NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

| This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations or Completing National Register Forms" (National Register Bulletin requested information. If an item does not apply to the property be areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories Type all entries. | 16). Complete each item by marking being documented, enter "N/A" for "no s listed in the instructions. | "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the t applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and |
|---|--|--|
| 1. Name of Property | | |
| historic name Albany Theatre other names/site number N/A | , NAT R | GISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES |
| 2. Location | | |
| street & number107 North Jackson Strcity, townAlbanycountyDoughertycodestateGeorgiacode | | ()vicinity of |
| () not for publication | | |
| 3. Classification | | |
| Ownership of Property: | Category | of Property: |
| (X) private () public-local () public-state () public-federal | (X) buildi () distric () site () struct () objec | ure |
| Number of Resources within Property: | Contributing | Noncontributing |
| buildings sites structures objects total | 1 0 0 1 | 0 0 0 0 0 |
| Contributing resources previously listed Name of previous listing: N/A Name of related multiple property listing | | er: N/A |

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination 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 the National Register criteria. () See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying officia

W. Ray Luce Historic Preservation Division Director Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

In my opinion, the property () meets () does not meet the National Register criteria. () See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

State or Federal agency or bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

| I, hereby, certify that this property is: | | |
|--|---------------------------------|--------|
| entered in the National Register | John C | 812166 |
| () determined eligible for the National Register | V | |
| () determined not eligible for the National Register | | |
| () removed from the National Register | | |
| () other, explain: | | |
| () see continuation sheet | Keeper of the National Register | Date |

1. le Ole

Date

Date

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions:

RECREATION AND CULTURE/THEATER/MOVIE THEATER/PLAYHOUSE

Current Functions:

WORK IN PROGRESS

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS/CLASSICAL REVIVAL

Materials:

| foundation | Brick |
|------------|---------|
| walls | Brick |
| roof | Asphalt |
| other | N/Å |

Description of present and historic physical appearance:

The Albany Theatre (photograph 1) was constructed in 1927 in downtown Albany to serve as a movie house and live performance theater. The theater was constructed on a lot behind an existing twostory retail and office building that was extensively remodeled and became the entrance arcade for the theater. The two-story retail portion of the building (photographs 1, 5, and 18) features elements of the Classical Revival style including a symmetrical facade. The first floor veneer has been removed, however the storefront display windows and door openings remain intact (photograph 1). The second floor (photograph 1) is covered in a yellow brick veneer and features five bays divided by brick pilasters topped by classical capitals. There are four windows on the second floor topped by stone panels each featuring a carved detail. The cornice of the facade features a dentil course and a stone band with "ALBANY THEATRE" engraved in the center. To the south of the main entrance is an arched opening (photograph 1) that opens into an alley (photograph 2) that leads to the entrance historically associated with African-American patrons (photograph 10). A separate ticket window (photograph 10) is present at this entrance. The south façade of the building (photograph 2, right) is red brick and contains window openings at the second floor level. The rear portion of the building (photograph 3), which contains the theater, was originally constructed of brick, however a 1941 tornado damaged the exterior of the building and the south and west facades were finished with stucco. The north facade shares a party wall with the adjacent building.

The interior of the retail portion of the building contains an entrance arcade that was flanked by eight stores, four on each side (photograph 6). Each store had a separate entrance from the arcade. The original store entrances and display window openings remain intact. Most of the original mosaic tile floor also remains (photographs 6 and 9). The ticket kiosk which was originally located in the center of the arcade was removed and a ticket window was installed at the rear of the arcade near the

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

() nationally () statewide (X) locally

Applicable National Register Criteria:

(X) A () B (X) C () D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): () N/A

| | () A | () B | () C | () D | () E | () F | (X) G |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------|--------------|-------|-------|
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------|--------------|-------|-------|

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions):

Architecture Commerce Entertainment/Recreation Ethnic Heritage/Black Social History

Period of Significance:

1927-1959

Significant Dates:

1927-Construction date of the building

Significant Person(s):

N/A

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect(s)/Builder(s):

Roy A. Benjamin, architect A.E. Ittner, builder/contractor

9. Major Bibliographic References

"Albany Theater Easily one of the Most Beautiful Anywhere in Southwest." <u>Albany Herald</u>, September 10, 1927.

"Charles "Buddy" Rogers Plays at Albany Today Only." <u>Albany Herald</u>, November 12, 1939.

Chatmon, Tommy, Sr. Civil Rights Activist/Citizen, Albany, Georgia. Interview by, Lisa Love, November 28, 1999.

