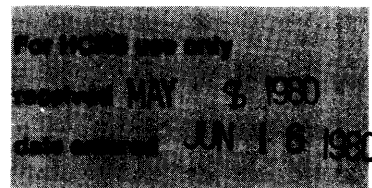


**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**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 Circle Theater

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 45 Monument Circle ___ not for publication

city, town Indianapolis ___ vicinity of congressional district 11th

state Indiana code 46204 county Marion code

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 American Fletcher Natl. Bank
Trust Company & Horace F. & Rosana Wood

street & number c/o Fourth Ave. Amusement Co., 356 Francis Building

city, town Louisville ___ vicinity of state Kentucky

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Marion County, Center Township Tax Assessor's Office

street & number City-County Building Room 1360

city, town Indianapolis state Indiana

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Survey of Historic Buildings in Indianapolis/Marion County
has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1977 ___ federal ___ state county local

depository for survey records Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission

city, town 705 Union Title Indianapolis state Indiana

7. Description

<u> </u> excellent	<u> </u> deteriorated	<u> </u> unaltered	<u> X </u> original site
<u> X </u> good	<u> </u> ruins	<u> X </u> altered	<u> </u> moved date _____
<u> </u> fair	<u> </u> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

EXTERIOR, General: The Circle Theater, being located on Monument Circle and conforming to lot and block configuration, is irregular in plan (photo 1). The main facade, facing the Soldiers & Sailors Monument, follows the slight curvature of The Circle. Rising behind this white glazed terra cotta entrance facade is the unadorned brick auditorium bounded on the south & east by Court and Scioto Streets. See Map

The Entrance Facade (photo 2) of glazed white terra cotta is thirty-five feet high and eighty feet wide with three bays and a central entry. There are two storefronts, one on either side of the slightly recessed entry. A pair of thin pilasters flank each bay. Between the storefronts and theater entry are decorative metal advertisement cases. Two large, rectangular wooden-sash windows with plate glass lights are located directly above the storefront openings. Simple molded panels decorate the spandrels between storefront and window. The bracketed cornice and pediment are decorated with dentils, egg and dart molding, and antefixae. Rosettes along the soffit served as fixtures for lighting. Bas-Relief panels of Greek figures in Rookwood pottery ornament the frieze below the cornice and the tympanum enclosed by the pediment. A swag design encircles the now-blank panel above the marquee. This panel originally contained a painted Grecian pastoral scene (photo 3). The Circle theater monogram, A "C" bisected by a "T", decorates the frieze at either side of the two bas-relief panels and above the entry. Four urn-shaped "firepots", originally designed to provide electrical illumination, crown the facade.

The original copper and cast-iron marquee and an electrically illuminated clock dial (30 foot diameter) are exterior features which have been removed. Besides the "painting over" of the Grecian pastoral scene, the storefronts and vestibule are the only other altered features.

INTERIOR, General: Except for the vestibule and lobby which were remodeled and "modernized" in 1964, the interior has retained most of its 1916 character. In 1935 the original rose, ivory and grey color scheme was restored by Henry Behrens, the 1916 interior designer. In 1935 and 1964 minor changes were made to the house of the auditorium. Space between rows was expanded both times to provide more leg room, reducing the number (3,000-2,700-2,000) of seats. In 1964 gold-colored draperies were hung over the splay walls, new sound and projection was installed, and new carpeting and paint was added.

The Main Level consists of the entrance lobby, the lobby promenade and the main seating level of the house of the auditorium. The entrance lobby, also containing the box office, was enclosed with "storm doors of the automatic closing type, thus insuring the prevention of much dreaded drafts through the theater". Although the doors have been replaced, the original ceiling still exists above the drop-ceiling. Angling to the left beyond the vestibule doors, the curving lobby promenade (photo 4) stretches across the rear of the house. Two staircases, located at either end of the lobby promenade, with mahogany rail and gilded posts lead to the mezzanine level. A curving wall with glass panels covered by draperies separates the lobby promenade from the house. Originally, this was only a screen wall as there were no panels above the glass. A series of urns, similar to those in the two stairwells have been removed. Six entrances lead from the lobby promenade to the main floor aisles. A transverse aisle (100 feet side-to-side) connects these aisles with the side stairs and exits. Line of sight from the rear-most seat to the stage (screen) is approximately one hundred ten feet.

