

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Royal Theatre

other names/site number SA0129

2. Location

street & number 111 South Market Street

☐ not for publication

city or town Benton

☐ vicinity

state Arkansas

code

AR

county

Saline

code

135
007

zip code

72015

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature]
Signature of certifying official/Title

8/11/03
Date

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See Continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

☒ entered in the National Register.

☐ See continuation sheet

☐ determined eligible for the National Register.

☐ See continuation sheet

☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.

☐ removed from the National Register.

☐ other, (explain:)

[Signature]
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

SEP 27 2003

Royal Theatre
Name of Property

Saline County, Arkansas
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in count.)

Contributing

Noncontributing

1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: theater

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: theater

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT: Moderne

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK

walls BRICK

roof ASPHALT

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See continuation sheets.

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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

SUMMARY

Occupying one lot near the center of the west side of the 100 block of Market Street in downtown Benton, the Royal Theatre is a freestanding, two-story brick building with a partial basement. The theater was remodeled and enlarged in 1948-49, when the existing façade was created, and a flat-roofed addition was built at the rear of the original 1920 gable-roofed section of the building. The remodeling was the work of the Little Rock architectural firm of Ginocchio and Cromwell, who incorporated into their design for the Royal some of the same materials they used in a contemporaneous project, the Center Theater in Little Rock (NR 5/22/03). The Royal Theatre's most striking features--the neon-trimmed marquee and the vertical "Royal" sign--came from the theater in Little Rock that was remodeled as the Center Theater.

ELABORATION

The original section of the Royal Theatre was built in 1920, when it was known as the Imp Theatre. Located near the center of its block, the theater originally was flanked to the north by a commercial building, which still stands, and to the south by a residence, now gone. It was constructed as a freestanding building, centered between its two neighbors with a few feet of space on either side, and it was topped by a low-pitched, gabled roof. A two-story brick and stucco façade on the street elevation, however, gave the theater the appearance of a flat-roofed commercial building.

The original theater building occupied only about three-quarters of the depth of its lot, leaving room for a rear addition which was constructed beginning in December of 1948. As this 43', flat-roofed extension was being built, the Imp Theatre initially remained open. The theater finally closed on February 22, 1949, so that "interior work and remodeling of front" could begin.¹

Announcing that the Imp Theatre soon would close, the *Benton Courier* of February 17, 1949, published an "Architect's drawing of modernized Royal Theatre"--the old Imp with a newly streamlined façade. According to the newspaper, the "front of the building will be entirely redone with maroon tile on the lower portion and the principal parts of the building in asbestos cement siding. The marquee and speller boxes are to be the latest design with neon lighting decorating the whole." As completed in May of 1949, the work closely followed the architect's drawing, except that buff brick was substituted for the "asbestos cement siding."

Since 1949, the only major change to the exterior of the Royal Theatre has been a new color scheme: the buff brick and much of the maroon tile were painted dark green in the late 1990s. Otherwise, the façade remains almost exactly as it was designed in the late 1940s. The Royal Theatre's original color scheme can be viewed in Little Rock, where architects Frank Ginocchio and Edwin Cromwell appear to have used the same brick and tile for the Center Theater, also dating from 1948-49, as they did for the Royal Theatre.

The Royal Theatre's main (east) façade originally derived much of its modern, streamlined look from bricks laid in patterns that created two vertical lines running up each side of the façade and traced a large square in the center of the façade, over the marquee. (These lines were exaggerated by being painted cream when the rest of the brick was painted dark green.) The configuration of the upper edge of the main façade--higher in the center, above the marquee, and stepping down on either side--added to the "modernized" look of the Royal Theatre. Otherwise, the upper portion of the façade was, and is, unadorned, broken only by three small square openings--two windows and a louvered vent--just above the marquee.

¹ *Benton Courier*, 17 February 1949.

