

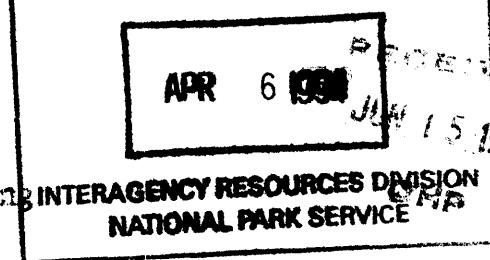
431

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

historic name: New Sequoia Theater Building
other names/site number: Fox Theater Building

RECEIVED 413



2. LOCATION

street & number: 2211-2235 Broadway
city, town: Redwood City
state: California code: CA county: San Mateo code: 061 Zip code 94063

3. CLASSIFICATION

ownership of property: private
category of property: building
number of resources within property:
Contributing: 1 building
Noncontributing: 0

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As a 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 x meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Philip Zoller
Signature of certifying official

3/29/94
Date

California Office of Historic Preservation
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State of Federal agency or bureau

New Sequoia Theater
San Mateo County, CA

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register *Dale Ferguson* 5/5/94
 See continuation sheet.
 determined eligible for the
National Register.
 other (explain) _____ Signature of the Keeper _____ Date of Action _____

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic Functions: Recreation & Culture/theater; Commerce/ Business
Current Functions: Recreation & Culture/theater; Commerce/ Business

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification

Late 19th and 20th century revivals/Late Gothic Revival

Materials:

Foundation: concrete

Walls: concrete

Roof: asphalt

Describe present and historic physical appearance:

The New Sequoia (Fox) Theater in Redwood City is a two-story reinforced concrete building in the Late Gothic Revival style. It was designed by James and Merritt Reid of San Francisco in 1928. The exterior cast concrete wall cladding takes the form of a Gothic tracery screen. The central portion of the building is capped by a square, stepped-back tower carrying the tracery screen motif on an open, steel framework. Horizontal rows of single transom, and double-hung, wood sash windows above the plate-glass commercial fronts and theater marquee of the ground floor keep the strong vertical emphasis of the building in balance. The exterior was altered about 1935 when the 1928 canopy marquee was replaced with a moderne neon type. In 1950 the original vertical Sequoia sign was removed in a remodeling that saw the theater box-office lobby and interiors modified in a Fox West Coast Theaters Skouras style designed by Carl G. Moeller. Other changes to the exterior have been minor. Overall, the building retains a high level of integrity.

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APR 6 1981

INTERAGENCY RESOURCES DIVISION
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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The cast-concrete tracery screen that characterizes the building's facade looks both forward and back in its decorative vocabulary. The main building block, behind its ca. 1935 Art Deco canopy marquee, features a multitude of Gothic details, including lancet and Tudor window openings capped with finials and fleur-de-lis surrounded by foliation in relief. An equally ornate pierced lambrequin-like feature articulates much of the building's flat, stepped parapet roof line between projecting concrete piers with a decided Art Deco feel. In concert they do much to unify the building ensemble. These elements are also present in the design of the set-back tower atop the theater building's tar-and gravel-covered steel truss roof. The open steel-framed tower was dramatically back-lit at night.

Penetration along the Broadway street elevation is characterized by a variety of plate-glass store fronts flanking the recessed, central box-office lobby. The lobby was remodeled in 1950 in a Skouras-style make-over with recessed cove lighting in the ceiling and a stylized floral-pattern terrazzo floor. The ornate ticket kiosk from this period is no longer present.

To the west, along Broadway, is the Tudor arched entry to the theater building's upper floors. This feature is capped by a larger version of the lambrequin-like parapet detail with the addition of a raised central cartouche. The deeply recessed entryway carries the Tudor design motif as a ribbed vault, terminating in double glass-panel hardwood doors with a transom above. The west wall of the entry is arcaded with three, tall Tudor display windows. The original 1928 hanging-bowl light fixture is still in place.

Penetration above the ground floor is symmetrical, consisting of a row of square, inward-opening wood transom windows. These are separated from the row of double-hung wood sash windows on the second floor by spandrels with blind lancet arches in relief. All window muntins above the ground floor are vertical, including those in the top lights of the four double-hung Tudor windows behind the theater's canopy marquee. Surmounting these features is a row of tall, slender, lancet arches with small, diamond-pattern fixed lights.