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The Mezzanine Level provides access to the loges (altered), the lounges and restrooms, (which were considered novel in design) and six boxes. The mezzanine level (photo 5) allowed for the "2nd show" audience to gather. An "old-fashioned" fireplace is located on the north wall. An oval opening (photo 6) in the floor of the mezzanine was designed "to keep the air pure and wholesome under the balcony". The main stairwells at either side continue up to the top level balcony foyer.

The Balcony (photo 7 & 8) contains additional seating and the projection booth which was originally located on the main floor beneath the balcony in the oval opening. A transverse aisle separated the loges area from the main balcony seating area. Now containing three rows of seats, there were originally seven loges each with a seating capacity of eighteen persons in four rows of wicker chairs with rose-colored cushions. Six grill-work boxes, three on either side of the stage, were reached from the mezzanine level and seated six persons each. The boxes, which were attached to the splay wall, have been removed and the entrances sealed. Draperies now cover the splay wall from floor to ceiling.

The Proscenium Arch opening is forty-two feet wide and thirty feet high. The stage is thirty-five feet deep and seventy feet wide. A forestage has been built over the orchestra pit. The fly loft is sixty feet from stage to grid. It was the intention of the builders of the Circle theater to equip the stage to accommodate any "metropolitan theatrical attraction". The original lightboard and pinrail (photo 9) are still in use and in fair condition. Below stage was a "clubroom" for musicians and "those employed as entertainers". Three levels of dressing rooms are located stage left. Original stage design features, such as fountains and painted scenery, have been removed.

INTERIOR, DECORATIVE TREATMENT

The Entrance Lobby is probably the most altered space in the theater. The ceiling has been lowered (the original ceiling is intact) and the floor is covered with carpet of blue with gold stars. The walls are white marble.

The Lobby Promenade continues the carpet pattern. The rear wall and ceiling retain the original plaster moldings and decorations. The cornice decoration is a repetitive string of garland and urns. Circular plaster screen moldings surround the chandeliers which are not original. The wall separating the lobby from the house has also been altered. In the 1917 Circle Theater Publication, a photograph shows a screen wall with wood-framed glass in the top panels. This glass was draped with material and the top rail crowned with 6 inch urns. This string of urns is repeated in the main staircases. The rail is mahogany and the posts and grillwork were gilded. A gilded urn (6") used to top each post. The carpeting has been removed from the stairs exposing marble.

The Mezzanine Level retains the classical wall and ceiling plaster moldings. The floor is covered with a collection of carpeting that could date from 1935 in some places. A fireplace on the rear wall and the exit lights are intact. A 1917 photo and description show "plush" rose-colored divans and chairs, plants and tall lamps with shades against white walls. The grill-work railing around the oval opening was altered when the projection booth was moved to the balcony.

The House originally continued the rose, gray and ivory color scheme. The ceiling is incredibly detailed with circular and oval moldings and decorations. The balcony walls are the only surfaces that have not been covered with gold draperies. A procession of Greek figures connect the splay and proscenium friezes. The seating and carpeting have

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been replaced at least twice. Some possibly original seating sections and parts have been saved. A few gas fixtures and the chandelier appear original. The proscenium arch has also been covered with draperies hiding the centered Circle logo. The "massive" curtain reportedly had no markings in contrast with vaudeville or the Indiana Theater. The Circle Theater was designed as a Classical Temple and was decorated with intricate plaster moldings and details. The philosophy of the builders was to present a quality program in a dignified setting.

1980

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 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 1916

Builder/Architect Rubush & Hunter

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Significant for many reasons to the community of Indianapolis, the Circle Theater was one of the first "deluxe movie palaces" built in the midwest. When the Circle Theater opened, as many as sixteen theaters of various types existed within the Mile Square. The Circle is the only surviving downtown movie theater still in operation.