Crosby/Photographs . Albany Herald, January 29, 1939.

Cyriaque, Jeanne. "Public/Private Partnership Reclaims the Albany Theatre." <u>Reflections</u>, Volume I, No. 3, May, 2001.

Dent, Selenia. Albany State University, Albany, Georgia. Interview July 21, 2000.

Dougherty County, Georgia. Dougherty County Clerk of Court. Deed Book 1786, Page 050.

"Early Morning Twister Ravages Business and Residential Section." <u>Albany Herald</u>, February 10, 1940.

"The Famous Cab Calloway Comes To Albany." Albany Herald, February 9, 1940.

Farkas, Leonard. Farkas Estate, Albany, Georgia. Interview by James Miller, January , 1997ongoing.

Garcia, Matt, and Alton Hornsby, Jr., Steven Lawson, and Susan Cianci Salvatore. "Civil Rights in America Theme Study: Racial Desegregation of Public Spaces (Draft)." <u>National Register Multiple</u> <u>Property Documentation Form</u>, February, 2004.

"Grand Stairway of the Albany Theater." Albany Herald, September 10, 1927.

Jenkins, Mary Royal. Open Dem Cells: A Pictorial History of the Albany Movement, 2000.

King, Carol. Citizen, Albany, Georgia. Interview by, Lisa Love, January 9, 2000.

Lee, Ira Buddy. Seminole Appraisal, Thomasville, Georgia, November 26, 1997.

Malone, Thomas W. Attorney -at- Law, Atlanta, Georgia. Interview by, Lisa Love December 20, 1999.

Poitier, Sidney. Actor, Beverly Hills, California. Interview by, James R. Miller, February 10, 2000.

Taylor, Walter Q. KBJ Architects, Jacksonville, Florida. Interview by Tijuana Brewer, February 10, 2000.

Troutman, Occie. Citizen, Albany, Georgia. Interview by, Lisa Love, December 5, 1999.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

UTM References

A) Zone 16 Easting 770112 Northing 3496868

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property is indicated on the attached map by a heavy black line.

Boundary Justification

The boundary of the nominated property follows the current legal boundary and includes the retail arcade and theater building.

11. Form Prepared By

State Historic Preservation Office

name/title Holly L. Anderson, National Register Historian
organization Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources
mailing address 34 Peachtree Street, N.W., Suite 1600
city or town Atlanta state Georgia zip code 30303
telephone (404) 656-2840 date June 7, 2006
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Consulting Services/Technical Assistance (if applicable) () not applicable

name/title James R. Miller, President, and Willie McMillan organization Oglethorpe Development Group, Inc. mailing address P.O. Box 4711 city or town Albany state Georgia zip code 31706 telephone (912)446-1220 e-mail

- (X) property owner
- () consultant
- () regional development center preservation planner
- () other:

Property Owner or Contact Information

name (property owner or contact person) James R. Miller, President organization (if applicable) Oglethorpe Development Group, Inc. mailing address P.O. Box 4711 city or town Albany state Georgia zip code 31706 e-mail (optional)

Section 7--Description

entrance to the theater lobby (photograph 9). The ticket window opening is arched with a fanlight transom. The second floor of the retail portion of the building contained offices that were accessed by a stairway in the northeast corner of the building. The individual office spaces have been removed and the second floor is currently unfinished (photographs 7 and 8).

Three sets of paneled double doors (photograph 11) at the end of the arcade lead into the theater lobby. The doors are topped by an entablature that supports three round arches each containing a carved detail. The lobby features an ornamental plaster frieze with scrolls, acanthus leaves, shields, and egg-and-dart motifs (photograph 11). The walls are divided into panels by fluted pilasters and the sections contain a chair rail with applied panel molding above (photograph 11). The staircase (photograph 12) leading to the mezzanine and balcony levels is to the right of the lobby entrance. The mezzanine walls are similar to those in the lobby with chair rail and panel molding.

