

**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

For HCRS use only

received

JUL 13 1982

date entered

**1. Name**

historic Theater Building

and/or common Theater Building

**2. Location**

street & number 625-33 S. 4th Avenue NA not for publication

city, town Louisville NA vicinity of congressional district 3 & 4

state Ky. code 021 county Jefferson code 111

**3. Classification**

| Category  | Ownership                                   | Status  | Present Use                                    |
|---|---|---|--|
| <u>NA</u> district                              | <u>NA</u> public                            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied        | <u>NA</u> agriculture                          |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private | <u>NA</u> unoccupied                                | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial |
| <u>NA</u> structure                             | <u>NA</u> both                              | <u>NA</u> work in progress                          | <u>NA</u> educational                          |
| <u>NA</u> site                                  | <b>Public Acquisition</b>                   | <b>Accessible</b>                                   | <u>NA</u> entertainment                        |
| <u>NA</u> object                                | <u>NA</u> in process                        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted | <u>NA</u> government                           |
|   | <u>NA</u> being considered                  | <u>NA</u> yes: unrestricted                         | <u>NA</u> industrial                           |
|   |   | <u>NA</u> no  | <u>NA</u> military                             |
|   |   |   | <u>NA</u> museum                               |
|   |   |   | <u>NA</u> park                                 |
|   |   |   | <u>NA</u> private residence                    |
|   |   |   | <u>NA</u> religious                            |
|   |   |   | <u>NA</u> scientific                           |
|   |   |   | <u>NA</u> transportation                       |
|   |   |   | <u>NA</u> other:                               |

**4. Owner of Property**

name Mr. J. A. Alexander c/o Frank Strickler, Trustee

street & number Citizens Fidelity Bank & Trust Co., 500 West Jefferson Street

city, town Louisville NA vicinity of state Kentucky

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Jefferson County (Ky.) Courthouse

street & number 531 W. Jefferson St.

city, town Louisville state Kentucky

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Kentucky Historic Resources Inventory has this property been determined eligible?     yes  no

date September 6, 1978 NA federal  state NA county NA local

depository for survey records Heritage Division, Department of the Arts

city, town Frankfort state Kentucky

## 7. Description

|  |                            |   |   |                |
|--|----------------------------|---|---|----------------|
| <b>Condition</b>                         |                            | <b>Check one</b>                            | <b>Check one</b>                                  |                |
| <del>NA</del> excellent                  | <del>NA</del> deteriorated | <del>NA</del> unaltered                     | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site |                |
| <del>NA</del> good                       | <del>NA</del> ruins        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered | <del>NA</del> moved                               | date <u>NA</u> |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair | <del>NA</del> unexposed    |   |   |                |

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Art Deco Theater Building, built in 1928 to complement the adjacent Loew's and United Artists' State Theater, is located on Fourth Avenue in downtown Louisville. Besides providing office and shop space along the major retail corridor of the city, the Theater Building was designed to screen from view the auditorium of the Loew's Theater.

The four-story brick structure is faced with smooth beige tile applied to resemble stone and enriched with an array of terra cotta ornamentation. The central bay is flanked by eight, wider bays which are identical above the first story. Each bay contains a group of three windows, the center of which is somewhat larger than the other two and separated from them by slender pilasters. The narrow entry bay has a single window in each story. All the windows of the facade are double-hung, with wooden sash and one-over-one panes.

The entry is finished in red marble. Affixed to its rounded corners are the words "Theater Building" in bronze lettering. The bronze-plated double doors are deeply recessed and topped by a multi-paned transom. Above the transom is metal grillwork in a geometric pattern. A lantern is suspended above the doorway.

The four storefronts at ground level are severely altered. Only the southernmost end retains a portion of the original terra cotta drip mold. An extended cornice above the first story is supported by paired brackets and enriched with egg and dart molding. Above each second-story bay is a large rectangular panel bearing a classical urn in relief. Similar panels above the third story carry the theatrical "mask of tragedy." Above the fourth level are areas of open grillwork in a geometric pattern similar to that above the doorway. The structure is crowned by a row of panels containing festoons and cartouches and a series of anthemions along the roofline.

The interior of the building has retained some of its original features, most notably in the lobby area on the first floor. A long, narrow corridor leading back to the elevator and stairwell has a terrazzo floor and marble wainscoting. Art Deco chandeliers hang from the coffered ceiling which is adorned with rosettes. Pilasters have decorative capitals. The wrought-iron stair railing is still intact. There is little to distinguish the upper floors except the terrazzo hallways.