With the 1979 razing of the former Colonial (Fox) Theater (built 1909), the Circle and Murat (built 1909) have become the oldest remaining theater buildings in the city. The Circle Theater is also one of the oldest buildings fronting on Monument Circle as only Christ Church Cathedral, built in 1860, and the Indianapolis Journal (46 Monument Circle SW) Building built in 1897, predate the Theater.

Architecturally, the Circle Theater is an excellent example of the Neo-Classical Revival style. This went along with the mood of the earlier owners and patrons who were seeking classicism and quality in their music and entertainment. The decoration of the lobby promenade, mezzanine and house with the processions of Greek figures, intricate moldings and details is an excellent example of a Neo-Adamesque interior. Robert Adams (1728-1792), a British architect, inspired the distinctive style that was an eclectic combination of Greek, Etruscan, Pompeian with hints of VanBrugh (1669-1726).

Architects for the Circle theater were Rubush and Hunter, Inc., one of the principal architectural firms of Indianapolis in the early 20th century. From the founding of their partnership in 1904, buildings designed and built by the firm of Preston C. Rubush and Edgar O. Hunter include: Masonic Temple (1906), State Museum (City Hall, 1910), Murat Temple (1910), School for the Deaf (1911), Hume Mansur building (1911), Columbia Club (1925), Indiana Theater (1927), Circle Tower (1930), Coca-Cola Bottling Company (1931) and the remodeling of the H.P. Wasson building (1948). Adept at almost any architectural style, Rubush and Hunter were early masters of the latest, ranging from Neo-Classical to Art Deco. With architectural careers spanning nearly fifty years, Rubush and Hunter were among the Directors (at the time of the construction of both the Circle and Indiana Theaters) of the Circle Theater Company.

The Wood Transfer Company was torn down, removing the last vestige of the Wood Foudray Livery Stables (1834 to c. 1900) and construction commenced in the spring of 1916. The Bedford Stone Construction Co. was the general contractor. Electrical work was done by Sanborn Electric Co., plumbing by Freyn Brothers, and heating and ventilating by Kirkoff Brothers and McElwaine, Inc. An updraft ventilation system was installed with outside air being "washed and dried", passed over tempering coils, ducted and forced out from openings beneath every main floor seat and exhausted through the ceiling. This system was replaced with a down-draft system in 1935.

See Continuation Sheets 1, 2 & 3

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet 1

10. Geographical Data

ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

Acreeage of nominated property Less than one acre

Quadrangle name Indianapolis West

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

UTM NOT VERIFIED

A

1	6	5	7	2	1	8	0	4	4	0	2	1	4	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

52½ feet on the Circle, 153 10/12 feet on alley, southwest side of Lot 12, Square 56, and 18 feet on the Circle, 109 3/12 feet on alley, northeast side of Lot 13, Square 56 (Parcel Number 1088124)

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

state _____ code _____ county _____ code _____

state _____ code _____ county _____ code _____

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Larry B. Justice For Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana

organization Restoration Preservation Architecture, Inc date December 6, 1979

street & number 3402 Boulevard Place telephone _____

city or town Indianapolis state Indiana

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 [Signature] date April 29, 1980

title State Historic Preservation Officer date _____

For HCRS use only	
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register	
<u>[Signature]</u>	date <u>6/16/80</u>
Keeper of the National Register	
Attest: <u>W. Ray Luce</u>	date <u>6/12/80</u>
Chief of Registration	

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For HCERS use only
 received
 date entered

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Among the artists whose work graced the Circle Theater was H.A. Wheeler who "painted" the Grecian pastoral scene on the facade in place using tinted cement. Twenty oil paintings (valued at \$20,000) from A.L. Lieber's personal collection were displayed on the mezzanine level. Although the management planned to show other collections, portraits of several famous Indiana citizens were on "permanent" display. "Handsome and lifelike" oil paintings of actors and scenes from the current movies were displayed in the lobby promenade instead of the "lurid and wild-eyed" lithographs common for the time. There are presently three oil paintings displayed in the lobby promenade. One is titled "Dance in the Harem" by H. Pinggera and the second is a country scene by Virginia Shaw dated 1916. The third is an untitled, anonymous portrait of three canines.

