, and recessed or alcoved areas that flanked the proscenium and were designed to house pipe organs or mechanical equipment. The Cordova Theater contains all of these features (see plan view of theater).²⁴

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Architectural Integrity

The Cordova Theater retains excellent architectural integrity found in its original location, setting, feeling, materials, design, workmanship, and association as a motion picture cinema in Pullman, Washington. The theater's original floor plan is intact, and as discussed in Section 7, most of the theater's original interior features are intact. Although it is not part of the original 1927 exterior façade design of the building, the large 1950 Art Deco-style marquee was installed on the front of the building during the Cordova Theater's period of significance from 1927 to 1950, and illustrates trends in film entertainment and theater design from traditional to non-traditional decorative concepts. The marquee reflects advances in cinematic marketing, advertisement, and the exhibition of movies. It contributed to the prominence of the Cordova Theater, remains a character-defining feature of the theater, and is the only theater marquee of its type in Pullman.

"Palace-Era Theater" Form & Plan—Part of a Commercial Complex

The MPD defines the property type, "Palace and Palace-Era Theaters" as the following:

The palaces represented a shift in the design treatment of the theater... Still a prominent structure along principal thoroughfares, the increased scale of the palace resulted in it dominating large blocks of property amid the central commercial cores.

The plan of the palace varied. Constructed principally as a commercial complex of which a grand theater was a part, the palace included within its plan rentable, habitable space. Occasionally the space was commercial retail and occupied the first floor area on either side of the main entrance. More frequently, the complex abutted, surrounded, or encased the theater with offices, apartments, or large commercial establishments, unifying the whole with a cohesive design of a notable style or mix of styles (p. F:6).

The MPD explains that, in contrast to grand palace theaters, *palace-era* theaters "exhibit palace-like features" but "scale...of design treatments" place them in the palace-era theater classification (p. F:6). Although it is located in a small town and was designed on a smaller scale compared to large palace theaters like the Fox Theater in Spokane, the Cordova Theater was actively promoted during its period of significance as a luxury theater and embodies characteristics that place it in the palace-era theater type.

Built in 1927, the Cordova Theater was constructed before the adjoining building was erected in 1932 and 1938. The design for the adjoining building was executed in the same Spanish Eclectic style as the Cordova Theater.

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Interior doors opened from the theater's vestibule into the adjoining building, which operated as Struppler's Restaurant. Owned and managed by P. W. Struppler, the Cordova Theater and Struppler's Restaurant comprised a large commercial complex and continued in tandem operation from 1931 to 1958 during the theater's period of significance (1927-1950). In 1971 the exterior of the restaurant building was remodeled. The exterior of the Cordova Theater, however, remained untouched. In accordance with requirements set forth in the MPD, "exceptions to the requirements of exterior integrity may be considered when the theater is part of a large commercial complex... Properties considered for exception must retain integrity of the interior character-defining features, including lobby, projection booth, and auditorium" (p. F:9). The Cordova Theater meets this requirement exception and retains architectural and historical integrity *individually*, apart from the adjoining Struppler's Restaurant building.

In summary, the Cordova Theater embodies the palace-era type of motion picture theater and tangibly demonstrates the advent of construction of motion picture houses and advanced cinematic art. It retains specific defining features (all original), which are characteristic of palace-era theaters, such as a prominent façade and marquee, a center ticket booth, a lobby, a lounge, loges, a projection room, and a large auditorium with a proscenium and stage. The theater is a fine example of the Spanish Eclectic style, one of the theater styles mentioned in the MPD, and reveals a "gradual visual progression from the outside world to the fantasy world within" (p. F:7). Although it represents the Art Deco style, the Cordova Theater's prominent marquee, installed in 1950, has achieved significance of its own through its visual connection by the public as a movie theater.

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- ² Whitman County Tax Assessor Records (Whitman County Courthouse, Colfax, WA, 17 Oct 1940) p. 1.
- ³ *Hutchinson Studio Photographs Collection of WSU and Pullman, WA from 1927-1973*. PC-123, #1204f, Cage 599, photo of Cordova Theater, dated February 1933. (Pullman, WA: WSU Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections Libraries).
- ⁴ "New and Elegant 'Cordova' Opens Its Doors Wednesday." *Pullman Herald*, 24 Feb 1928, pp. 1:1 & 6.
- ⁵ *Kenworthy Collection*. "Cordova Theater Building" and "Struppler's Restaurant Building." Plans and renderings, 1927, 1932, 1938. (Spokane, WA: Whitehouse & Price Architects); Personal interview with Bethine Kenworthy, 2003.
- ⁶ Whitman County Warranty Deeds, Bills of Sale, Document #290250, dated 10 Dec 1956. (Whitman County Courthouse, Colfax, WA), p. 4; Personal interview with Bethine Kenworthy, 2003; Whitman County Assessor Records (Whitman County Courthouse, Colfax, WA).
- ⁷ Pullman Chamber of Commerce, "Community Profile." *Pullman Chamber of Commerce Directory 2003*.
- ⁸ "William Struppler Rites To Be Conducted Friday," No newspaper name, 1967.
- ⁹ "Struppler Will Build Elegant New Theater," *Pullman Herald*, 4 Feb 1927, p. 1:1.
- ¹⁰ Ibid, p. 1:1.
- ¹¹ "New and Elegant 'Cordova' Opens Its Doors Wednesday," *Pullman Herald*, 24 Feb 1928, pp. 1:1 & 6.
- ¹² "Thoroughly De Luxe Is Cordova Theater," *Pullman Herald*, 19 April 1929, p. 1:4.
- ¹³ "Strupplers Give Old Theater Organ to WSU," *Pullman Herald*, 4 Oct 1962, p. 2:1.
- ¹⁴ "William Struppler Rites To Be Conducted Friday," No newspaper name, 1967.

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¹⁵ Personal interview with Bethine Kenworthy, 2003.

¹⁶ Julin, Suzanne and Diane Krahe. *Nu Art Theater*. National Register of Historic Places Nomination (Boise, ID: Idaho State Historic Preservation Office, 2001), p. 8:3.