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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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On the first floor of the theater, original movie poster display cases remain in place, facing the sidewalk on either side of the entry area, beyond the marquee. The cases are trimmed with wood that was added in the late 1990s when the façade was painted. Under the marquee, the main façade is recessed, creating a sidewalk vestibule with walls angling inward. A third poster display case occupies the angled wall on the south side of the sidewalk vestibule. The angled wall on the north side of the vestibule contains the window for the original concession stand, now used as an office. The ticket booth curves forward directly in the center of the vestibule and is flanked on each side by three original doors, each with two circular windows. The sidewalk vestibule has a tile floor, and the first-floor façade is surfaced with tile, most of which now is painted. Only the ticket booth retains the original unpainted maroon tile.

The neon-trimmed marquee projects forward over the entry area, coming to a point at the center of the main façade. Centered above the marquee, and projecting at a right angle from the building, is the vertical "Royal" sign, which rises above the height of the upper edge of the façade. Both the marquee and the sign appear to be fully intact, as are two parallel rows of lightbulbs running down the center of the underneath side of the marquee.

Two short wing walls were added to either side of the main façade during the 1949 remodeling, "attaching" the theater building to its neighbors and blocking access from the sidewalk to the narrow spaces on each side of the building. From the rear, however, it remains obvious that the theater building originally was freestanding; the spaces between the theater and the neighboring buildings have not been entirely filled in. The point where the 1920 building ends and the 1948-49 addition begins also is obvious. The flat roof of the addition contrasts markedly with the original building's gabled roof, and the brickwork also clearly is different. A bricked-in door and two bricked-in, second-story windows can be seen on the south side of the original building, while the addition was constructed without openings, except in the rear (west) facade, which has a door, four louvered vent openings, and two small windows (now covered). Small, one-story, shed-roofed extensions, each containing a door, are attached to the north and south sides of the addition.

The interior of the Royal Theatre also was thoroughly remodeled in 1949 and subsequently has undergone somewhat more alteration than the exterior. Spanning the front of the building, with restrooms at either end, the lobby has changed little since 1949, except for the addition of a new concession stand in 1959. The 1959 concession stand is centered on the west wall of the lobby. The original concession stand, which opens to the outside as well as into the lobby, still exists and is used as an office.

Openings on either side of the 1959 concession stand lead into the theater auditorium. The basic configuration of the auditorium is intact, although the balcony was enclosed in 1978, when it became the location of a second movie screen. When the theater changed hands in 1996, the new owner covered the walls in the main auditorium with velvet and installed newer seating. For the theater's latest incarnation as a community playhouse, the movie screen has been removed, and some alterations have been made to the stage area. Original light fixtures, however, line the auditorium walls (and original decorative motifs are thought to remain intact on the walls, beneath the velvet). The main auditorium also retains its 1949 acoustical tile ceiling. In the balcony, the seating installed in 1949 still exists, as does the projection booth.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☐ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** moved from its original location.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Levels of Significance (local, state, national)

Local

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1948-1949

Significant Dates

1948-1949

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked)

Cultural Affiliation (Complete if Criterion D is marked)

Architect/Builder

Ginocchio, Frank
Cromwell, Edwin B.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ 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:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State Agency
- ☐ Federal Agency
- ☐ Local Government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository: _____

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SUMMARY

Created when an older theater was extensively remodeled and enlarged, the Royal Theatre opened in the spring of 1949. At the time, it was one of three movie theaters in downtown Benton--and it was to be the longest-lived. The Royal continued showing movies until 2000, when it was converted to use as a community playhouse. Except for a change in color scheme, the design of the Royal's façade has survived intact since the theater opened, and several important original interior features also remain. With its distinctive neon-trimmed marquee and "Royal" sign, the building has been a landmark in downtown Benton for more than fifty years. It is eligible for listing in the National Register under **Criterion C** with **local significance**.

ELABORATION

The oldest part of what now is the Royal Theatre was built in 1920 as the Imp Theatre. ("Imp" reportedly stood for "Independent Motion Pictures."²) The theater was initially operated by Mrs. Alice Wooten, who came to Benton in 1916, and, for a few years, operated a movie theater in a downtown storefront. In 1920, she moved her business into a newly-constructed building on Market Street designed specifically for showing "motion pictures." Two years later, Wallace Kauffman, who earlier had worked for Mrs. Wooten, took over the Imp Theatre.³ Mr. Kauffman, according to the *Benton Courier*, proceeded to give "to the citizens of Benton the cleanest and best shows he could procure."⁴