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The building's theater interior, originally designed as an "atmospheric" Spanish courtyard, was redecorated in 1950 by Carl G. Moeller, employing the Skouras style. This was a combination of Streamline patterning and stylized vegetative forms, drawing their inspiration from the Rococo period of ornamentation. These fantastic shapes were realized in a variety of applied materials, including stucco (a building material consisting of plaster and fiber) in bas-relief, hand-etched aluminum panels, brass lighting fixtures, and fabric. Fluorescent paint was used with ultraviolet and colored neon lighting for added dramatic effect.

The New Sequoia (Fox) Theater Building is prominently sited on one of Redwood City's main thoroughfares behind a screen of mature street trees directly across from San Mateo County's historic 1903 courthouse. The property is the only commercial example of the Late Gothic Revival style of architecture in Redwood City and retains a high level of integrity and a strong sense of time and place.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Area of Significance: Architecture **Period of Significance:** 1928 **Significant Dates:** 1928

Significant Person: Architect/Builder
N/A Reid, James William & Merritt James/Pasqualetti, G.B.

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and periods of significance noted above.

The New Sequoia (Fox) Theater Building in Redwood City derives its significance under criterion C as an example of Late Gothic Revival design in a commercial building in Redwood City during the late 1920s.

Redwood City was one of the earliest American settlements in San Mateo County, and would become its first incorporated town. It was established in 1849 as a port and shipping point for lumber being cut along the eastern slopes of the Sierra Moreno. Spanish attorney Simon Mezes acquired the property in 1853 as part of his contractual agreement with the Luis Arguello family for clearing the title to their 35,000-acre Las Pulgas rancho. In the mid-1850s Mezes surveyed and mapped a townsite at the port to be called Mezesville. However, in 1856 when the developing community became the county seat and a U.S. post office was established on Broadway, the retail center of the town, it was renamed Redwood City.

The decade of the 1860s saw a gradual decline in the lumbering industry and a rise in agricultural development, expedited in part by the completion of the San Francisco and San Jose Railroad in 1864. By 1867, when the city's 500 inhabitants voted for incorporation, the retail core was moving west along Broadway toward the railroad depot. The taxing authority created by incorporation resulted in a series of civic improvements including a water system and paved streets. Electric lighting would come in 1889. Local businessmen dominated civic affairs and played a major role in town politics.

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The 1870s were characterized by a diversification of Redwood City's economic base. The small shipbuilding industry that had developed during the logging days would survive into the 1880s. Two tanneries and San Mateo County's two largest breweries located in the community during this time. The town had grown to about 1,400 residents by 1890, giving it the largest urban population in the county. A national depression in the 1890s slowed the town's growth until the early 1900s, when San Francisco's 1906 earthquake and fire changed things. While Redwood City suffered the loss of nearly all its brick buildings as a result of the seismic event, it benefited directly from the exodus of San Francisco inhabitants to San Mateo County's developing suburban communities. The county reported a 72% increase in population between 1900 and 1910, doubling again by 1920.

The explosive post-earthquake growth south along the San Francisco Peninsula was also a by-product of the opening of the automobile age. By 1915 the Peninsula Rapid Transit coach system was operating between San Francisco and Redwood City along San Mateo County's first paved roadway, El Camino Real. As a statewide leader in highway improvements, the county benefited early from its investment through expanding commuter suburbs and new industrial and retail growth.

During the 1920s, bay area salt and cement industries concentrated their activities around Redwood City. The latter, in the form of the Portland Cement Company built a major plant in the tidelands northeast of town in 1924. This action was pivotal to the development of a modern deep-water port for the city after 1927. Broadway remained the retail core of the county seat, reaping the benefits of the new tourist industry that was developing along El Camino Real.

Among the business entrepreneurs taking advantage of the economic boom of the late 1920s in Redwood City were Ellis J. Arkush, president of the Peninsula Theater Corporation and the development group of Hare, Brewer and Clark, Inc. In one of the largest commercial developments in the city's history, these two firms invested about \$300,000 to convert an entire city block into a modern mixed-use business complex..

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The block, bounded by Hamilton, Webster (Middlefield Rd.) and Theater Streets, and fronting on Broadway, was in the center of the city's retail-sales district, directly across the street from the main entrance to the San Mateo County Courthouse. The New Sequoia Theater Building was to be the centerpiece of the business complex. It would be the first moving-picture palace in San Mateo County to be integrally equipped for talking pictures. The two-part commercial block was designed and executed as a unified composition in a Late Gothic Revival style by the important San Francisco architectural firm of James and Merritt Reid in 1928.