¹⁷ Personal interview with Bethine Kenworthy, 2003.

¹⁸ Austin, Kay A. *Movie Theaters in Washington State from 1900 to 1948*. National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Nomination (Olympia, WA: OAHP, 1991), pp. F:6-9.

¹⁹ Woodbridge, Sally B. *Building Through Time: The Life of Harold C. Whitehouse, 1884-1974* (Portola Valley, CA: American Lives Endowment, 1981), 54:712; EWSHS. *Spokane Skyline: A Century of Architecture, 1889-1989* (Spokane: EWSHS, 1989) p. 44.

²⁰ McAlester, Virginia and Lee. *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Knopf, 1989), pp. 416-429.

²¹ "Struppler Will Build Elegant New Theater," *Pullman Herald*, 4 Feb 1927, 1:1; "Opening of Theater Draws Capacity House," *Pullman Herald*, 2 March 1928, p. 1:1.

²² Austin, Kay A. *Movie Theaters in Washington State from 1900 to 1948*. National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Nomination (Olympia, WA: OAHP, 1991) p. E:9.

²³ *Ibid*, p. F:8.

²⁴ *Ibid*, pp. F:6-9.

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PHOTOGRAPHS (all 2003 photos taken by Frank Tobie for nomination author/consultant Linda Yeomans)

Photo 1

June 2003; East façade of Cordova Theater building.

Photo 2

June 2003; East façade of Cordova Theater building.

Photo 3

June 2003; First-floor lobby grand staircase in Cordova Theater.

Photo 4

June 2003; First-floor foyer and hallway in Cordova Theater.

Photo 5

June 2003; First-floor foyer, entrance to auditorium in Cordova Theater.

Photo 6

June 2003; Cordova Theater auditorium, looking north.

Photo 7

June 2003; Cordova Theater auditorium truss, stencil painting.

Photo 8

June 2003; Cordova Theater chandelier in auditorium.

Photo 9

June 2003; Cordova Theater auditorium balconette above northwest exit, looking northwest.

Photo 10

1950 image; Cordova Theater, east façade, and south half of adjoining Struppler's Restaurant building.

Photo 11

February 1933 image; East façade of Cordova Theater.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Part of Lots 3, 4, and all of Lot 5 in Block 47, Original Town of Pullman Addition, Pullman, Washington in Whitman County.

VERBAL BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nominated property includes the west 55 feet of Lots 3 and 4, and all of Lot 5 which are historically associated with the Cordova Theater.

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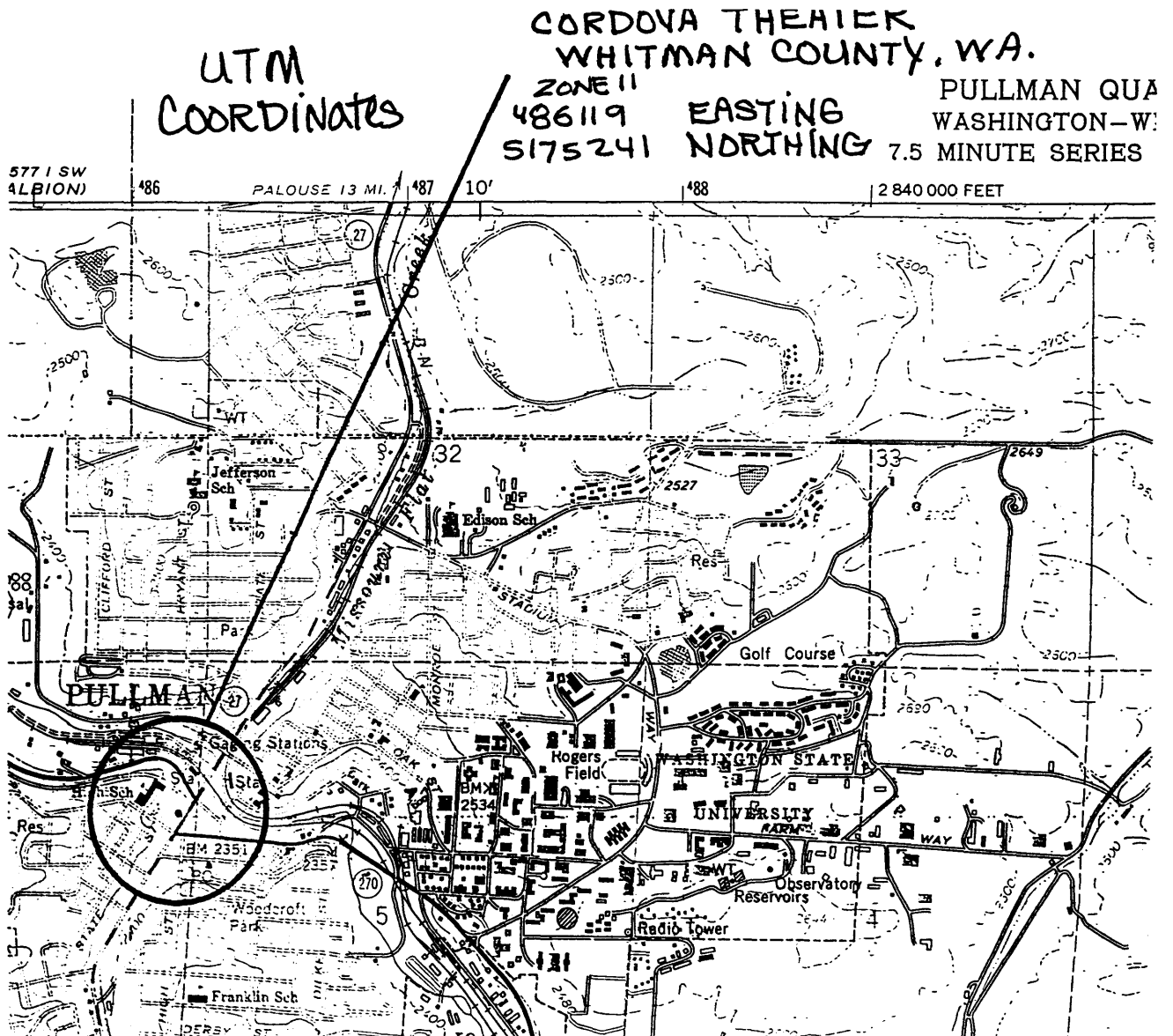
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USGS Map

