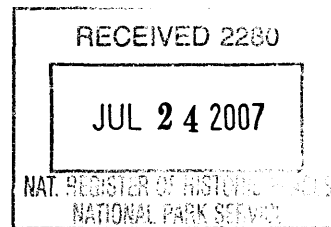


908

NPS Form 10-900
(Rev. 10-90)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name Film Exchange Historic District
other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number intersection of West Sheridan Avenue and Lee Avenue not for publication N/A
city or town Oklahoma City vicinity N/A
state Oklahoma code OK county Oklahoma code 109
zip code 73102

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally. (N/A See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Bob Blackman
Signature of certifying official

7-23-07
Date

Oklahoma Historical Society, SHPO
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 commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this 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

Edson H. Beall 9.6.07

other (explain):

for

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

=====

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>9</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>9</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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

=====

6. Function or Use

=====

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: COMMERCE/TRADE Sub: specialty store

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: COMMERCE/TRADE Sub: specialty store

 COMMERCE/TRADE office

 VACANT/NOT IN USE

=====

7. Description

=====

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

 LATE 19TH & 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS:

 Commercial Style (4)

 MODERN MOVEMENT:

 Moderne (2) Art Deco (3)

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

roof ASPHALT

walls BRICK

other _____

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

=====

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.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- 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.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance 1925-1955

=====
8. Statement of Significance (Continued)
=====

Significant Dates 1937

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder unknown

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

=====
9. Major Bibliographical References
=====

(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: _____

=====
10. Geographical Data
=====

Acreage of Property Approximate 2.25 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	14	633940	3925570	3	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____

N/A 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 Jocelyn Lupkin

organization Robison & Associates Architects date February 16th, 2007

street & number 2927 The Paseo telephone (405) 524-4544

city or town Oklahoma City state OK zip code 73103

=====
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 digital 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 the SHPO or FPO.)

name _____

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____
=====

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Film Exchange Historic District
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NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

Description

The Film Exchange Historic District is an early to mid twentieth-century commercial area located in Oklahoma City, the state capital of Oklahoma. The Film Exchange Historic District is located in downtown Oklahoma City, in an area approximately one-half block to the north, south, east, and west of the intersection of North Lee Avenue and West Sheridan Avenue. Sheridan Avenue, once Grand Avenue, serves as the division line between north and south Oklahoma City and is characterized by one and two story commercial buildings interspersed with surface parking lots in the area near the Film Exchange Historic District. Bradford pear trees have been planted in front of many of the buildings.

The buildings clustered at the intersection of West Sheridan Avenue and Lee Avenue are all historically related to the movie industry. They are connected thematically, and in many cases physically. Of the 9 documented resources, all are contributing buildings. 4 buildings are Commercial Style, 3 are Art Deco, and 2 are Moderne. The buildings have a consistent setback with paved walks and curbs between the building facade and the street. Most of the buildings are one-story, two are two-story, and one, 701 West Sheridan Avenue, is two-story on the front elevation going up to three stories at the rear elevation. The buildings, for the most part, exhibit a high degree of integrity.

The Film Exchange Historic District is contained within a predominantly commercial and industrial portion of downtown Oklahoma City. To the east, west and south are low-rise commercial and industrial buildings and parking lots. North of the Film Exchange Historic District is a complex of large Art Deco buildings, used primarily for city and county government, offices and entertainment. The Art Deco Oklahoma City Civic Center and the Centre Theatre (which is now incorporated into the Oklahoma City Museum of Art) are notable examples of this style at a large scale. By contrast, the examples of the style contained within the Film Exchange are much smaller, but have a gem-like quality that comes as a surprise within the generally industrial and commercial aesthetic of the surrounding area.

The boundaries of the Film Exchange district are defined by starting at the alley between West Sheridan Avenue and West Main Street at the northwest corner of the building at 701-705 West Sheridan Avenue, going west across North Lee Avenue to the northwest corner of the building at 10 North Lee Avenue, proceeding south down the east side of 623 West Sheridan Avenue and across Sheridan Avenue down the east side of 624 West Sheridan Avenue to the alley between West Sheridan Avenue and West California Avenue. From this corner, proceed west to the west side of 718 West Sheridan Avenue, go north across Sheridan Avenue, proceed east to the west side of 701-705 West Sheridan Avenue, and close the boundary at the northwest corner of 701-705, the point of origin.