ARCHITECTURE

The Reid Brothers were a good choice for the design of the new theater building. The architectural firm had been designing entertainment facilities since the 1880s, and by the 1920s, moving picture houses for local neighborhoods represented a considerable percentage of their business. They also had an excellent reputation for the structural quality of their work.

The design program called for a combination house with facilities for both live performance and moving pictures. This required a large stage and loft area as well as dressing rooms at one end of the 1,500 seat main auditorium. The lobby and mezzanine areas were to be flanked by two floors of retail and professional office space, creating a large building mass. The adjacent commercial block was to be composed of one story storefronts abutting the central theater block, further expanding the building mass. What was needed was a design that would unify and balance the composition of the block-square building complex.

The Reid Brothers were known, "to keep their fingers on the pulse of fashion and science," skillfully preparing plans to suit taste as well as fashion. Such may have been the case in their decision to employ a Late Gothic Revival tracery screen to cloak the modern, mixed-use building whose overall character had been determined by other factors.

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They had used an adaption of the Gothic style once before in 1918 on the Coliseum Theater at Clement and Ninth Streets, in San Francisco, (since demolished).

The Gothic Revival style had been introduced to America in the 1840s by Richard Upjohn, who helped establish it as a dominant form of ecclesiastical design well into the 20th century. 'Carpenter Gothic' became one of the most popular pattern-book house plans prior to the Civil War. The style reemerged in the late 19th century through the work of firms like Cram and Goodhue, adapted to the fields of commercial and educational architecture as well as to ecclesiastical. The "Collegiate Gothic" form became a national emblem for cultural institutions. As early as 1913, Cass Gilbert's New York Woolworth Building showed the possibilities of the style applied to the design of tall office buildings. However, it was in the 1922 Chicago Tribune Tower competition that the Late Gothic Revival style exerted its greatest influence on architectural design in the far west.

It was not the first prize winner in the Chicago competition, but the second-place entry by Eliel Saarinen that would leave its mark on the San Francisco skyline in the mid-1920s. Several of Saarinen's design solutions for the Tribune Tower were incorporated in major building projects in San Francisco, beginning with Miller and Pflueger's Pacific Telephone Building in 1925. Strong perpendicular lines were employed to express the verticality of the skyscraper. The tower was gracefully stepped-back and ornament was used inventively. In 1927 George Kelham drew from these same sources for his Russ Building, which the *Architect and Engineer* described as "the center of western progress".

It is possible that the Russ Building and other local responses to the Saarinen design may have influenced the Reid Brothers' Redwood City Theater building. The New Sequoia's projecting concrete piers and stepped-back tower give the large building mass a strong vertical emphasis while the cast-concrete tracery screen, drawn from the English Perpendicular decorative vocabulary, effectively articulates the broad surface of its principal elevation.

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The Late Gothic Revival style lent itself well to the romantic sense of extravagance and illusion which characterized small-town movie palaces in the late 1920s. The picturesque mode made them stand out from their surroundings, with illuminated canopy marquees and towering vertical signs announcing the building's name and purpose.

The New Sequoia (Fox) Theater Building has been in service since January of 1929. While the movie theater closed in 1983, the retail space and professional offices have remained in continuous use. The building is the best and only remaining example of the Late Gothic Revival style of architecture from the late 1920s found in Redwood City. Despite changes in the canopy marquee and box office lobby and the loss of a small amount of tracery along the roof parapet, the building retains a great degree of its integrity as constructed in 1928, and evokes a strong sense of time and place. Neither James and Merritt Reid, its architects, nor Ellis J. Arkush, its owner, would have any problem recognizing it today. The building should be listed in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance.

New Sequoia Theater
San Mateo County, CA

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

BOOKS

Corbett, Michael R. *Splendid Survivors: San Francisco's Downtown Architectural Heritage*, Foundation for San Francisco's Architectural Heritage, San Francisco, CA, 1979.

Hynding, Alan. *From Frontier to Suburb: The Story of The San Mateo Peninsula*, Star Publishing Co., Belmont, CA, 1982.

Kaufmann, Preston. *Skouras-ized For Showmanship*, Theatre Historical Society of America, Elmhurst, IL, 1987.

