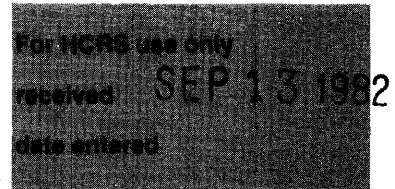


**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**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 Fargo Theatre Building

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 314 Broadway not for publication

city, town Fargo vicinity of congressional district 1

state North Dakota code 38 county Cass code 017

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" 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	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military <input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Thomas Powers 1617 South 7th, Fargo, and

street & number Mrs. Urban Powers as representative of

Peter Elliott Estate, 702 Broadway, Fargo state North Dakota

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Cass County Courthouse

street & number 211 9th Street South

city, town Fargo state North Dakota

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date N/A federal state county local

depository for survey records N/A

city, town N/A state N/A

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Fargo Theatre is a two-story concrete and masonry commercial block with a 72-foot frontage on Broadway, Fargo's main commercial street.

The front facade, clad in a red face brick, was symmetrical in appearance and sat on a base of limestone, approximately one foot in height. Entrance doors and a box office occupied the center at street level and were flanked by a small storefront shop and a pair of exit doors on each side. Above the exits, stone consoles visually supported cornices, each of which were terminated at the top with a decorative cartouch.

The second level is rhythmically articulated by large windows with a vertical four-over-four sash configuration, set deep within brick piers. Here, arched stone hood moldings spring from a molded stone impost course and end in highly detailed keystones. Six of the tympanums formed by the arches are infilled with brick in a herringbone pattern while the three in the center are glazed. Directly above, stone dentil work forms a decorative building cornice and the facade is completed in a stepped stone coping.

Protruding from the wall between the arches are stone faces with grotesque expressions, their mouths open to accept the hanger rods of the marquee. The original marquee was square, and at sometime was replaced by the existing diagonal version that flows upward to an illuminated sign approximately 36 feet in height.

Inside, a central lobby opened to a mezzanine level and was richly adorned with colored mirrors, a large crystal chandelier and numerous art panels. The auditorium was furnished with seats of Spanish leather and seated 1,300 patrons on the main level and in a balcony.

In 1937 a renovation of the theatre's interior was undertaken and a sleek, streamlined appearance replaced the elegant finishes of the 1920's. The interior of the auditorium was transformed into a composition of planery surfaces superimposed upon each other, particularly in the corbeled treatment of the proscenium arch, in the sinuous curves of the ceiling and in the horizontal coursings of neon light on the side walls.

The modern, art deco style was carried through to the lobby and mezzanine as well. At this time the two shops were incorporated into a larger lobby and the entrance was moved to the side.

A third, but comparatively minor renovation was made later, probably in the 1950's, which gave the first level of the front facade its existing appearance.

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/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1926, 1937 **Builder/Architect** Buechner and Orth; Liebenberg and Kaplan

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The significance of the Fargo Theatre is derived from its continuing association with the community as a social and entertainment center, from its unique blend of architectural styles, and from the forces and events that contributed to both.

Constructed in 1926, the building was owned by T. F. Powers and Peter Elliott, prominent Fargo businessmen. Architects for the project were Buechner and Orth,¹ a Twin Cities firm who had gained a reputation in the state by designing no less than 13 county courthouses.

The Fargo Theatre was considered at the time of its construction to be the finest of nearly 100 theatres operated by the St. Paul firm of Finkelstein and Ruben, a vanguard in the motion picture industry. When uniformed attendants opened the doors on March 15, patrons were greeted with "brilliant lights, bewitching architectural beauty, and symphonic music."² Booked for the auspicious opening was a customary blend of stage and screen entertainment, enhanced by the theatre's 10-piece concert orchestra. Since motion pictures had not yet learned the art of talking, a large new Wurlitzer Theatre organ allowed a talented organist the ability to interpret any mood or expression of the silent "photoplays."

The theatre continued to offer a variety of shows through the years. In addition to silent movies (accompanied by the incomparable Hildigard on the mighty Wurlitzer) the Fargo accommodated numerous vaudeville acts, music reviews, high wire acts, and personal appearances by Hollywood stars. Notables featured include Babe Ruth, Boris Karloff, Lyle Talbot, Alan Dinehart, Glenda Farrell, Gig Young and Robert Young. Western star, Tom Mix, delighted audiences by appearing on stage with his horse.³

In addition, the popular WDAY radio show, "Barndance," was broadcast live from the theatre. The swells and tremolos of Hildigard's music were captured in homes and businesses throughout the area, filling in between a variety of talk, music, and comedy routines.

The advent of "talkies," however, coupled with the economic conditions of the depression, caused the grand theatre to undergo numerous changes in the 1930's. Hildigard now played only preludes to the new films with a sound of their own. Also, manager Ed Krause finally conceded to the sale of concessions when dwindling attendance demanded that new sources of revenue be sought. Krause had been resisting the trend for years, arguing that it was not conducive to the proper movie palace atmosphere.

