

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

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Item number 8

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31. (N-6170):

A. Property Name: State Theater

B. Location & Verbal Boundary Description: The State Theater is located at 39 East Main Street, on the south side of the street between South College Avenue and Academy Street. This nomination includes the buildings and the property on which it stands. The lot has a frontage of 69.12 feet on Main Street and a depth of 220 feet (property tax map, City of Newark, No. 20, Lot No. 67). Approximate acreage is .36.

C. Owner: Dorothy Goberman, R.D. 3, Box 252, Hockessin, Delaware 19707

D. Property Description:

The State Theater is a circa 1929 neo-Classical movie theater constructed of brick. The building is rectangular in plan with one of the narrow ends oriented toward the street. The theater occupies most of the building; however, two small store spaces are located at either end of the facade.

The side and rear walls are constructed of red brick, while the facade exhibits its neo-Classical mask in a hard-pressed yellow brick. Six pilasters with Ionic capitals rise through the center section of the facade to support a molded entablature accented with paterae. A mock Palladian window, composed of an eight-over-eight sash window with sidelights and a molded semi-circular window head, fills the center bay of the second floor. The second floor of the two flanking bays are emphasized by brick quoining and are lit by sash windows in groups of three.

The first floor of the theater entrance has been re-faced with ceramic tile, but the ticket booth is original and the door placement is unchanged. The wall surfaces surrounding the two storefronts has changed several times during recent years; however, the original bay windows and transomed doorways remain intact. The original rectangular marquee was replaced by the current triangular one at mid-century.

The interior of the theater has a 600-seat capacity with a balcony seating area.

E. Historical Background:

Built and owned by Louis Handloff, the State Theater opened to the public in May 1929. The theater served as a vaudeville roadhouse equipped with a stage, orchestra pit and four dressing rooms. A screen and projection machinery were maintained for showing motion pictures. When live performances were no longer presented at the theatre, a screen was permanently fixed to the proscenium arch and the theater was used solely for showing movies. The current operators of the theater show films and periodically feature live performing artists.

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F. Significance:

The State Theater is significant stylistically in contributing to a group of historical revival-style buildings that dramatically changed the look of Main Street in the early twentieth century. It also illustrates the success of the Handloff family in Newark and, in a broader context, reveals Delaware's response to the establishment of the movie industry in the 1920's and 30's. This building fulfills National Register selection Criterion A in representing the broad development of the movie theater business in Delaware, and it fulfills Criterion C as an example of commercial neo-Classical building styles.

In Newark, the 1920's was marked by the beginning of a distinct period of rapid commercial development which is evident visually in the new construction of that period. Previously dominated by modest dwellings and stores operated out of domestic-style buildings, the sudden appearance of a group of commercial and corporate buildings constructed in bold neo-Classical, Colonial Revival, and Gothic Revival styles attests to the change taking place in the very nature of commerce in Newark at this time.

The achievements of Louis Handloff (1886-1965), the builder and owner of the State Theater, reveal the nature of this commercial activity on Main Street. Handloff emigrated from the Ukraine to the United States in 1906. He first lived in Philadelphia, but abhorred the city slums and wished to relocate in a rural area to raise his family. After examining the local area he settled in Newark in 1910. Once settled, he established a furnishing and dry goods store in which he made substantial money, both before and after World War I. His daughter remembers that in the beginning, these were not easy times. As both a foreigner and a Jew, Handloff initially encountered a good deal of prejudice. But as a result of good business practice, he was able to overcome this obstacle and succeed. In 1922, he used his profits to build a two-story brick Renaissance Revival Building in which he operated a five-and-ten-cent store, and lived with his family on the second floor. Also in the 1920's, Handloff operated a movie house, called the Hanark Theater, out of a small brick building on Main Street. In 1929, he had the State Theater erected and discontinued the Hanark. Again, having prospered, he began investing his money in real estate around town. In the ensuing years he bought the Newark Opera House and the Bank of Newark building. Today, these four buildings and several other properties are still in the possession of the Handloff family. This pattern of profit, expansion, and reinvestment raised the level of Handloff's initial establishment from mere commerce to organized business.

Theaters like the State appeared all over Delaware in the early-twentieth century (see Delaware Cultural Resource Survey: K-3967 Capitol Theater, Dover and N-425.103 Everett Theater, Middletown). These theaters are similar in style with their Neo-Classical facades, and were similar in their function as both live performance theaters and movie houses. This dual function allowed the proprietors to present an established form of entertainment familiar to audiences in live performance shows, while introducing moving pictures.

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G. Bibliographical References:

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Dorothy Handloff Goberman, Telephone Interview, October 4, 1982.

William D. Lewis. "University of Delaware: Ancestors, Friends and Neighbors", Delaware Notes, (Newark: University of Delaware, Vol. 34, No. 1, 1961), p. 203.

Newark Delaware. Mayors' Committee: Armed Forces-Civilian Relations. "Greetings", 14 page pamphlet (University of Delaware Library, Delaware Collection), see photographs.