Buildings were constructed between 1925 and 1949. District boundary lines include those properties which share the historic characteristics of building use and architectural styles. The Film Exchange Historic District's consistency of scale, material, architectural styles and setbacks contribute to its delineation as a visually cohesive unit.

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Contributing Properties

1. 10 North Lee Avenue. 1936. This one-story Art Deco building has a buff brick facade and cast stone base from floor to window sill height. The buff brick is used on the west (front) elevation and in one bay to the east on the north and south elevations. The back of the building is made of a utilitarian red brick. The facade is simple and symmetrical with three bays. The central bay has centered double doors with a pilaster, narrow glazed opening and another pilaster on each side. A wider glazed bay is on each side of the central bay. The exterior wall above the buff brick has a cast stone cap with a chevron pattern. The building is distinguished by four stepped cast stone steeply vertical projections that are spaced on either side of the central bay and on either side of the central double doors. The scale of these elements with respect to the rest of the building makes a strong architectural statement.
2. 623-625 West Sheridan Avenue. 1931. This one-story Commercial Style building has three equal bays. The building has a red brick facade with a darker brick soldier course above the window head that is similar to the Commercial Style buildings across the street at 700-708. There is a low, window-sill height cast stone base. There appears to have been vertical elements that were removed than extended from the parapet down about one-quarter of the way towards the window head. The parapet cap has been parged and asphaltic waterproofing has been applied. There is a rectangular outline above the storefront glazed area that is the full length of each bay. This appears to have been an area for a sign panel, but the outline has also been parged over. Bays are separated by plain brick columns and the space between the columns is a fully glazed storefront with a low sill. The bay to the west has five lights with a corresponding clerestory. At some time, pigmented structural glass panels were applied to the exterior of this bay. About two-thirds of this elevation is still clad in vitreous salmon pink square panels and the same proportion of the base is clad in vitreous black panels. The center bay has four lights and a door towards the west end of the bay with a clerestory over all. Glass, glazing frames and the door appear to have been replaced, although the general vertical organization of the glazing system appears similar to the (intact) building next door (629 West Sheridan Avenue). The east bay has six framed panels, no clerestory, and the sill is much higher than the adjacent bay. Both the sill and the frames have black opaque infill panels and there is a central door. None of this appears to be original.
3. 629 West Sheridan Avenue. 1939. This one-story Art Deco building has a symmetrical buff brick facade accented by distinctive black-glazed terra cotta. The building has a symmetrical facade with an ABA rhythm. The entry door is recessed slightly and is flanked by sidelights. The door is centered and has a glazed clerestory panel above. There are large panels of storefront glazing, also recessed slightly, that take up most of each flanking bay. The black-glazed terra cotta ornament provides strong accents at the parapet cap, at the base, above the door and storefront glazing, and at brick panels on the east and west ends and on either side of the central bay. There is a continuous cap black terra cotta parapet cap with four vertical projections above the storefront glazing and three above the door. A continuous black terra cotta base comes up to the storefront glazing sill height. Long vertical stepped terra cotta accents either side of the stepped parapet above the door

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and extends down to the level of the door head. Vertical stepped terra cotta on the east and west ends of the facade are centered on brick panels and run from the base up to a slight projection above the parapet. The door and window heads have simple stepped black terra cotta ornament that extends down the jambs to the level of the clerestory muntins and door head. The storefront glazing is divided into four vertical panels, with the two in the center being approximately fifty percent wider than the flanking panels. Glass areas now have solid infill, but divisions have been preserved. The ornamented facade turns the corner for one bay. The remainder of the building on the west side, which is a secondary elevation, is a plain buff brick with punctuated by industrial steel windows with a 3 x 5 pattern. On the west elevation, original downspout collectors and leaders are intact.