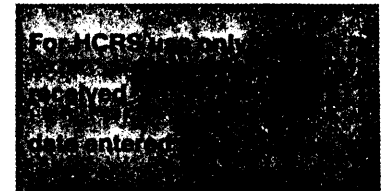
Local civic leaders were associated with the financing, construction and management of the Circle theater. A.L. Block, president of L. Strauss and Co. was president and Robert Lieber, president of 1st National Films, was vice-president of Monument Realty Co. which erected and owned the Circle Theater. Other persons associated with the founding of the Circle included Meyer Efroymsen as treasurer, owner of Props Star and Wholesale Dry Goods; and Ralph Norwood as secretary, a credit manager. Efroymsen was succeeded by Theodore Stempfel of the American Fletcher National Bank. Other directors included Fred Gardener, owner of the Severin Hotel and Republic National Committee member; Rubush and Hunter, the Architects; Isidor Feibleman with the law firm Bamberger & Feibleman; Leo Rappaport, a prominent lawyer; Herman Lieber, brother of Robert; Morris Cohen, Arthur Strauss and A.J. Gilligham. Those who built the Circle Theater had a vision of promoting civic pride by creating a theater of great artistic beauty with the latest in comfort and modern equipment. Novel design and technical features were part of the theater's productions. Music, lighting, pantomime, dance, tableaux, and scenery were all part of the entertainment. A twenty or sixty piece orchestra, the forerunner of Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, and a pipe organ enhanced the silent "photoplay" with musical interpretation. The first organ was a two manual Hooks-Hastings and the second a three manual sixteen Rank Wurlitzer. Indianapolis audiences were also introduced to the dramatic moods created through lighting and color effects on the screen.

The stage was equipped with a sophisticated lighting control board and a mechanical system to raise and lower the screen. Although the Circle was the first theater erected in the United States for the main purpose of presenting feature length movies and the motion picture was finally the main attraction at the Circle, the stage was still considered an important feature and remains functional. The set was often decorated as an Italian Garden, complete with urns, fountains and running water. A fully equipped scenic studio was maintained by S. Barret McCormick, the managing director.

Early performers included Dessa Byrd at the organ and Max Weil conducting the Circle Orchestra. In the 1920's, Dick Powell sang with the Charlie Davis Orchestra and later was the Circle's Master of Ceremonies for stage shows before moving to the Indiana theater with the advent of sound. In 1928 the Circle showed the first sound movie (*Jazz Singer*) to play Indianapolis. Fred Allen, in "Passing Show" at the Murat joined Dessa Byrd for midnight radio recital. In the 1940's and 50's a series of Big Bands, including the Paul Whiteman Band and the Glenn Miller Orchestra, played on the Circle's stage. Circle presentations included:

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Films of 1916:

- "Home" with Bessie Barriscale, Charles Ray and Louise Glaum
- "The Patriot" William S. Hart
- "Gretchen The Greenhorn" with Dorothy Gish
- "The Garden of Allen" (premiere)
- "The Crisis"
- "The Barrier" by Rex Beach
- "On Trial"
- "Within the Law"
- "The Witching Hour"
- "Wild and Woolly" with Douglas Fairbanks
- "A Poor, Little Rich Girl" with Mary Pickford
- "Skinner's Dress Suit" with Bryant Washburn and Hazel Daly
- "Broadway Jones" with George M. Cohan
- "The Vicar of Wakefield"
- "The Mysterious Mrs. M"
- "The Easiest Way" with Clara Kimball Young
- "The Tanks at the Battle of the Ancre" (official British war picture)

February 1927:

- "The Winning of Barbara Worth"
- "McFadden's Flats" with Charlie Murray and Chester Conklin

March 1927:

- Will Hays (Indiana's own) followed by Roy Smeck
- "Wizard of the Strings" Giovanni Martinelli, famed opera star, was the feature of the initial "Vitaphone" program with Al Jolson. Films were "Convoy" and "Camille"

February 1928:

- "Jazz Singer" with Al Jolson

September 1928:

- "Lilac Time" with Gary Cooper

December 1935:

- "Dawn Patrol" with Errol Flynn, Basil Rathbone and David Niven
- "Next Time I Marry" with Lucille Ball, James Ellison and Lee Bowman

January 1947:

- "White Tie and Tails" with Dan Duryea, Ella Raines and William Bendix
- Stage show Alvino Rey and His Talking Guitar

April 1958:

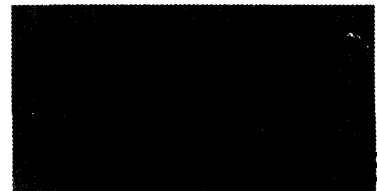
- "Snow White & The Seven Dwarfs"
- "Portugal"

October 1964:

- "My Fair Lady" with Audrey Hupburn and Rex Harrison

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September 1970:
Live Musical "Hair"

January 1980:
"Alien" and "Roller Boogie"

In the beginning, only outstanding programs and films selected "with rigid censorship" were presented. S. Barret McCormick used "analysis, insight and psychology" to select programs of universal appeal. After the Grand Opening, there were six performances daily from 11:30 AM to 11:00 PM. Programs changed twice weekly on Sunday and Thursday. Prices for evening performances were 10 and 15 cents for the main floor, 10 cents for the balcony, and 25 cents for the mezzanine floor and loges.

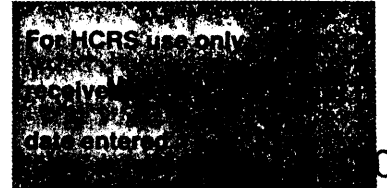
Opening night, 30 August 1916 was an important event and many turned out to see the new theater dedicated. "Hundreds were present when the doors opened at 7 o'clock." The sell-out opening performance (3,000 seats) was under the personal direction of Samuel L. (Roxy) Rothapfel of the Rialto Theatre in New York. Rothapfel had brought his chief of ushers to train sixty young men. Following an overture by the Circle Orchestra, addresses were made by A. G. Ruddell, president of the Chamber of Commerce; Mayor Joseph E. Bell; and Charles Bookwalter, former Mayor. Following a "Topical Review" by Pathe Freres, the singing of the prologue from "Pagliacci" by Eduardo Ciannelli, a scenic study, and finally the Meditation from "Thais"; the feature film "Home", starring Bessie Barriscale, Charles Ray and Louise Glaum, was shown. The program ended with "Pan Americana" performed by the Orchestra and a Keystone comedy, "His Bitter Pill". In his opening night address, Charles Bookwalter (Mayor 1905-1909) expressed the thought that

"such a building as the Circle Theater helped to form a proper setting for the Soldier's and Sailor's Monument."

In 1917, the Circle Theater Company believed the Circle Theater held a unique place in the theatrical world. It was a "monument to evolution, the lofty peak ultimately gained in the pursuit of an ideal". The stately dignity of their institution was "a far cry from the tinsel of the Mountebanks" and artistry held "sway over the dominion of shadowland". The Circle Theater represented the acme of architectural skill and the embodiment of art as a Temple dedicated to a greater enjoyment of life.