After operating the theater with his wife, Lena, for twenty-seven years, Wallace Kauffman closed the Imp for remodeling on February 22, 1949. Work had begun in December of 1948 on a rear extension of forty-three feet, but closing the theater was necessary for completion of the interior and remodeling of the main façade. The *Benton Courier* reported that the remodeled theater, to be called the Royal Theatre, would feature many improvements: "Seating capacity increased from 590 to 800, with seat rows four inches further apart; Westinghouse refrigeration system, adequate for cooling the theatre regardless of size of crowd; an automatic heating system; enlarged projection screen; foyer size doubled, and ladies rest room and lounge greatly enlarged and modernized."⁵

The newspaper also stated that the "marquee and speller boxes are to be the latest design with neon lighting decorating the whole"--without mentioning that the marquee and "Royal" sign were coming from the recently-dismantled Royal Theater in Little Rock. Little Rock's Royal Theater closed in September of 1948 and was replaced by the Center Theater, which was designed by Little Rock architects Frank Ginocchio and Edwin Cromwell. Ginocchio and Cromwell also designed the remodeling that turned Benton's Imp Theatre into the Royal Theatre. The old sign and marquee from the firm's Little Rock project are believed to have been incorporated into the design of the project in Benton.

The new Royal Theatre opened on May 12, 1949, with the showing of a Jimmy Stewart movie, "You Gotta Stay Happy."⁶ It was the beginning of a forty-seven year run for the Royal Theatre under the management of successive generations of the Kauffman family. When Wallace Kauffman died in 1974, his son, Warren, took over the business. In turn, Warren Kauffman's son, Randy, assumed control when Warren retired in 1986. Ten years later the run ended when Randy Kauffman sold the theater to Jerry Van Dyke. In 2000, Van Dyke turned the theater over to the nonprofit Central Arkansas Community Players, now known as the Royal Players. Since then, the Royal has been operated as a community theater.

² *Benton Courier*, 12 May 1949 and 12 January 1972.

³ *Benton Courier*, 12 January 1972.

⁴ *Benton Courier*, 25 March 1937.

⁵ *Benton Courier*, 17 February 1949.

⁶ *Benton Courier*, 19 May 1949.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Fifty-four years after it originally opened, the Royal Theatre remains very much intact. Its distinctive marquee and "Royal" sign have made it a local landmark in the truest sense, and it is the last historic movie theater building that survives in Benton in recognizable form.⁷ For these reasons, it is eligible for the National Register under **Criterion C** with **local significance**.

⁷ The Saline County Public Library for many years has been housed in a building that began life as the Palace Theater. This building, however, has been so extensively remodeled that it no longer is recognizable as a theater.

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Section number 9 Page 1

Bibliography

Benton, Saline County, Arkansas. New York: Sanborn Map Company, March 1915.
Benton, Saline County, Arkansas. New York: Sanborn Map Company, May 1921.
Benton, Saline County, Arkansas. New York: Sanborn Map Company, July 1930.
Benton, Saline County, Arkansas. New York: Sanborn Map Company, July 1930—updated June 1948.
Benton Courier, 27 January 1916; 25 March 1937; 17 February 1949; 12 May 1949; 19 May 1949; 12 January 1972.
Moss, Shannon. Former Royal Theatre employee, Benton, Arkansas. Interview, 15 April 2003.

Royal Theatre
Name of Property

Saline County, Arkansas
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 15 537784 3824448
Zone Easting Northing
2 _____

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing
4 _____

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Cheryl Griffith Nichols/Consultant
organization _____ date June 4, 2003
street & number 1721 S. Gaines St. telephone 501-375-2686
city or town Little Rock state Arkansas zip code 72206

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Royal Players
street & number P.O. Box 1743 telephone 501-682-2144
city or town Benton state Arkansas zip code 72018-1743

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

Royal Theatre
Name of Property

Saline County, Arkansas
County and State

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 1

Verbal Boundary Description

Lot 3, Block 14, Original Town of Benton, Saline County, Arkansas.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes all of the property that historically has been associated with this resource.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Royal Theatre
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: ARKANSAS, ~~Benton~~ *Saline*

DATE RECEIVED: 8/13/03 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 9/15/03
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 10/01/03 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 9/27/03
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 03000955