Cordova Theater, North 135 Grand Avenue, Pullman, WA.
UTM coordinates: 486119 easting, 5175241 northing

Pullman Quadrangle, WA, Whitman County, 7.5 minute
series topographic map, 1:24,000



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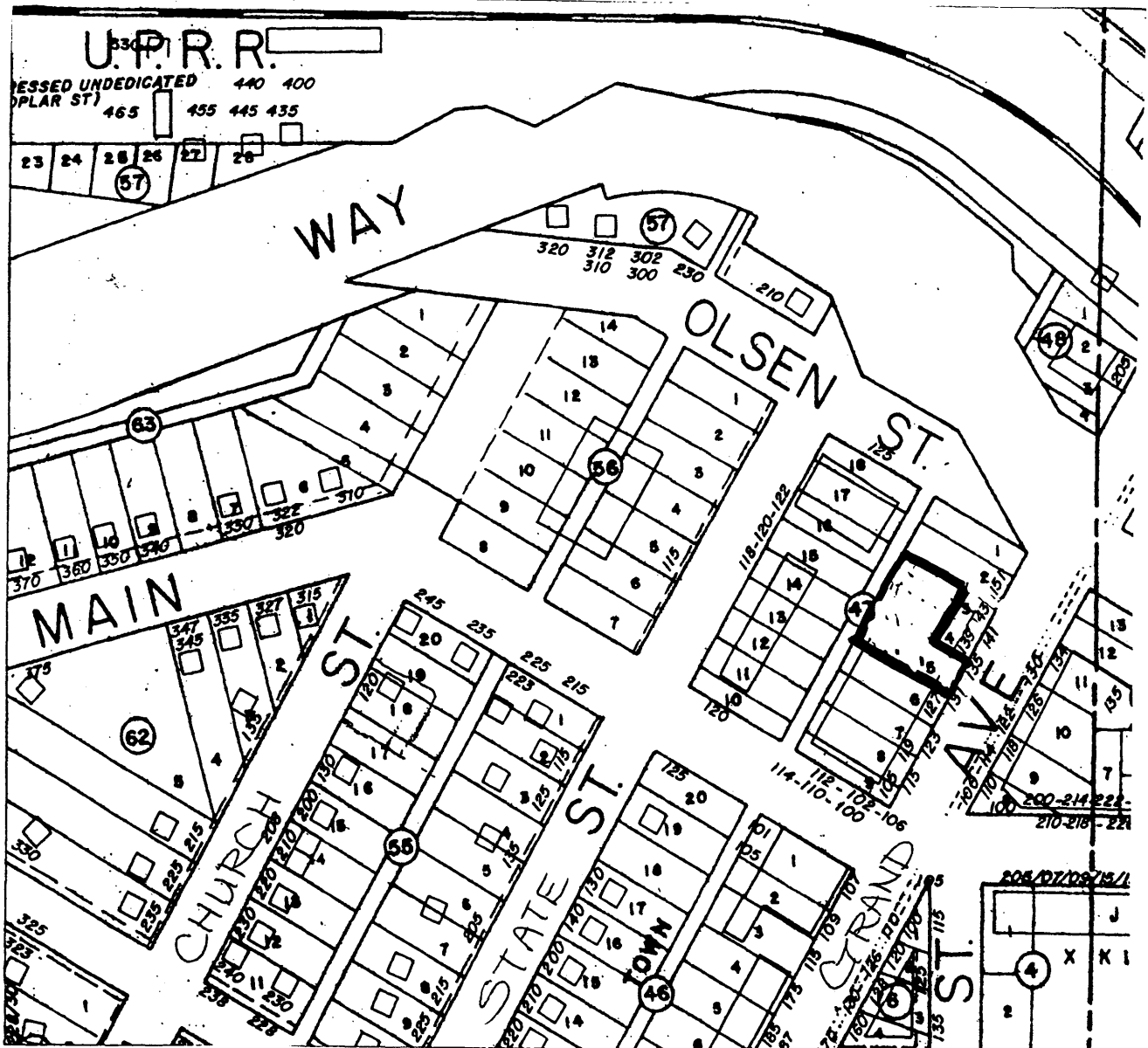
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Plat Map

Circa 2003 plat map, picturing site for Cordova Theater, Lots 3-4-5, Block 47, Original Town of Pullman (Source: City of Pullman Planning Department).