Malinick, Cynthia. "The Lives and Works of The Reid Brothers, Architects 1852-1943", Master's Thesis, University of San Diego, San Diego, CA, 1992.

Stanger, Frank. *Peninsula Community Book*, A.H. Cawston, San Mateo, CA., 1946.

Whiffen, Marcus. *American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to Styles*, M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, MA., 1969.

NEWSPAPERS

Redwood City Tribune, Jan. 4, 1929, p.1.

San Mateo Times, Oct. 11, 1926, P.1.; Feb. 11, 1974, p. 25.

COLLECTED DOCUMENTS

Historic Landmarks Element of the Redwood City General Plan, Jan. 22, 1990, Appendix B.

Original set of plans for the New Sequoia Theater Building, (not dated).

Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Redwood City, 1919, updated to May 1932, Sheet #9. Located in the Redwood City Public Library.

New Sequoia Theater Building
San Mateo County, CA

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of property. .6 acres

UTM References

A 10 568210 4148900
Zone Easting Northing

Verbal Boundary Description:

Beginning at a point along the south side of Broadway 50 feet west of the southwest corner of Broadway and Middlefield Road in Redwood City, thence running south 235 feet, bounded on the east by commercial buildings, thence running west 100 feet, bounded on the south by a parking lot, thence running north 235 feet, bounded on the west by a parking lot and commercial building, thence running east 100 feet, bounded on the north by Broadway to the point of beginning, the property is identified as Assessor's Parcel Number 052-365-090.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary includes the entire city lot that has historically been associated with the property.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

name/title: Kent L. Seavey/Preservation Consultant

Organization: Redwood City Historical Resources Advisory Commission

Date: April 1, 1993

street & number: 1017 Middlefield Rd. telephone (415) 780-7234

city or town: Redwood City, CA 94064

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(Except where noted the information for items 1 through 5 are the same for all photographs listed. Photographs #4 through #8 were taken in 1993 by Kent L. Seavey.)

- *1 1. New Sequoia (Fox) Theater Building
 2. 2211-2235 Broadway, Redwood City, CA 94063
 3. unknown
 4. Ca. 1930
 5. Redwood City Public library, Redwood City, CA
 6. Looking southwest from Middlefield Rd. toward the north
 (facade) elevation of the New Sequoia (Fox) Theater Building.
 Note flanking one-story storefronts and original tall sign and
 flat canopy marquee.
 7. Photograph #1 of 8

- *2 3. Unknown
 4. Sept. 30, 1956
 5. B'hend & Kaufmann Archives, Pasadena, CA
 6. Looking southwest from Middlefield Rd. toward the north
 (facade) elevation of the New Sequoia (Fox) Theater Building.
 Note removal of original tall sign and new (ca.1935) Fox
 Art Deco neon marquee.
 7. Photograph #2 of 8

- *3 3. Unknown
 4. Oct. 20, 1953
 5. B'hend & Kaufmann Archives, Pasadena, CA
 6. Looking southeast from the north side of Broadway toward the
 north (facade) elevation of the New Sequoia (Fox) Theater
 Building. Note the lambrequin-like ornamentation above the
 Tudor arched entry to the building's upper floors at the right
 of the Fox marquee.
 7. Photograph #3 of 8

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- #4 3. Kent L. Seavey
 4. 1993
 5. Community Development Dept., Redwood City, CA
 6. Looking southwest from the north side of Broadway toward the north (facade) elevation of the New Sequoia (Fox) Theater Building. Note some loss of parapet tracery above Fox marquee.
 7. Photograph #4 of 8

- #5 6. Looking south from the north side of Broadway at the north (facade) elevation of the New Sequoia (Fox) Theater Building. Note the mature street trees that now partially mask the building's facade.
 7. Photograph #5 of 8

- #6 6. Looking westerly from the east side of Middlefield Rd. toward the east (side) elevation of the main auditorium block of the New Sequoia (Fox) Theater Building. Note the stepped-back tower to the right.
 7. Photograph #6 of 8

- #7 6. Looking northeast from a parking lot towards the southwest corner of the main auditorium block of the New Sequoia (Fox) Theater Building. Note the raised loft area.
 7. Photograph #7 of 8

- #8. 6. Looking in a westerly direction along Broadway from the southeast corner of Middlefield Rd. showing the setting of the New Sequoia (Fox) Theater Building. To the right is the San Mateo County Courthouse.
 7. Photograph #8 of 8