## 8. Significance

| Period                    | Areas of Significance—Check and justify below |                                      |                                      |                               |
|---------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <del>NA</del> prehistoric | <del>NA</del> archeology-prehistoric          | <del>NA</del> community planning     | <del>NA</del> landscape architecture | <del>NA</del> religion        |
| <del>NA</del> 1400-1499   | <del>NA</del> archeology-historic             | <del>NA</del> conservation           | <del>NA</del> law                    | <del>NA</del> science         |
| <del>NA</del> 1500-1599   | <del>NA</del> agriculture                     | <del>NA</del> economics              | <del>NA</del> literature             | <del>NA</del> sculpture       |
| <del>NA</del> 1600-1699   | <del>X</del> architecture                     | <del>NA</del> education              | <del>NA</del> military               | <del>NA</del> social/         |
| <del>NA</del> 1700-1799   | <del>NA</del> art                             | <del>NA</del> engineering            | <del>NA</del> music                  | <del>NA</del> humanitarian    |
| <del>NA</del> 1800-1899   | <del>NA</del> commerce                        | <del>NA</del> exploration/settlement | <del>NA</del> philosophy             | <del>NA</del> theater         |
| <del>X</del> 1900-        | <del>NA</del> communications                  | <del>NA</del> industry               | <del>NA</del> politics/government    | <del>NA</del> transportation  |
|                           |   | <del>NA</del> invention              |                                      | <del>NA</del> other (specify) |

**Specific dates** 1928 **Builder/Architect** John Ebersson

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Theater Building is the companion piece to Louisville's most lavish movie theater, the United Artists' (National Register, March 1978). It is the work of America's leading theater architect John Ebersson. Architecturally, the Theater Building displays an interesting blend of traditional Beaux Arts and contemporary Art Deco elements. However, its greatest significance is that it constitutes one of fewer than six buildings in Louisville with intact terra cotta facades and is one of the most substantial of these examples.

Both the Theater Building and the United Artists' Theater were built in 1928. Though the buildings had different owners, it is apparent that Ebersson conceived of them as a functional unit. From a design standpoint, the Theater Building complements the United Artists' in two ways. First, by its height and especially in its almost exclusive use of terra cotta and tile, the facade serves visually to extend the narrow street front of the theater along 4th Avenue. Secondly, the shallowness of the Theater Building allowed the architect to tuck behind it the auditorium of the movie house.

John Ebersson (? 1875 - 1954) originated the "atmospheric" school of theater design which became so popular during the 1920s. His theater projects often included an office/retail counterpart, which was usually executed in a more restrained, classical manner than the flamboyant theater itself.<sup>1</sup> In the Theater Building, Ebersson borrows freely from the Beaux Arts tradition for many of the decorative elements, while contemporary Art Deco styling is expressed in the design of the main entry and in the lobby. Although terra cotta decoration was used in many buildings in Louisville, a facade composed entirely of terra cotta and glazed tile panels is rare and cannot be found in any structures of comparable size.

The office space in the upper floors is vacant now, but plans are underway to rehabilitate the Theater Building as part of an overall redevelopment project in this block of 4th Avenue.

1. Elroy Quenroe, "John Ebersson in Richmond, Virginia: Architect for the Twenties," Master's Thesis (University of Virginia, March 1975), p. 33.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

1. Gilfillen, S., editor. The American Terra Cotta Index. Compiled from the Northwest Archives at the University of Minnesota, n.d.
2. Historic Landmarks and Preservation Districts Commission. "Loew's and United Artists' State Theater." National Register of Historic Places Inventory- Nomination Form, April 1977

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 0.21 acres

Quadrangle name Louisville West

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UMT References

A 

|      |   |   |   |         |   |   |   |          |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|------|---|---|---|---------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1    | 6 | 6 | 0 | 8       | 7 | 0 | 0 | 4        | 2 | 3 | 3 | 8 | 3 | 0 |
| Zone |   |   |   | Easting |   |   |   | Northing |   |   |   |   |   |   |

B 

|      |   |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|------|---|---------|--|--|--|----------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| N    | A |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Zone |   | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

C 

|      |   |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|------|---|---------|--|--|--|----------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| N    | A |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Zone |   | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

D 

|      |   |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|------|---|---------|--|--|--|----------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| N    | A |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Zone |   | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

E 

|      |   |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|------|---|---------|--|--|--|----------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| N    | A |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Zone |   | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

F 

|      |   |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|------|---|---------|--|--|--|----------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| N    | A |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Zone |   | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

G 

|      |   |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|------|---|---------|--|--|--|----------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| N    | A |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Zone |   | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

H 

|      |   |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|------|---|---------|--|--|--|----------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| N    | A |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Zone |   | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

### Verbal boundary description and justification

Block 13-K, Lot 128 of the City of Louisville. (See Map 2.) No other structure, aside from the Theater Building, sits on the lot.