The auditorium balcony and gallery contain tiered and slanted seating levels (photograph 14). The ceiling features recessed domes that contained colored art-glass and tracery frames that were backlit (photographs 13 and 17). Also located in the balcony is the "crow's nest" (photograph 15, center background), the seating area reserved for African-American patrons. This seating area was accessed by the separate street entrance on the south facade of the building (photograph 10). This seating section is at the rear of the balcony next to the projection booth (photograph 16) and has the only original seating remaining in the theater. The main level of the auditorium is highly decorative and features chair rail and panel molding (photograph 14). The cornice of the main auditorium features radiating half-fans, a dentil course, and crown molding. The stage (photograph 13), located at the north end of the auditorium, features an arched opening decorated with an ornamental plaster band of intertwined half circles. The orchestra pit (photograph 13), located in front of the stage, is separated from the seating area by a wooden balustrade. A nine-pipe ebony lacquer organ was located in the orchestra pit during the historic period. The organ chamber grill boxes (photograph 13, far right) are located to each side of the stage. The ceiling in the main part of the auditorium features a 26-foot center medallion (photograph 17). A crystal and bronze chandelier hangs from the center of the medallion. Four smaller medallions with smaller chandeliers surround the center medallion. Much of the interior is in a deteriorated condition. The theater operated until the early 1970s. After being vacant for three decades, the theater is now undergoing major rehabilitation and restoration, based to a large degree upon the original 1927 architectural blueprints.

Section 8--Statement of Significance

Statement of significance (areas of significance)

The Albany Theatre, constructed in downtown Albany in 1927, was a focal point of community arts and entertainment during the historic period. The theater is significant in the area of architecture as a good example of an early 20th-century theater constructed in south Georgia. Character-defining features of the Classical Revival style include the symmetrical facade, pilasters with classical capitals supporting a prominent frieze, and multi-light, double-hung-sash windows. Interior features include the original mosaic tile floor and ticket windows in the entrance arcade. Historic features associated with the theater portion of the building include lobby details such as paneled doors, plaster work, and the original staircase, as well as plaster details, chandeliers, and portions of the original seating. The Albany Theatre is somewhat unusual in that it incorporated an existing two-story commercial building into the 1927 theater complex. Although many theaters in Georgia's cities and towns were built all in one piece, adaptations of existing buildings are not uncommon; indeed the state's most famous 1920s movie theater. The Fox Theater in Atlanta-a National Historic Landmark-is an adaptation of the Yaarab Temple Shrine Mosque built for the Shriner's headquarters. The Albany Theatre is a good local example of this type of 1920s movie theater. The theater is also significant in the area of entertainment/recreation as a good example of a one-screen theater built for a small city in southwest Georgia that also accommodated live performances. These dual-function theaters were popular during the 1920s and 1930s when live performances and film productions coexisted. Later theaters were built primarily or exclusively for movies. The theater is significant in the area of commerce for the stores located in the retail arcade leading to the theater lobby. The businesses housed in the building included a cigar and tobacco shop, a stationary shop, a ladies boutique, a jewelry store, and a shoe store. The theater itself was also a major commercial enterprise, drawing people to downtown Albany and generating significant local revenues. The theater is significant in the area of social history and ethnic heritage/black for its association with segregation, desegregation, and African-American history in Albany. The Albany Theatre is one of the few remaining community landmark buildings that once served as a joint public gathering place for both the white and black communities in Albany. Separate entrances and ticket windows and the formerly separated balcony seating areas reflect the traditional segregation of such public places. In the late 1950, the continuation of segregated seating plus the displacement of black patrons by whites during crowded shows led to complaints of discrimination which helped coalesce local civil rights efforts during 1961-1962. Focused by a visit by Martin Luther King, Jr., in December, 1961 and by his continuing presence locally through August, 1962, local civil rights activists targeted discrimination throughout the city and staged protests at the Trailways bus station in what became known as the Albany Movement. Discrimination at the Albany Theatre was one of many precipitating factors leading to organized civil rights activity in Albany in 1961-1962.

National Register Criteria

The Albany Theatre is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its role as the main theater with separate spaces for African-American patrons to serve Albany and southwest Georgia during the historic period. It is also eligible for listing under Criterion C as a good and intact example of a movie theater constructed in the Classical Revival style in a small

Section 8--Statement of Significance

Georgia town.

Although deteriorated and undergoing renovation, the Albany Theatre retains its essential historic theater integrity. Important surviving features include: the 1920s Classical Revival street façade; the arcade space with its central hallway flanked by retail spaces; the lobby with its plaster and wood ornament, paneled doors, and grand staircase; the historically segregated African-American side entry, stairway, and ticket window; and the theater space itself with some surviving architectural features such as the proscenium arch, ornamented plaster ceiling, and balcony with historically segregated seating.

Criteria Considerations (if applicable)

See explanation for period of significance below.

Period of significance (justification)

The period of significance begins in 1927, the year in which the theater was constructed, and ends in 1959, and this includes the period in which the building served as the main theater and entertainment venue in downtown Albany during the historic period, and it encompasses events at the historically segregated theater which helped coalesce organized civil rights advocacy in Albany.