4. 701-705 West Sheridan Avenue. GRIFFITH AMUSEMENT COMPANY. 1926. This large building is two stories on the south half and three stories on the north. The building has a slightly asymmetrical facade with the entry door slightly east of center. At some point, the building windows were covered with a continuous band of siding and the building was painted gray. Over time some of the siding has either been removed or fallen off and the windows that are visible are original well preserved. They are large industrial steel windows with an overall 6 x 6 pattern. The windows are divided into a 6 x 2 fixed upper panel and a 6 x 4 lower panel that is subdivided into a fixed 2 x 4 center panel with 2 x 4 operable panels on either side. The windows are paired on either end of facade with centered single windows in between. First floor windows are set on a buff brick base and have a darker gold brick crenellated surround and a soldier course at the head. Brick between windows is dark red. Second floor windows have buff brick sills and vertical elements on either side of each window that have stepped motifs at the bottom, which lines up approximately with the sills, and at the top, which lines up with the heads. The step at the heads becomes the springpoint of an arch formed in buff brick. These arches are evident on the front (south) elevation and over the southernmost window on the west elevation. The front double doors have a sheet metal surround and cornice, which appears to be original. The north half of the building steps up one-and-a-half stories to accommodate a movie theater.
5. 624 West Sheridan Avenue. 1946. This one story building is a good example of the Art Moderne style. The asymmetrical facade has a large square window on the east and an off-center door adjacent to a long glazed area with a strong horizontal composition over a brick base. The base and the door surround is a dark red brick. The remainder of the facade is a buff brick. The square window has a heavy cast stone band surround that projects from the brick face. There is a matching cast stone band that runs at the sill and head of the horizontal band of windows. The band at the window head is also continuous over the door. The horizontal window is composed of long narrow glazed frames arranged in a five over three pattern. Horizontal divisions are formed by heavy cast stone bands. Cylindrical cast stone elements mark vertical divisions between windows. The square window is composed of panes in a three over four pattern. The center panes are twice the width of the flanking panes. All of the windows appear to be original. The parapet cap has a single wythe of red brick above the buff brick field with a cast stone cap.
6. 628 West Sheridan Avenue. 1949. This two story building has a perforated metal facade that covers the second

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story and a matching half circle awning over the front door. On the first floor the door is located on the first quarter of the west end and the remaining three quarters are dominated by a large storefront window. The window is subdivided into four panels. The window sill is relatively low and the head is even with the top of the door awning. The door and window surround and the area between the window head and perforated metal appears to be stucco. Usually, facade treatments of this type are remodels. However the late date of construction indicates that the metal facade may be original.

7. 630 West Sheridan Avenue. 1939. This one-story Art Deco building has a symmetrical buff brick facade accented by outstanding black-glazed terra cotta ornament at the parapet cap, pilasters, and corner column. The building has a symmetrical facade with an ABA rhythm. The entry door is centered in the central bay. It is flanked by a buff brick pilaster, a narrow glazed panel, and another buff brick pilaster. On either side of the second set of pilasters, is a wide glazed storefront terminated by a buff brick pilaster adjoining the building to the west and a buff brick corner column on the east. There is a continuous cast stone base at the sill height of the glazing frames. The black-glazed terra cotta ornament is overscaled for the size of the building and, thus, makes a strong statement. There is a continuous terra cotta cap between the pilaster and column caps with vertical accents and pyramidal tops that project above the top of the cap. The pilaster and corner caps are layered geometrical compositions with central projecting vertical accents with pyramidal caps. The terra cotta ornament extends in panels from the cap, down the pilasters and corner column to the same level as the storefront glazing head. The panel composition consists of a shorter chevron-patterned panel centered between simple rectilinear panels that extend from the top of the cap to the level of the storefront glazing head. The chevron-patterned panel is approximately half the length of the flanking rectilinear panels. Below the chevron-patterned panel are small rectangular accents with a centered large square accent piece. The ornamented facade turns the corner for one bay. The remainder of the building on the west side, which is a secondary elevation, is a plain buff brick with a slightly darker beige brick base course.
8. 700-702 West Sheridan Avenue. FILM EXCHANGE BUILDING. 1928. This two-story Commercial Style brick building with a flat roof and a symmetrical facade. The facade is a dark red brick with cast stone detailing. It has a central door flanked by brick pilasters and brick pilasters at each end. In between the pilasters are open bays with aluminum storefront glazing. The glazing system appears to be new, but the configuration of the openings within the brick surround has not been altered. The bay on the west has a centered door and the bay on the east has a door on the east. Above the center door and pilasters is a simple cast stone building sign with the words "Film Exchange." The cast stone is set in a lugged sill band below a row of tall, narrow second floor windows, in a flat band at the roof line below the parapet, in a stepped flat band with small geometric projections at the parapet cap, and as a low continuous base along the front of the building that also forms the sill of the storefront glazing. There are also rectilinear (squares and squares turned at 45 degrees) cast stone medallion insets at pilasters and between the head of the storefront glazing and the sills of the second floor windows. The second-story windows are industrial steel frames, three lights across and

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five lights vertically. A central window lines up above the central door and it is flanked by a group of three windows. The window groupings have continuous darker brick soldier course above the heads. Each window is separated by a two-foot-wide brick panel from top to bottom. A distinguishing element on the west side of the roof is a tall, scoop-shaped north-facing skylight that is located near the front (north side) of the building.