But the major change in the theatre did not take place until 1936, when a new owner, the Minnesota Amusement Company, attempted to breath new life into it by renovating its interior. To accomplish this, the owners commissioned the firm of Liebenberg and Kaplan, Minneapolis architects, who were already well known as movie theatre designers.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property Less than 1 acre.

Quadrangle name Fargo North

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A

1	4	6	6	8	5	7	0	5	1	9	3	9	1	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C

Zone			Easting				Northing							

D

Zone			Easting				Northing							

E

Zone			Easting				Northing							

F

Zone			Easting				Northing							

G

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H

Zone			Easting				Northing							

Verbal boundary description and justification

Lots 6, 7, 8 of Roberts #2 Addition to Fargo

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

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

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Steven C. Johnson

organization N/A

date May 27, 1982

street & number 505 7th Avenue North, #9

telephone 237-6483

city or town Fargo

state North Dakota

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature James E. Shery

title State Historic Preservation Officer

date August 17, 1982

For HCRS use only

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

Bill Lawrence date 11/21/82

Keeper of the National Register

Affest: date

Chief of Registration

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date entered

Continuation sheet

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Jack Liebenberg, design principle of the partnership, began his career while in Minneapolis working on the front doors of the Lemington Hotel for his employer, a Milwaukee sash and door manufacturer. Learning of the new Department of Architecture being established at the University of Minnesota, Liebenberg registered as its first student in 1912. Earning a graduate degree from Harvard, he won the coveted Prix De Rome, but was unable to study in Europe due to the outbreak of World War I. Returning to Minneapolis, Liebenberg taught at the University of Minnesota and set up a practice with Mr. Kaplan. Together they designed a reported 200 theatres in sixteen states.⁴

Although the primary intent of the Fargo Theatre renovation was to better accommodate the technological advances of the preceding eleven years, it must be noted that major changes had also taken place in the practice of architecture during that short time. It is not surprising that a well trained architect such as Liebenberg would embrace the new theories of the modern movement. It is even less surprising he would put them to use in buildings such as movie theatres, where new technology and a new aesthetic could easily go hand in hand. The Fargo Forum of March 26, 1937 reads:

"From the critical point of view, Mr. Liebenberg states that the design of the new theatre is the forerunner of architectural expression in which the basic functional elements of the theatre have been brought into close harmony with good proportion, large mass, exquisite color and unique lighting effects.

'No simple problem," said Mr. Liebenberg, 'was this transformation in which an architectural orge of the past belonging to the ancient hierarchy of the architectural baroque was treated and ministered to in the fountain of architectural youth, commonly called the international or modern style."

There is little doubt that the relative austerity of the modern streamlined design was seen by the public as a sign of the times. Conversely, it was recognized by some as an exciting preface to new and better times. The same issue of the Forum, in describing the integration of lighting in the design, states:

"In this particular achievement alone, the architects of the Fargo have paved the way for much that will be new for some time to come."

Today the theatre has won the acclaim of historians studying the art deco style. Early drawings are part of an exhibition of Liebenberg and Kaplans' work currently traveling the region. Herbert Sherer of the University of Minnesota states that the theatre is a "masterpiece" of the art deco style and is particularly enthused about its grand scale, as most deco theatres are smaller. Sherer considers it "one of the most exciting projects completed by L & C," and Liebenberg himself is said to have viewed it as a triumph.⁶

More importantly, however, is the association the theatre continues to maintain with the community. WDAY utilized its exceptional acoustics for broadcasting and for talent shows well into the 1960's. As the only remaining general attraction theatre on Broadway, the Fargo is admired and enjoyed by many.

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In the 1970's the local chapter of the American Organ Society painstakingly restored the real "soul" of the Fargo Theatre, the mighty Wurlitzer. Today members of the Society, including "the incomparable Hildigard" revive the theatre's past by playing preludes to current attractions and by promoting frequent "silent movie nights."

In 1926, firm star, Coleen Moore, sent a telegram to Fargo on the theatre's opening night stating:

"Heaps of success to you and the new Fargo Theatre. Wish I could be there but I must keep busy and make some more pictures for your screen." 2

More than a half century later Coleen Moore appeared on the theatre stage as a guest for silent movie night. Clearly, the Fargo Theatre continues to lend a continuity to entertainment in Fargo.

Footnotes:

1. Telephone interview with Thomas Powers
2. Fargo Forum, March 15, 1926
3. Interview with Hildigard Kraus
4. Telephone interview with Jack Liebenberg, architect
5. Telephone interview with Herbert Sherer, art librarian, University of Minnesota; guest curator of catalogue, "Marquee on Main Street;" co-author of television documentary, "Streamline Dreams" KTCA, St. Paul, Minnesota
6. Telephone interview with Alan K. Lathrop, curator, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota

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Page 3

Fargo Forum, March 15, 1926.