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

☒ ACCEPT ☐ RETURN ☐ REJECT SEP 27 2003 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

*Entered in the
National Register*

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N



OLIVER!
JULY 17-27

OLIVER!
JULY 17-27



Royal Theatre
Saline County, Arkansas

Cheryl Nichols
June 25, 2003

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

Looking west toward main (east) facade

#1



Royal Theatre
Saline County Arkansas

Cheryl Nichols

June 25, 2003

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

Looking southwest/main facade

#2



Royal Theatre
Saline County, Arkansas
Cheryl Nichols

June 25, 2003

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

Rear (west) & south facades, looking northeast

#3



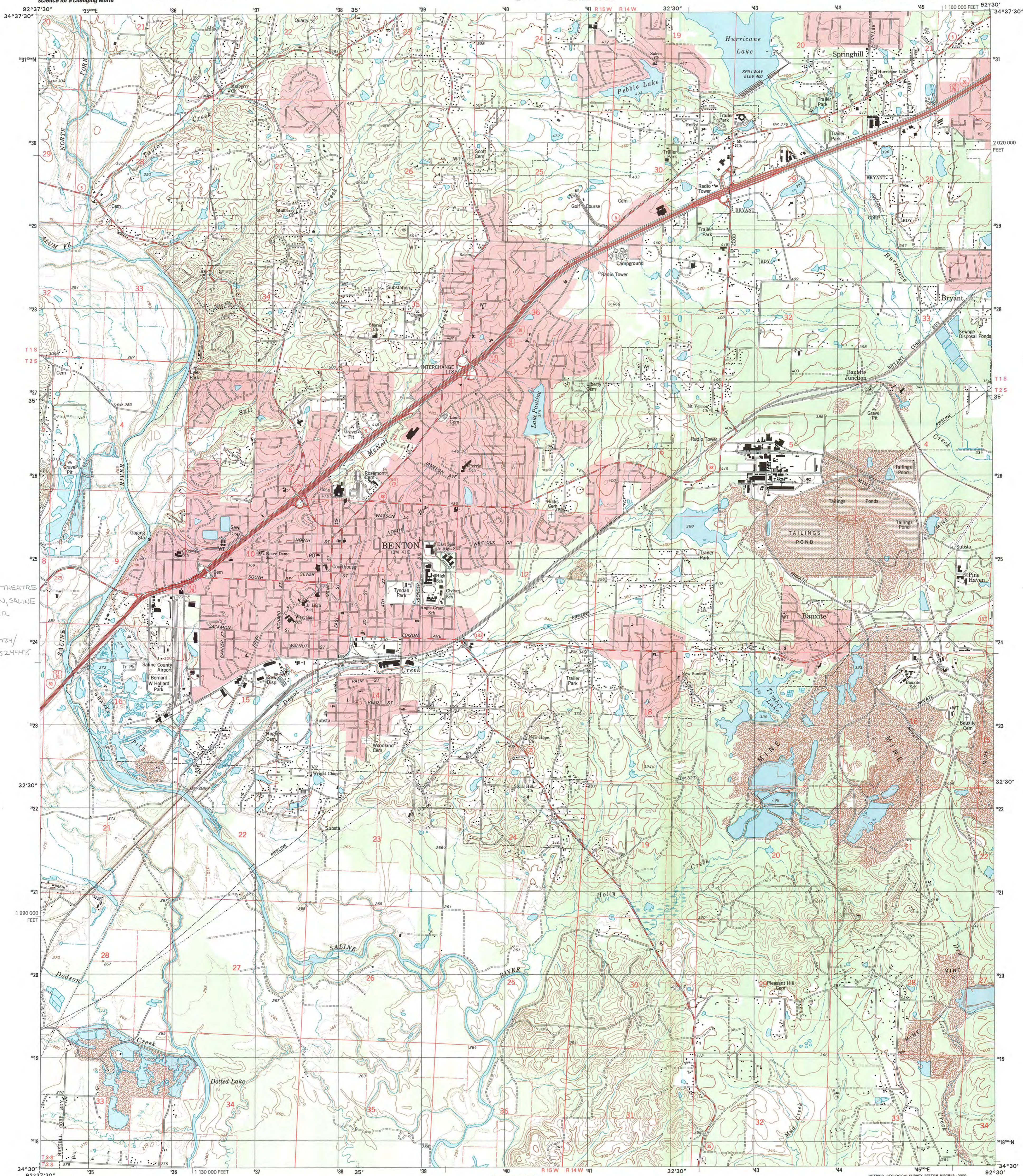




Royal Theater
Saline County Arkansas
Cheryl Nichols

June 25, 2003

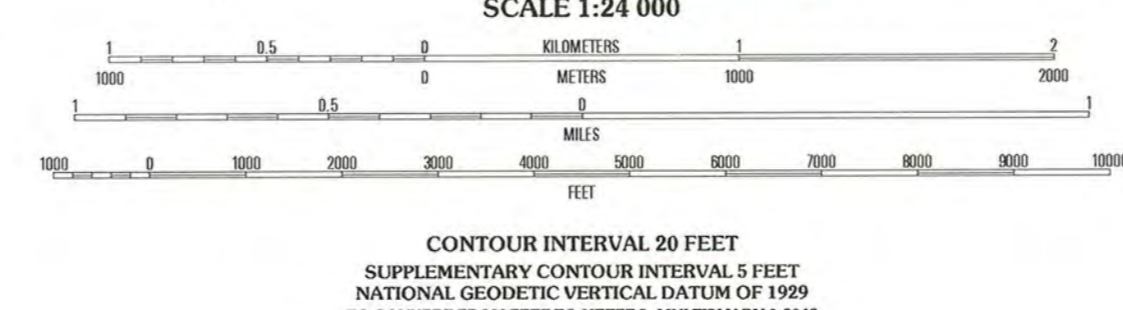
Arkansas Historic Preservation Program
Theater auditorium, looking east
#6



ROYAL THEATRE
BENTON, SALINE
CO., AR
UTM:
15/337734/
3324443

Produced by the United States Geological Survey
in cooperation with Arkansas Geological Commission
Topography compiled 1973. Planimetry derived from imagery
taken 1994 and other sources. Public Land Survey System and
survey control current as of 1974.
North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83). Projection and
1000-meter grid: Universal Transverse Mercator, zone 15
10 000-foot ticks: Arkansas Coordinate System of 1983 (south zone)
North American Datum of 1927 (NAD 27) is shown by dashed
corner ticks. The values of the shift between NAD 83 and
NAD 27 for 7.5-minute intersections are obtainable from
National Geodetic Survey NADCON software
Landmark buildings verified 1974

UTM GRID AND 2000 MAGNETIC NORTH
DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway
hard surface
Secondary highway
hard surface
Unimproved road
Light-duty road, hard or
improved surface
Interstate Route
U.S. Route
State Route

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9

1 Lake Norrell
2 Congo
3 Alexander
4 Haskell
5 Bryant
6 Taskwood
7 Tull
8 Rollins

BENTON, AR
1994
NIMA 7453 II SE-SERIES V884

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, P.O. BOX 25286, DENVER, COLORADO 80225
AND ARKANSAS GEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS 72204
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST





The Department of Arkansas Heritage

Mike Huckabee, Governor
Cathie Matthews, Director

Arkansas Arts Council

Arkansas Natural Heritage
Commission

Historic Arkansas Museum

Delta Cultural Center

Old State House Museum



Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

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323 Center Street
Little Rock, AR 72201

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info@arkansaspreservation.org

website:

www.arkansaspreservation.org

August 7, 2003

Carol D. Shull
Chief of Registration
United States Department of the Interior
National Register of Historic Places
National Park Service
8th Floor
1201 Eye Street, NW
Washington, DC 20005



RE: Royal Theatre – Benton, Saline County, Arkansas

Dear Carol:

We are enclosing for your review the above-referenced nomination. The Arkansas Historic Preservation Program has complied with all applicable nominating procedures and notification requirements in the nomination process.

If you need further information, please call Ralph S. Wilcox of my staff at (501) 324-9787. Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

Sincerely,

Cathie Matthews
State Historic Preservation Officer

CM:rsw

Enclosure

An Equal Opportunity Employer