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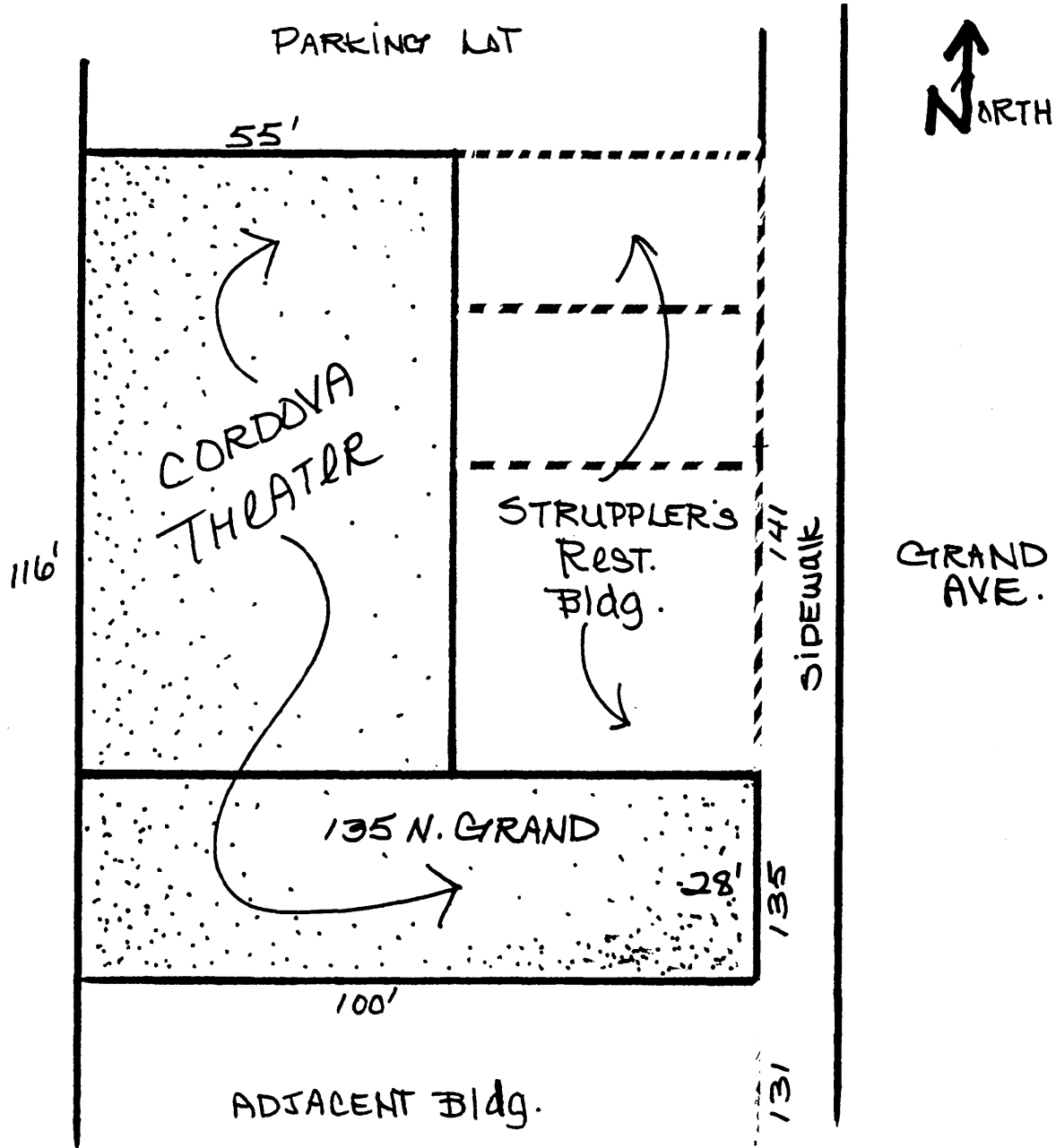
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Site Plan Map

C. 2003 site plan map of Cordova Theater in Pullman, WA
(source: Whitman County Assessor's records, Whitman
County Courthouse, Colfax, WA).



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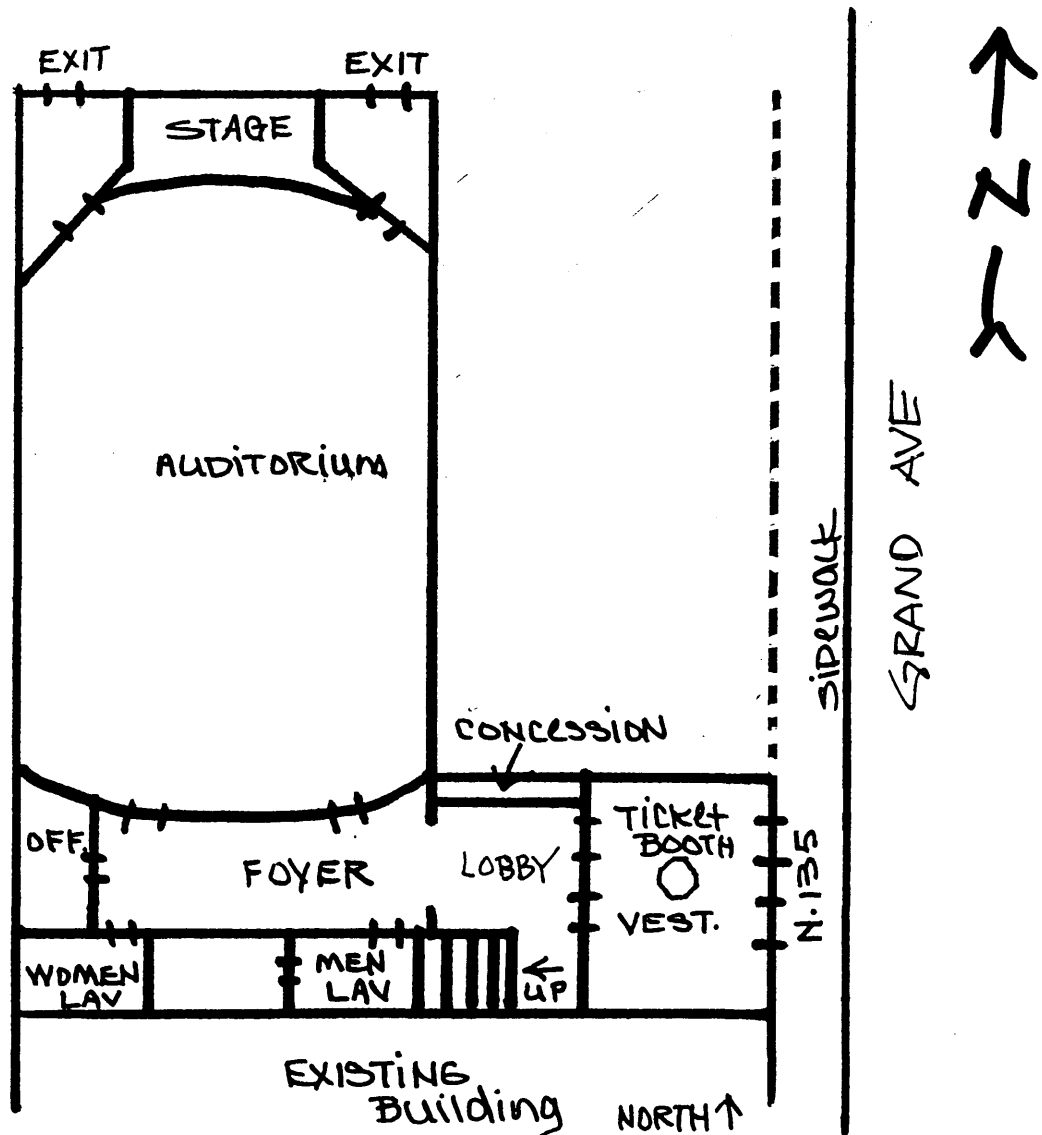
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Floor Plan

First Floor of Cordova Theater (not to scale).