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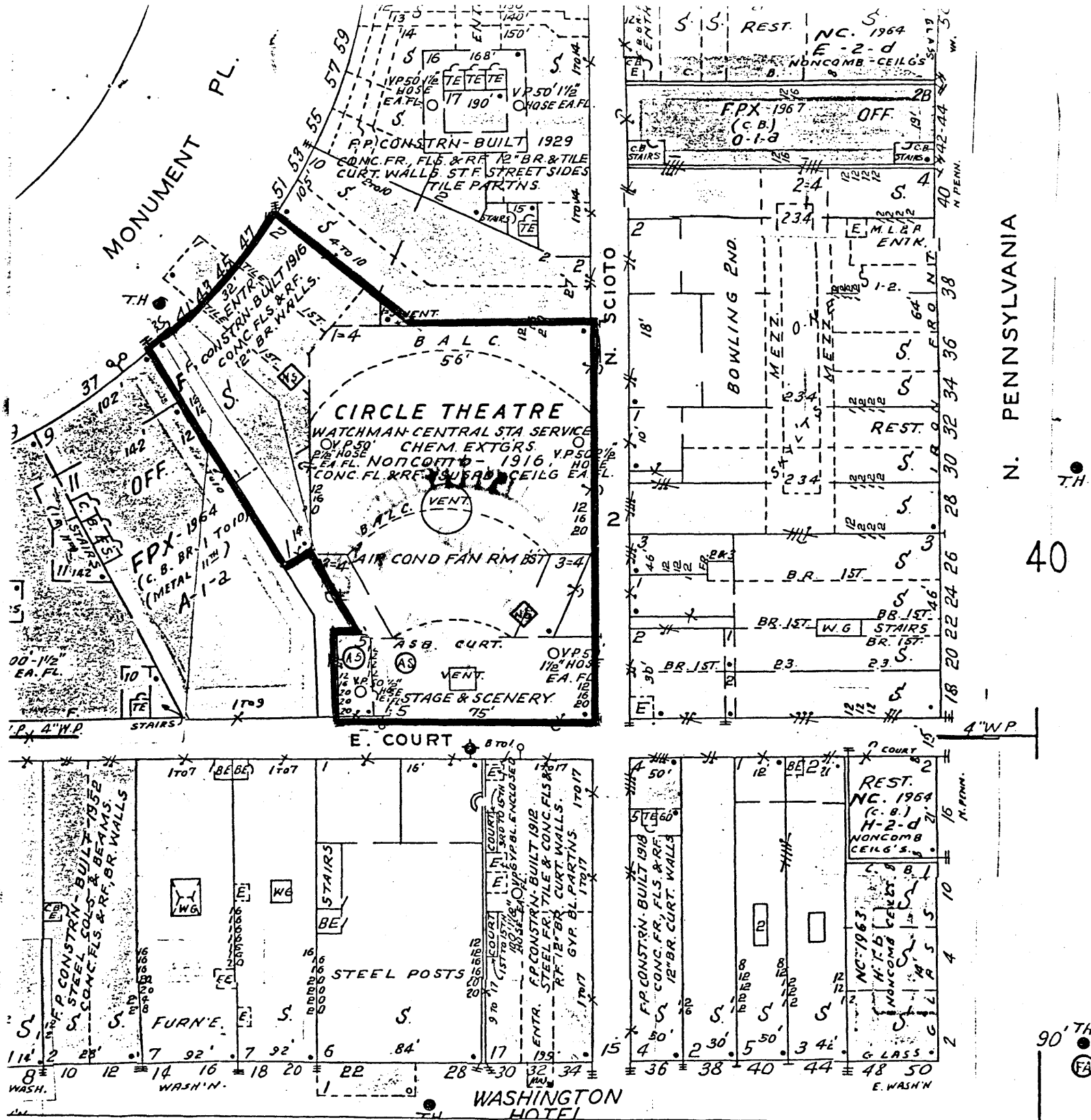


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- * The Circle News
- * The Circle Theater Co., "Circle, The Shrine of the Silent Art", 1917.
- * "Circle Theater is Real Model", Indianapolis Star, August 30, 1916.
- * "Circle Theater Plans Reveal Many Features", Indianapolis News, January 29, 1916.
- * "Circle Theater Renovation Planned, Then "Fair Lady", Indianapolis News, September 30, 1964, page 36
- * "Classic Beauty is Restored in Circle Theater", Indianapolis Star, December 22, 1938 page 10
- * "Film Industry Al-1 Set to Observe 50th Year of First Movie Theater". Indianapolis Star, October 7, 1951.
- * Gladson, Gene. Indianapolis Theaters From A to Z, Indianapolis: Gladson Publications, 1976, pages 17-18.
- * "Handsome New Circle Theater is Dedicated", Indianapolis News, August 31, 1916, page 17.
- * Indianapolis Historic Preservation Commission staff, Circle Theater Nomination Form for Indianapolis Marion County Register of Historic Properties, November 1979.
- * Indianapolis Star, Photographic Library.
- * "Little Remains of City Theaters' Wonderful Nonsense", Indianapolis Star, March 26, 1978, Section 7, page 1.



CONTINUATION SHEET

PROPERTY NAME Circle Theater

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