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

state NA code NA county NA code NA

state NA code NA county NA code NA

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Hugh B. Foshee / Architectural Historian

organization Louisville Landmarks Commission date March 1982

street & number 727 West Main St. telephone (502) 587-3501

city or town Louisville state Kentucky

# 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 Mary Joann Spill

title State Historic Preservation Officer date 7/9/82

For HCRS use only

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

Selma Byrum 8/12/82

Keper of the National Register date

Attest: date

Chief of Registration

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

Theater Building  
Louisville, Jefferson County,  
Kentucky

CONTINUATION SHEET

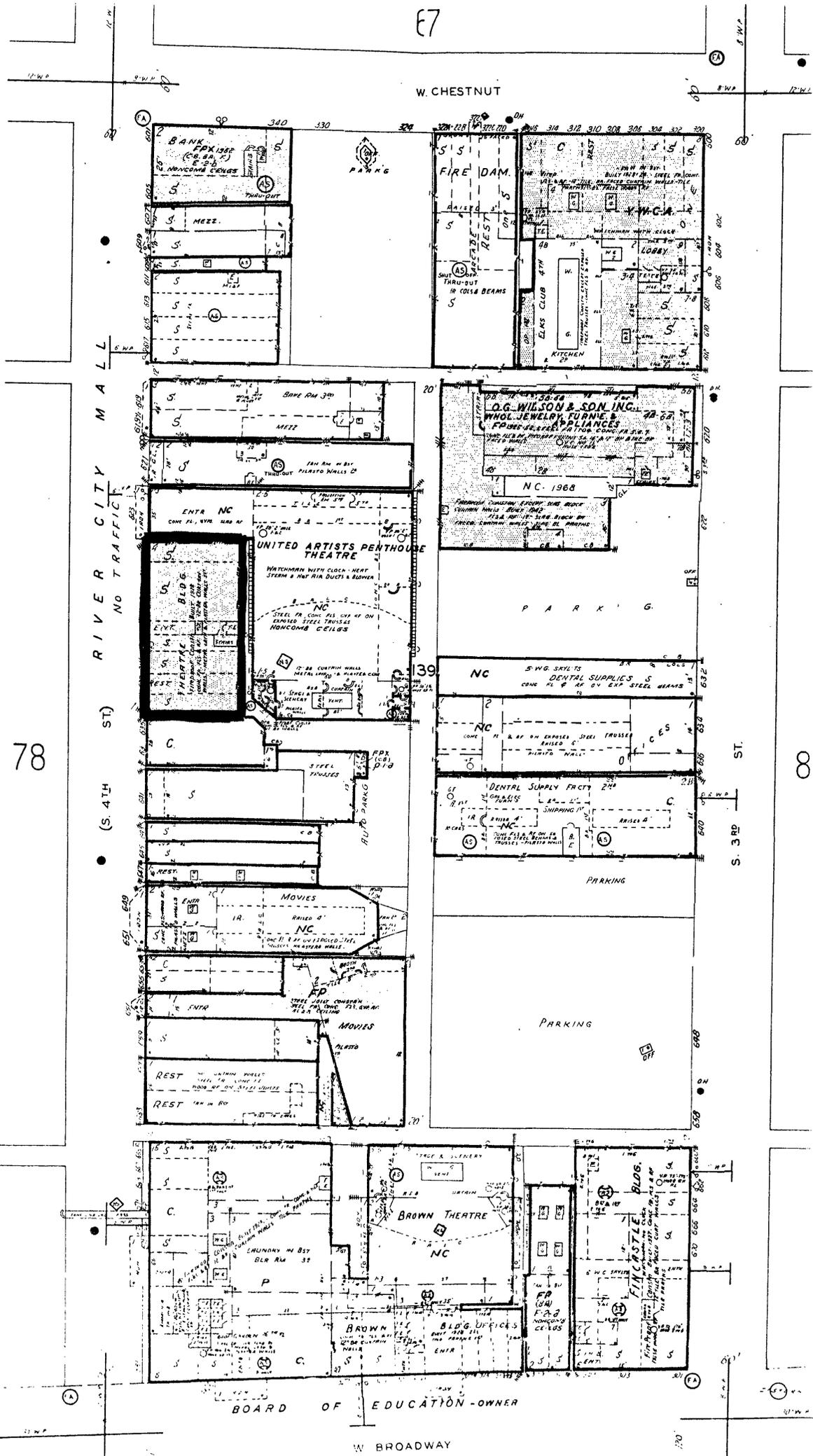
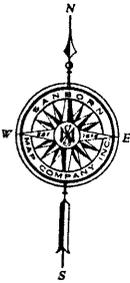
ITEM NUMBER

9

PAGE

2

- 
3. Jefferson County (Ky.) Deed Books
  4. Quenroe, Elroy. "John Eberson in Richmond, Virginia: Architect for the Twenties." Master's Thesis, University of Virginia, March 1975.