Hildigard Kraus, 1529 S. 6th, Fargo, ND, telephone interview, May 20, 1982, personal interview, May 26, 1982.

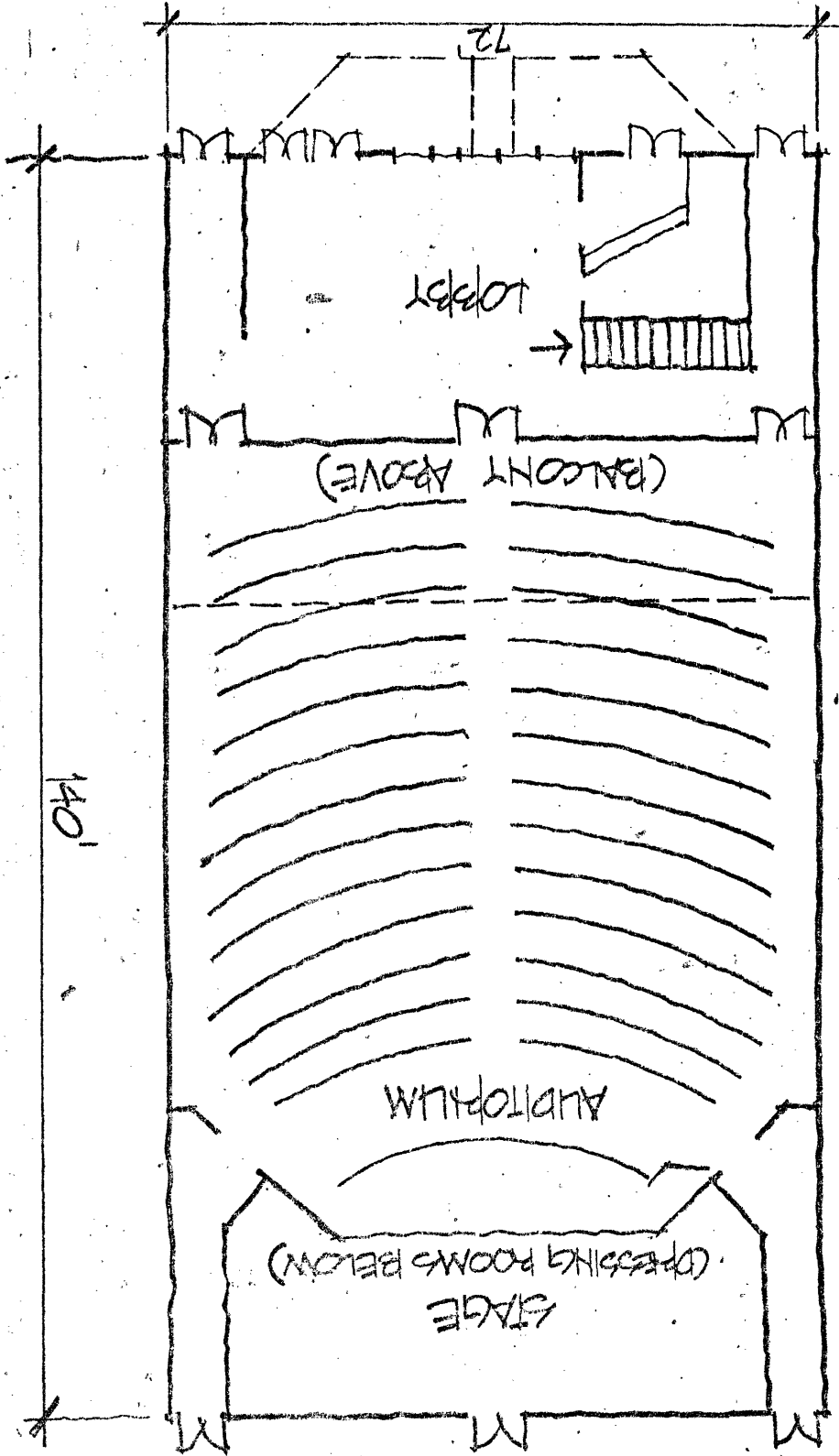
Alan K. Lathrop, Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota, telephone interview, March, 1982.

Jack Liebenberg, 5112 Ridge Road, Minneapolis, Minnesota, telephone interview, May 8, 1982.

Thomas Powers, 1617 S. 7th, Fargo, ND, telephone interview, May 26, 1982.

Herbert Scherer, Art Librarian, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota, telephone interview, May 20, 1982.

PROSCENIUM



140'

72'

(BALCONY ABOVE)

LOBBY

AUDITORIUM

(DRESSING ROOMS BELOW)

STAGE