Contributing/Noncontributing Resources (explanation, if necessary)

The theater is the one contributing included in the nomination. There are no noncontributing resources included in the nomination.

Developmental history/historic context (if appropriate)

**NOTE: The following history was compiled by James R. Miller and Willie McMillan, Oglethorpe Development Group, May and July, 2000. On file at the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Atlanta, Georgia.

The Albany Theatre was constructed in 1927 as a focal point of community arts and entertainment in downtown Albany and southwest Georgia. The land on which the theater was constructed was owned by the estate of Samuel Farkas, a Hungarian Jewish immigrant who became a prominent citizen in Albany in the late 19th century. He owned a mule trading business, a livery stable, and a farm implement business. Adolph and Ike Gortatowsky leased the land from the Farkas estate and developed the theater. Architect Roy A. Benjamin was commissioned by the estate to design the building. Soon after construction began it was discovered that the foundation was not strong enough to support the building, and it was suggested that piling be driven into the ground to stabilize it. History records that many thousands of feet of piling was driven, giving the building as strong a foundation as any in the city. The original estimate for the cost of constructing the theater was \$200,000, however the completed project came in at \$300,000. The Albany Theatre was the first building to use steel-beam construction in Albany.

Section 8--Statement of Significance

Like a majority of public spaces, the Albany Theatre had separate entrances and segregated seating for African-American patrons until the mid-20th century. A separate entrance and ticket window were located at the end of an alley on the side of the building. A small section of seats in the balcony known as the "crow's nest" was where African-Americans sat in the theater.

The Albany Theatre was formally dedicated on the evening of September 12, 1927. The event included live performances by the Albany Theatre Orchestra and other local talents. The <u>Albany</u> <u>Herald</u> reported in an article dated January 20, 1985, that upon its opening more than 4,000 persons tried to attend the gala first night presentation. The Albany Theatre became known as the finest and largest vaudeville and movie theatre in Georgia outside of Atlanta. The Albany Theatre showed the first-run high class motion pictures, four shows daily, with an admission cost for evening performances was fifty and fifteen cents. During the silent film era music was provided by an organ and a ten-piece orchestra. Due to its 2,000-seat capacity the theater attracted touring productions from all over the country, which included the Folies de Paree with the French exotic dansuese Mlle. Yvette; Buddy Rogers with his orchestra; and the complete NBC Broadcasting Orchestra with Stuart Allen in 1939. Cab Calloway and his orchestra with the Cotton Club Revue performed at the Albany Theatre for a one-day engagement in 1940.

The <u>Albany Herald</u> also reported in 1985 in the article entitled "Once the Grand Dame of Albany Entertainment,"

"no theatrical structure remaining anywhere in the nation has a more distinguished and illustrious history than the Albany Theatre. This is particularly true in terms of the internationally-known stars who performed in person on the Albany Theatre stage during the half century that followed its lavish opening in 1927.

These included Will Rogers, the folk humorist who was possibly the world's most beloved performer; Sarah Bernhardt, considered by many to be the finest stage actress in history; Maude Adams, who gained lasting fame in the title role in the original "Peter Pan;" Ethel Barrymore, reigning queen of the royal family of the American theatre, who performed on two occasions here."

Other famous performers of the day who appeared at the Albany Theatre included Noel Coward, the English playwright-actor-composer; Fredric March, stage and screen star; DeWolfe Hopper; Metropolitan Opera singer, Geraldine Farrar; show business giants Paul Whiteman and his Orchestra, composer Sigmund Romberg; actor John Forsythe; Charlotte Greenwood, film comedienne; Evelyn Keyes who starred in "Gone With The Wind" as Suellen; Ethel Waters, a noted Black actress and singer; and Cab Calloway.

The world premieres of two movies, "The Biscuit Eater" and "Goodbye My Lady," both filmed in the Albany area, took place at the Albany Theatre. As the <u>Albany Herald</u> article concluded "The Albany Theatre stands today, somewhat forlorn, yet it bears mute but eloquent witness to its own

Section 8--Statement of Significance

magnificent history, a history as rich as any existing theatre in America."