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80

BOARD OF EDUCATION - OWNER

W BROADWAY

Theater Building  
Louisville, Jefferson County,  
Kentucky

Sanborn Map Co. (1974)  
Pelham, New York

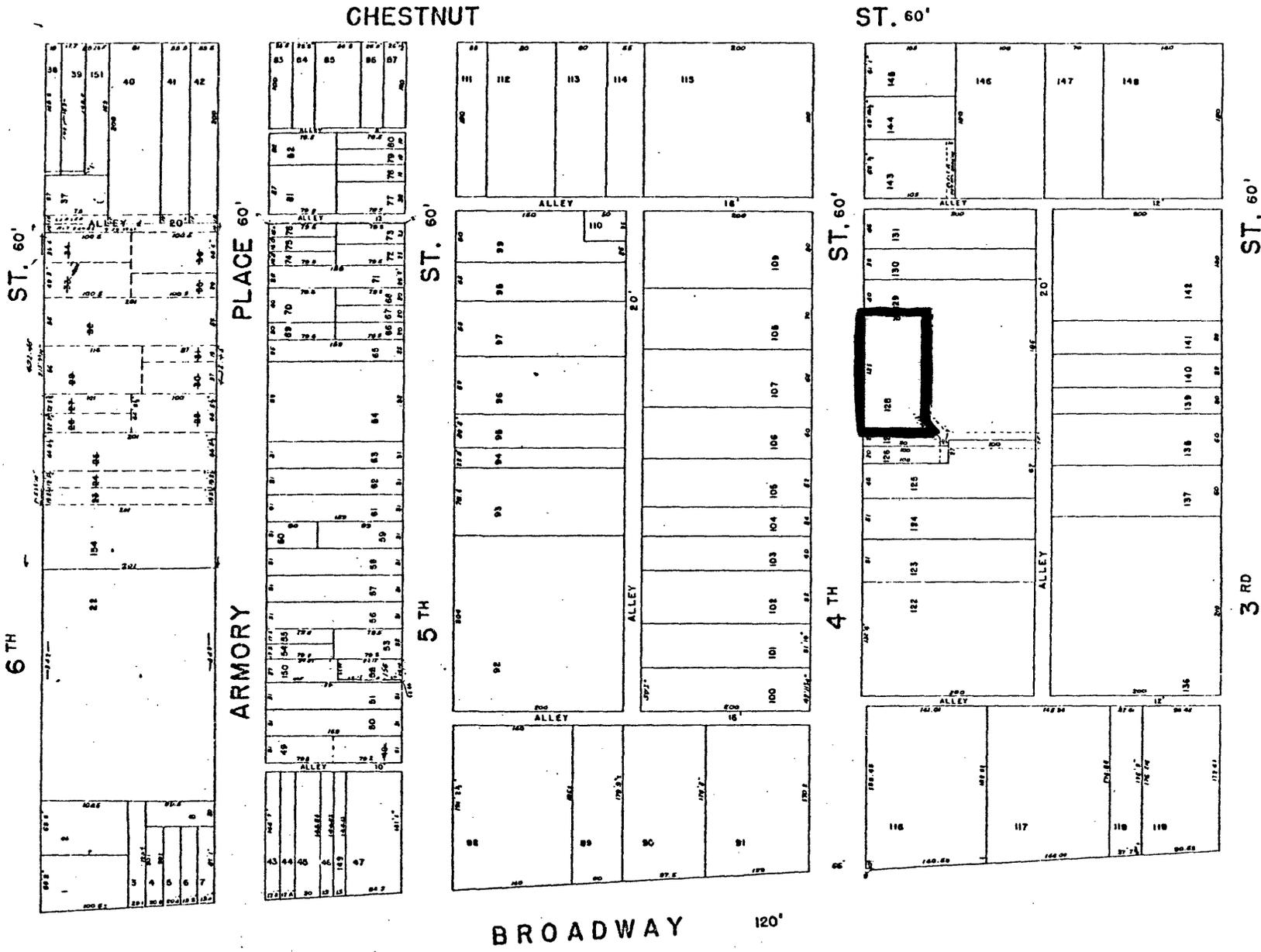
Map 2. Sanborn Map, vol. 1,  
p. 79. Nominated  
area bounded in blue.

SCALE, 1" = 60'

THOS. F. BURKE  
JEFFERSON COUNTY TAX COMM'R  
R. A. TAPPELHORN - CHIEF DRAFTERMAN  
DRAWN, 6-20-39

131  
132  
133

13-K



BAYLESS' SUB. - B B 88X138 - (202)  
BUSTARD'S SUB. - 45 X 80 - (188)  
MAP OF CANTON B BAYLESS' SUB. - 88X178 - (188)

89

141

13-K

Theater Building  
Louisville, Jefferson County,  
Kentucky

Jefferson County Real Estate  
Atlas (1968)

Map 3. Real Estate Atlas.  
Nominated area bounded  
in blue.