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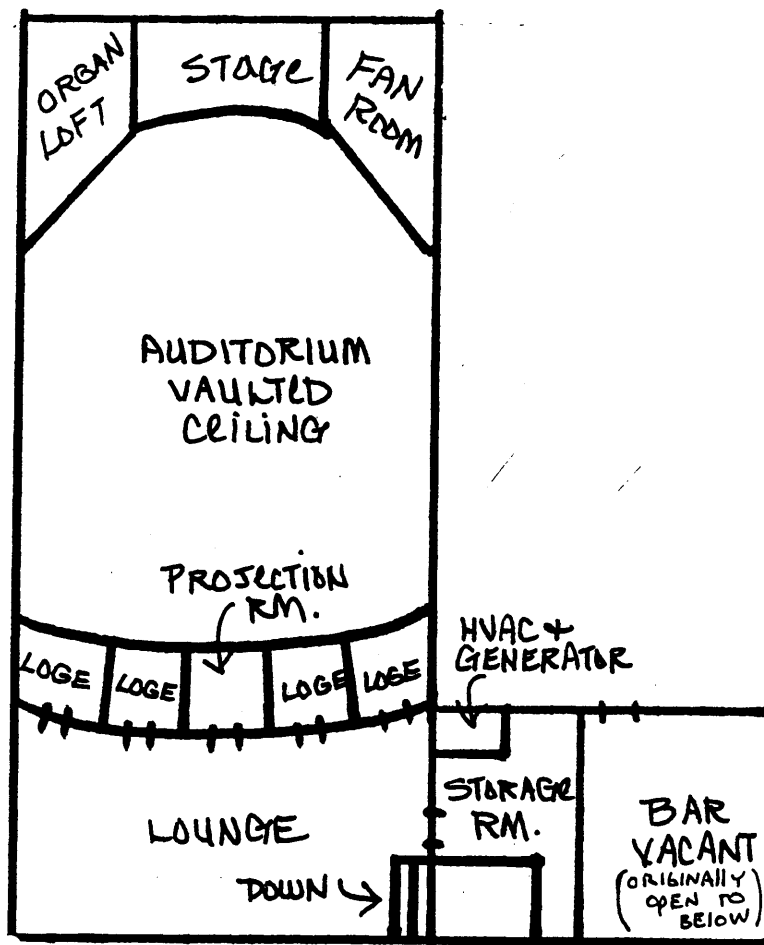
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Floor Plan

Second Floor of Cordova Theater (not to scale).



ADJACENT Bldg.

NORTH ↑

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Photo 1

East façade of Cordova Theater; photo taken in 2003.



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Photo 2

East façade of Cordova Theater; photo taken in 2003.



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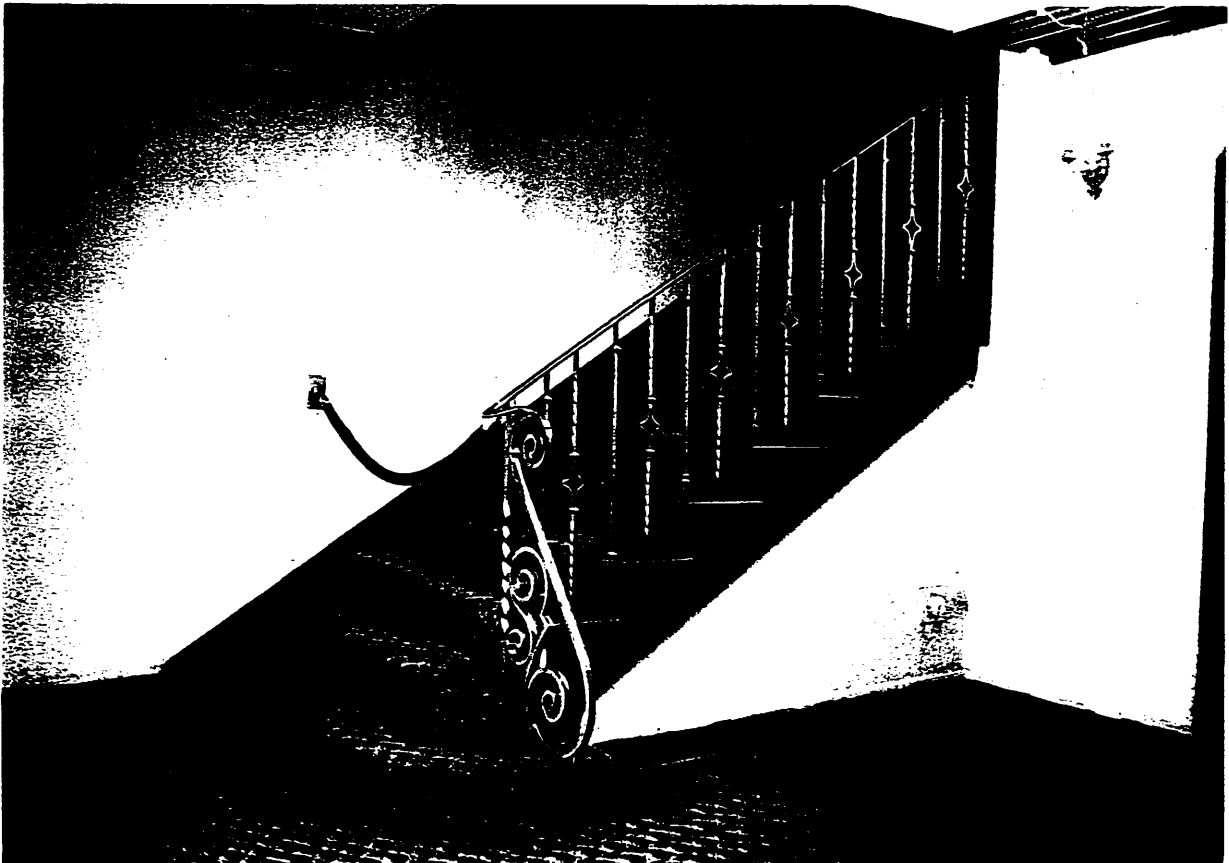
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Photo 3

Stairs from first floor to second floor, looking southwest in Cordova Theater; photo taken in 2003.