The theater also played a role in the beginnings of the Albany Movement, a coalition of local Black improvement organizations that came together during the Civil Rights movement. Tommy Chatmon, Sr., a Civil Rights activist in Albany in the 1960s, related details of an incident at the theater that helped lead to the greater Civil Rights movement in Albany. According to Mr. Chatmon some African-American students from Monroe High School purchased tickets for a movie at the "Colored Only ticket counter" at the Albany Theatre. They were permitted to sit in the African-American seating section in the rear of the balcony known as the "crows nest." Due to the overcrowded condition of the first orchestra level that was designated for white patrons, the students seated in the designated seating area were pressured to give up their seats. The students surrendered their seats but did not leave the theater before asking for a refund. The request was initially denied by the theater management, which at that time was Adolph and Ike Gortatowsky, who also operated other theaters in southwest Georgia. One student, Ms. Occie Troutman, stated, "I believe we got our money back." However, she also stated that the money was not the issue as much as the discrimination practices in the theater.

Some of the same students took a stand and appealed to Mr. Chatmon, at the time a local Black businessman, for help. According to Mr. Chatmon, he appealed to Melvin Heard, the principal of Monroe High for help, who contacted Vernon Jordan, the President of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). This meeting initiated the beginning of the NAACP Youth Council in Albany in 1959. The late McCree Harris was a Monroe High School civics teacher at the time and considered this as an opportunity for her students to be a part of an organization that was an advocate for minority rights. Some of the students who challenged the treatment they received at the Albany Theatre included Evelyn Toney, who is known for sitting in the all white section of the theater. She became one of the first students to be sent to the Trailways Bus Station for a sit-in in late 1961. The Interstate Commerce Commission's (ICC) order mandating the desegregation of all interstate transportation facilities such as train stations, and bus terminals, went into effect on November 1, 1961. Three NAACP Youth Council members, all students of Monroe High School, were sent to sit in the waiting room designated for whites at the bus station to test the new law. The students were asked to leave by the police and complied. The students returned three weeks later and were arrested by Chief Pritchett when they refused to leave. Later in the day, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) sent Albany State College students to the bus station, and they were also arrested for disorderly conduct. The students' arrests stirred the African-American community into action. Now it was time to confront the law. The rallying cry was "March and go to Jail!"

The Trailways Bus Station sit-in led to additional advocacy from the late Civil Rights attorney C.B. King. It also lead to the arrival of Vernon Jordan and gave rise to the Albany Movement, which ultimately led to the arrival of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) members. Although the Albany Movement did not immediately achieve its goal of desegregating public spaces in Albany, it did prove to be a testing ground for the SCLC for strategies and policies that would later be used in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963, and in voting rights

Section 8--Statement of Significance

movements in Mississippi in 1964.

Section 9—Major Bibliographic References

Whitmal, Angela. Albany Civil Rights Museum, Albany, Georgia. Interview by, Willie McMillan, July 21, 2000.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): (X) N/A

- () preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- () preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been issued date issued:
- () previously listed in the National Register
- () previously determined eligible by the National Register
- () designated a National Historic Landmark
- () recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
- () recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

- (X) State historic preservation office
- () Other State Agency
- () Federal agency
- () Local government
- () University
- () Other, Specify Repository:

Georgia Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): N/A

Photographs

| Name of Property: City or Vicinity: | Albany Theatre Albany |
|--|---|
| County: | Dougherty |
| State: | Georgia |
| Photographer: | James R. Lockhart |
| Negative Filed: | Georgia Department of Natural Resources |
| Date Photographed: | June, 2005 |

Description of Photograph(s):

Number of photographs: 18

1. Front (east) façade; photographer facing west.

2. South façade (at right) and alley to historic African-American patron entrance; photographer facing west.

- 3. Rear (west) façade and south façade; photographer facing northeast.
- 4. North façade (at left); photographer facing west.
- 5. Front façade; photographer facing southwest.
- 6. Interior, first floor, retail arcade; photographer facing west.
- 7. Interior, second floor; photographer facing southwest.
- 8. Interior, second floor; photographer facing southeast.

9. Interior, first floor, ticket window, and African-American ticket window; photographer facing southeast.

10. Interior, first floor, African-American patron entrance and ticket window; photographer facing northwest.

- 11. Interior, first floor, theater lobby; photographer facing southeast.
- 12. Interior, first floor, theater lobby; photographer facing north.
- 13. Interior, first floor, theater, stage; photographer facing northwest.
- 14. Interior, first floor, theater, seating area and balcony; photographer facing southwest.

Photographs

15. Interior, balcony floor; photographer facing southwest.

16. Interior, balcony floor, projection booth; photographer facing northeast.

17. Interior, balcony floor, stage; photographer facing northeast.

18. Front façade and south façade; photographer facing northwest.

(HPD WORD form version 11-03-01)