9. 704-706-708 West Sheridan Avenue. 1925. This one-story Commercial Style brick building has a flat roof and a symmetrical facade. The facade is a dark red brick with cast stone detailing. It has three bays and an ABA rhythm. There are brick pilasters between the central bay and end bays and end bays have brick pilasters at each end. In between the pilasters are open bays with aluminum storefront glazing. The glazing system appears to be new, but the configuration of the openings within the brick surround has not been altered. All three bays have doors on their west ends and storefront glazing from the door to the brick pilaster on the east end. Cast stone is set in a flat band at the roof line below the parapet, in a flat band with small steps and geometric projections at the parapet cap above the brick pilasters, and as a low continuous base along the front of the building that also forms the sill of the storefront glazing. There are also rectilinear (squares and squares turned at 45 degrees) cast stone medallion insets at the pilasters. A continuous darker brick soldier course runs above the storefront glazing and door head. This course, along with cast stone ornament at the top of the pilasters, lines up with and matches the construction at 700-702 West Sheridan Avenue.

As the major purpose of the district changed over time, some of the buildings were converted to new uses. These conversions, as well and the march of time, have affected the integrity of the individual buildings. The 700-702 West Sheridan Avenue Building, known as the Film Exchange Building, was later converted to a "cotton classing" function. At that time, the large skylights visible above the roof were added. Other buildings had minor changes, usually to fenestration. These generally do not impact the district's ability to distinguish itself from its neighbors. On the interior of many of the buildings, the film vaults are intact, if not converted to new uses. The district enjoys a high degree of integrity of location, setting, feeling, association, workmanship, design, and materials.

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Narrative Statement of Significance

The Film Exchange Historic District is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C, as the best remaining example of a complex of early and mid 20th century buildings related to the development of the film distribution business in Oklahoma City. The distinctive design of many of the buildings further enhances its unique character in the city.

The Film Exchange Historic District is an early to mid twentieth-century historic commercial district. It is located close to the heart of downtown Oklahoma City, the state capital. It encompasses approximately two-thirds of a square block, with its center at the intersection of West Sheridan Avenue (formerly Grand Avenue) and North and South Lee Avenue. The district includes nine properties, all of which are contributing. The building styles contained within the district include Commercial, Art Deco and Moderne. The Commercial style is predominant, however, the district's Art Deco buildings are the most distinctive because of their outstanding glazed terra cotta and cast stone detailing.

The buildings represented in the district share a common history - they served as the final center for the distribution of commercial films in Oklahoma. The district represents the third incarnation and final consolidation of "film row," a centralized location where theater managers from across the state could screen and rent films and stock up on related products. Previously, these businesses had been somewhat scattered across town, with two or three clustering near each other but still separated by many blocks.

The film exchange constituted a significant and often overlooked aspect of the entertainment industry. At a time when major studios tightly controlled the distribution of their products, these exchanges served as the sole outlet for the popular movies of the day. As the studios invested in their own exchange buildings, they used architectural details that evoked the theaters that they served. The exchanges varied in their exterior appearance - the more modest and business-like typically were those of the independent distributors while the high style, Art Deco buildings were built by the major studios. The period of significance for the district is 1925-1955, reflecting the move and consolidation of the film exchange and related businesses to the Sheridan Avenue/Lee Avenue intersection. A significant date of 1937 marks the time when all of the film exchanges had finally moved into the district. 1955 was chosen as the end of the period of significance because it marks the beginning of the end of the centralized film distribution system. The last building constructed in the district was constructed in 1949, but in the late 1950s, the studios started to begin distribution of films from the studios themselves, without the intermediary of the exchanges. The district remained viable for a number of years, though, supplementing the exchange business with theater-related business, including projection equipment, concessions equipment and supplies, and theater furniture.