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Photo 4

Lobby and hallway on first floor of Cordova Theater, looking west; photo taken in 2003.



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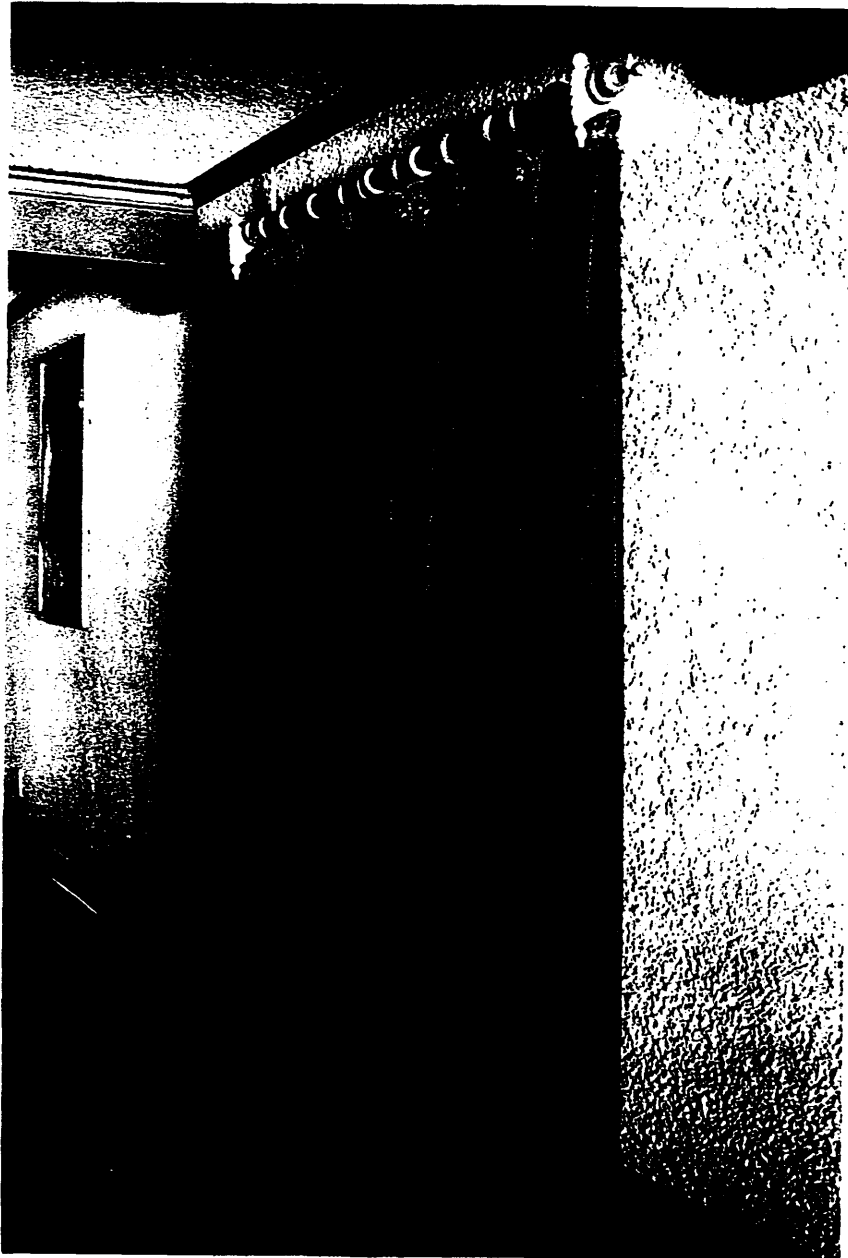
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Photo 5

Curtained entrance to Cordova Theater auditorium from lobby and hallway, photo taken in 2003.



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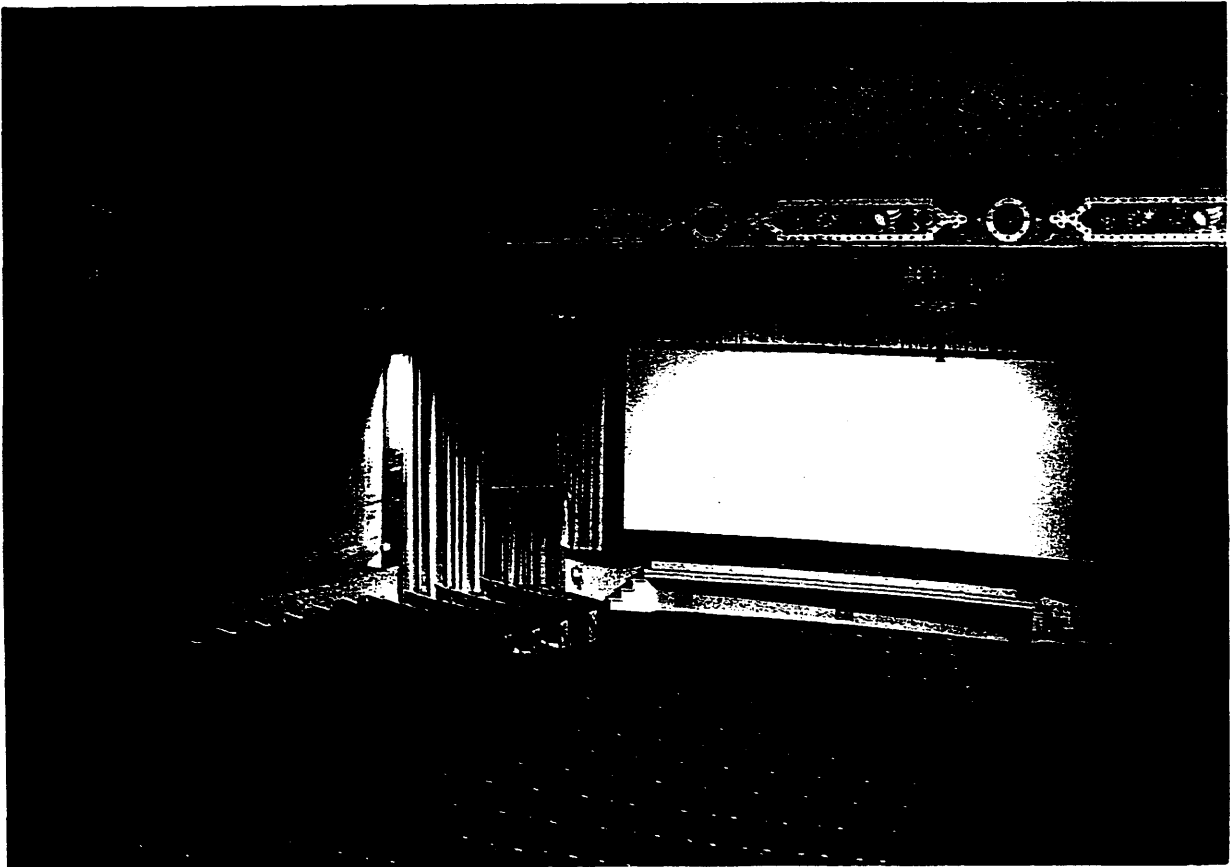
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Photo 6

Auditorium of Cordova Theater, looking north, photo taken in 2003.



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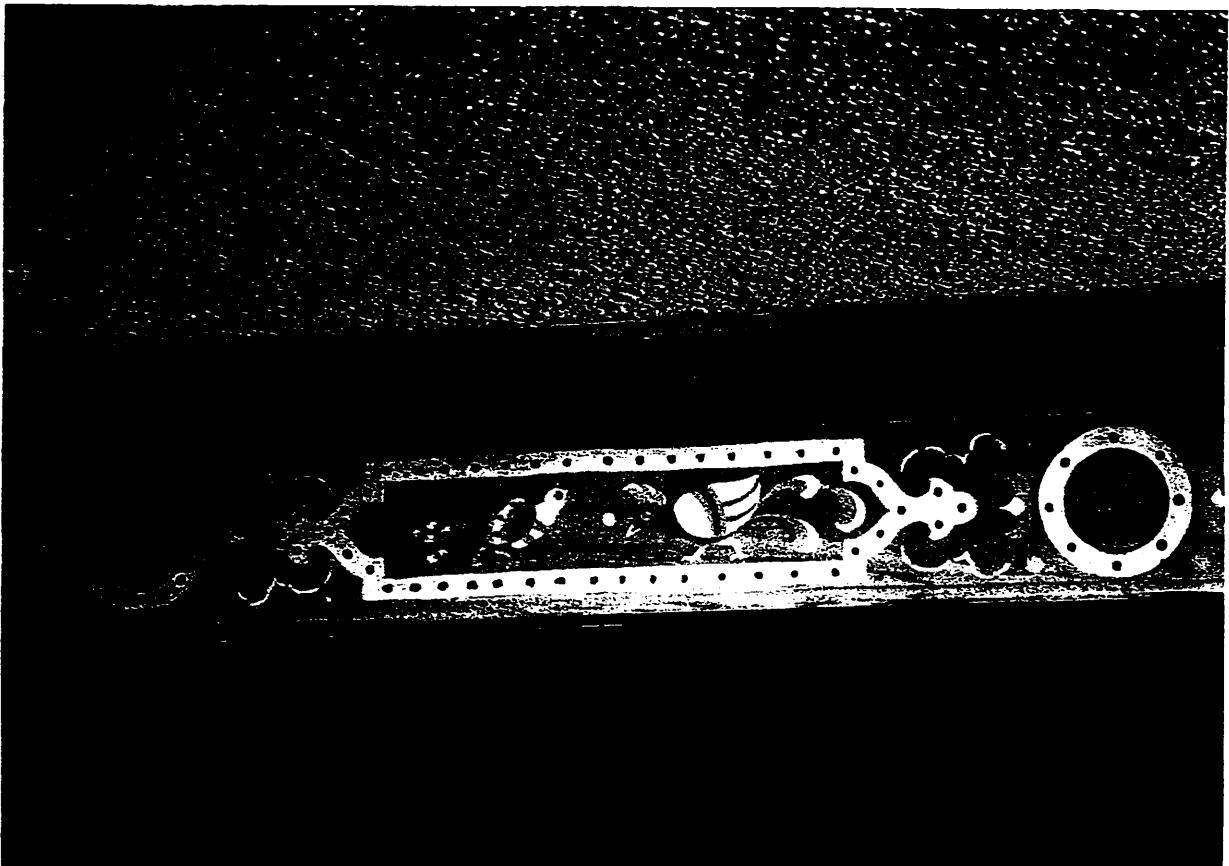
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Photo 7

Auditorium ceiling and beam detail, showing stenciled painting on beam, photo taken in 2003.