Historic Context

Oklahoma City

The construction of the Film Exchange Historic District was due, in part, to the pace and pattern of physical growth in Oklahoma City and the desire for entertainment. The rapid growth of Oklahoma City, its economic development and

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the desire for leisure activities and entertainment led to an active film distribution industry beginning in the 1920's, just thirty years after the first tents were pitched after the land run.

“A common description of western towns is that they ‘sprang up overnight.’ In the case of Oklahoma City, the literal truth is that it came into being between noon and sunset of April 22, 1889...ten thousand settlers...camped by nightfall over the wide expanse east and west of the Santa Fe’s single-track boxcar station, where land had been set aside for a townsite.”¹

The boundaries of the townsite were established two months after the opening, “...at Seventh Street on the north, Walker Street to the east, Seventh Street to the south and the Santa Fe Railway on the west.”²

Oklahoma’s statehood in 1907, the winning of the state capital from Guthrie in 1910, and Oklahoma City’s role as a crossroads for the railways paved the way for its “...vigorous growth as the trade center of an expanding new territory. In...twenty years, the population grew from 10,037 to 66,408, and it had become by far the state’s largest city...As the state capital, Oklahoma City attracted thousands of state employees, many of whom remained after their political employment ceased. And with the development of the state’s natural resources of oil, coal, and metals, the city became a financial and manufacturing center as well. Stimulated by the World War I boom, Oklahoma City’s population in 1920 was 91,295.”³

This rate of growth continued during the 1920s. Population grew “...by over one-hundred percent in ten years,” and the value of building permits issued “... increased... from about five million dollars in 1920 to eight million dollars in 1924.”⁴

This construction activity manifested itself as new businesses and industries in the downtown area and new, mostly residential, suburbs surrounding the downtown. “In terms of geographical area, the city covered 15.6 square miles in 1910, 17.2 square miles by 1920, and by 1930 it had grown to 25.2 square miles.”⁵

¹Workers of the Writers Program of the Works Project Administration, Oklahoma: A Guide to the Sooner State (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941) p. 182-183.

²Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office, “Intensive Level Survey of Central Park, Jefferson Park, and Paseo Neighborhoods in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma”, 1994, p. 13.

³Works Project Administration, pp. 182-183.

⁴Oklahoma State Historic Preservation Office, Intensive Level Survey of Central Park, Jefferson Park, and Paseo Neighborhoods in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma”, 1994, p. 20.

⁵ *ibid.* p. 9.

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After World War I, economic activity intensified. Petroleum exploration allowed the state's economy to diversify, greatly benefiting Oklahoma City. "Manufacturing became less bound up with agriculture and expanded into new fields, and in the late 1920's, a gusher oil field was developed on the east side, within the city limits. As Oklahoma City grew industrially, it added new iron and steel plants, factories for making furniture, clothing, and electrical equipment. Various large utility companies, brokerage houses, and commission concerns also established their headquarters downtown."⁶

Evolution of Movies as Popular Entertainment

The rise in economic activity and population during the latter part of the 19th century and the first decades of the twentieth century led to the creation of a working class with disposable income and leisure time. This, in turn, led to an ever-increasing demand for affordable entertainment.

Forms of entertainment evolved during this period. Vaudeville emerged in the 1880s and became a popular form of family entertainment, and the rise of movies occurred in conjunction with the evolution of vaudeville. Vaudeville usually consisted of variety shows performed in several acts that included comedy routines, music, dancing, pantomime, acrobatic performances, magic shows, and, starting in 1896, moving pictures.

The development of vaudeville circuits, where multiple entertainment houses in different towns and cities were owned or controlled by a single individual or firm, was made possible by the country's expanding transportation network. Those towns with access to the railroad were more likely to become a stop on one of the vaudeville circuits. In small towns across the country "opera houses" were some of the earliest facilities providing entertainment for the community.⁷

In 1894, Thomas Edison invented the Kinetoscope, the first commercially-designed machine for showing moving pictures.⁸ In April of that year the first Kinetoscope parlor opened in New York. However, since the Kinetoscope was designed for a single viewer, their commercial potential was limited. The parlors were profitable for about two years until the invention of movie projectors,⁹ which could screen films for large audiences. Films projected for large

⁶Works Project Administration, p. 182-183.

⁷Roy P. Stewart, Born Grown: An Oklahoma City History (Oklahoma City: Fidelity Bank, 1974), p. 88.

⁸Maggie Valentine, The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theater, Starring S. Charles Lee (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 16.