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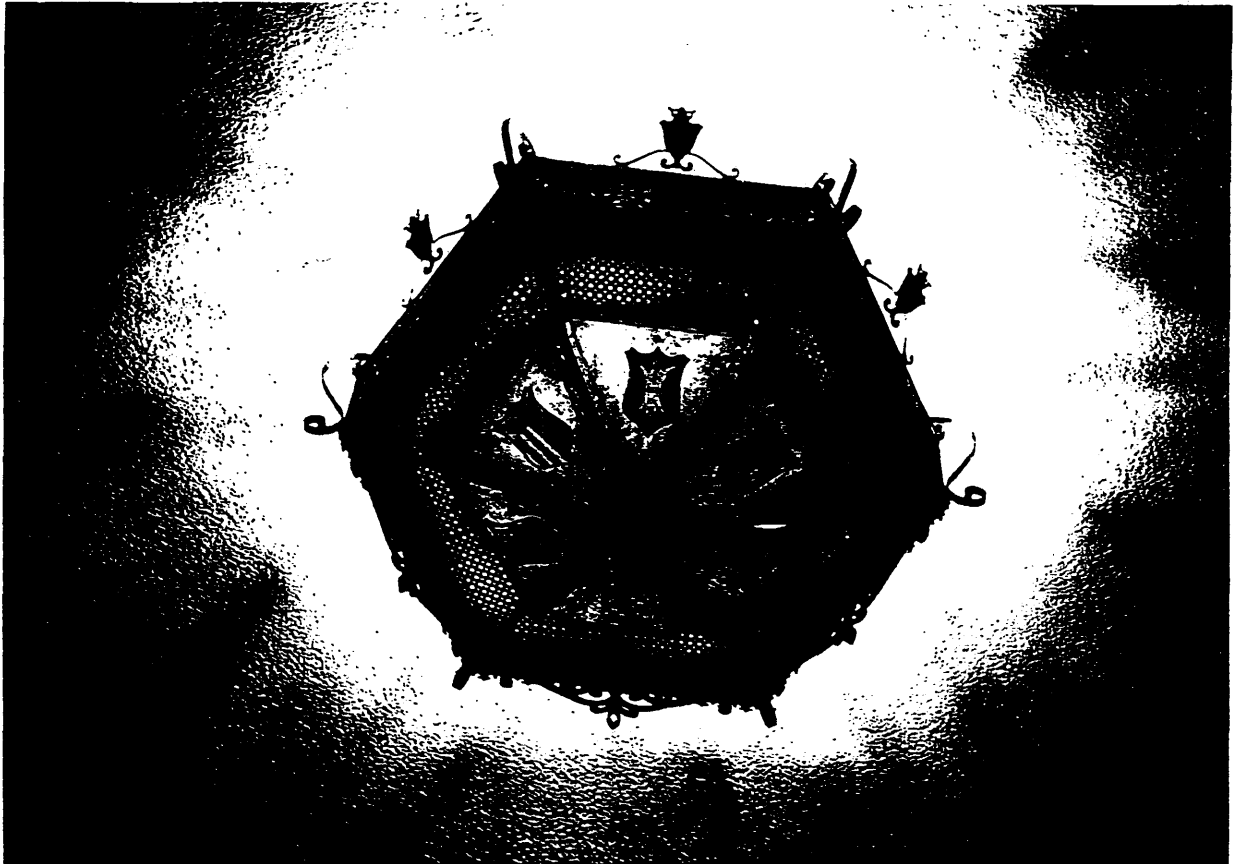
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CORDOVA THEATER
Whitman County, Washington

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

Photo 8

Original ceiling light fixture in Cordova Theater auditorium,
photo taken in 2003.



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Whitman County, Washington

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Photo 9

Cordova Theater auditorium, looking northwest at corner adjacent to stage, photo taken in 2003.



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CORDOVA THEATER
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ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

Photo 10

East façade of Cordova Theater pictured in a c. 1950s photograph. Struppler's Restaurant is pictured on the right.



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CORDOVA THEATER
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Photo 11

East façade of Cordova Theater pictured in a c. 1933 photograph. Note: this is the original façade design before the c. 1950s remodel, which features an Art Deco style marquee.



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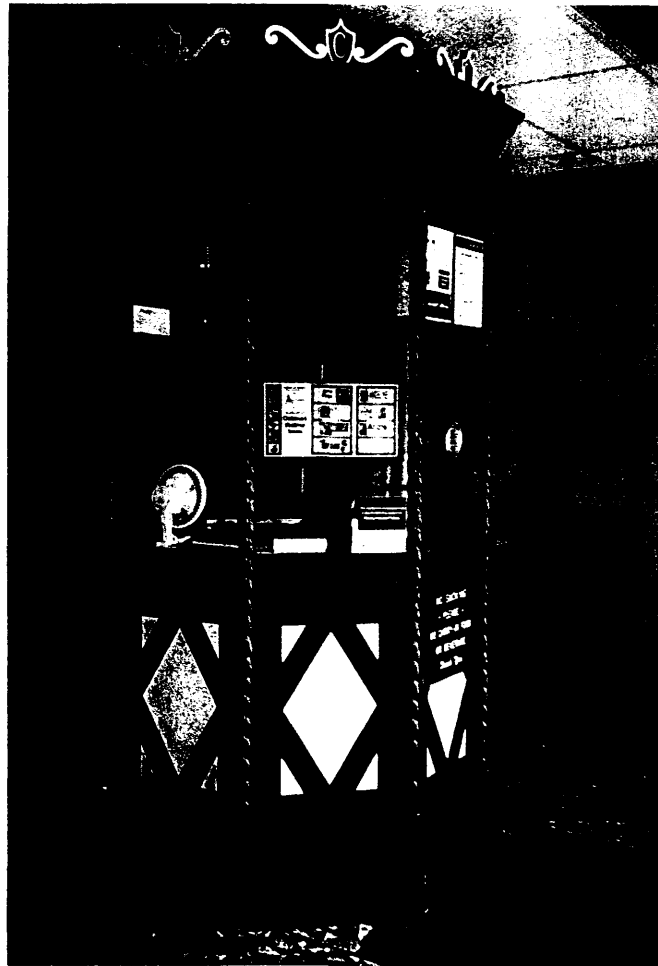
CORDOVA THEATER

Whitman County, Washington

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

Photo 13

Original 1927 ticket booth located in center of vestibule,
Cordeva Theater. Photo taken in 2003.



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Photo 12 East façade of Cordova Theater as drawn in 1927 rendering
by Whitehouse & Price, Architects, Spokane.