⁹1894 Page, April 14. Retrieved February 12, 2007 from <http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/~syverson/worldsfair/exhibits/hall3/lindley/1894page.html>

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audiences generated more profits because fewer machines were needed in proportion to the number of viewers.

This next generation of projection machines to serve large audiences was developed in 1895 and 1896. They included Edison's Vitascope, the Eidoloscope, the Lumière Cinématographe, the Kineopticon; and the Biograph. The Vitascope, along with many of the competing projectors, became a popular attraction in variety and vaudeville theaters in major cities across the United States. Motion pictures soon became starring attractions on the vaudeville bill. Edison produced his own films and exhibitors could choose the films they wanted from the Edison inventory.¹⁰ By the close of the first decade of the twentieth century, movies had supplanted vaudeville as the favored form of entertainment.¹¹

Movie Theater Growth in Oklahoma City

Theatrical entertainment in Oklahoma City had its roots from the beginning of the territorial era. From 1890 to the 1920s, Oklahoma City experienced the same transition from vaudeville to motion pictures that took place all over the country. "Construction of the Overholser Opera House in 1890 on the southeast corner of Robinson and Clark Streets usually marks the beginning of the history of theaters in Oklahoma City. In 1900 this was superseded by a new and larger facility (also called the Overholser Opera House) on Grand Avenue (now Sheridan) between Robinson and Harvey Avenues. It offered vaudeville entertainment until the 1920s when it was renovated in order to show moving pictures. At that time it became the Orpheum Theater (and later was the Warner Theater)."¹²

During the 1920s a large number of movie theaters were built in Oklahoma City, presumably to entertain a growing number of patrons with the disposable income and leisure time to enjoy the movies. The grandest example was the Criterion Theater at 116 West Main Street, which opened in 1921. The Criterion could seat 1,000 people, had a nursery, and was lavishly decorated. A cluster of movie theaters opened in the downtown area, including the Warner Theater, the Empress Theater (111-113 West Main), the Folly Theater (123-125 West Sheridan Avenue), the Liberty Theater (21-23 North Robinson Avenue), the Mediterranean-styled Midwest Theater (14-18 North Harvey Avenue), and the State Theater (20 North Hudson Avenue). Beyond the downtown core, smaller movie theaters began to appear in the surrounding neighborhoods throughout Oklahoma City. These neighborhood theaters included the Tower Theater (423-425 NW 23rd), the Mayflower Theater (1133 NW 23rd), the Knob Hill Theater (404 SW 25th),

¹⁰Library of Congress, History of Edison Motion Pictures: The Shift to Projectors and the Vitascope (1895-1896). (January 13, 1999). Retrieved February 12, 2007 from <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/edhtml/edshift>

¹¹Valentine, The Show Starts on the Sidewalk, 17.

¹²Dr. Alyson L. Greiner, Marvin Sebourn and John Womack, Thematic Survey of Historic Movie Theaters in Central Oklahoma, 2004-2005 (Stillwater, Oklahoma: Department of Geography, Oklahoma State University, 2005), 76-77.

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the Will Rogers Theater (4304 North Western Avenue), and the Redskin Theater (822 SW 29th).¹³

The Development of the Film Exchange

Oklahoma City required support services to serve the growing number of movie theaters. Because it was a population and transportation center, it also became an important hub for the regional distribution and exchange of motion pictures.

Film distribution and furnishing concessions and other services to theaters were attractive business prospects because of their potential for growth. "Businessmen soon became interested in the burgeoning movie industry. Some of the biggest names in the film business got their start as proprietors, investors, exhibitors, or distributors..."¹⁴ These businessmen included Adolph Zukor, Marcus Loew, Sam Goldwyn, the Warner brothers, William Fox, and Louis B. Mayer.

"They realized that greater profits could be derived from new systems of distribution, and by expanding the film audience to the middle-class, women, and children. At first, films (and the necessary projection machinery and equipment) were sold, not rented, to exhibitors.

As film production increased, cinema owner William Fox was one of the first (in 1904) to form a distribution company (a regional rental exchange), that bought shorts and then rented them to exhibitors at lower rates. The Warner brothers (Harry, Albert, Sam, and Jack) opened their first Theater, the Cascade, in New Castle, Pennsylvania in 1903, and then in 1904 founded the Pittsburgh-based Duquesne Amusement & Supply Company (the precursor to Warner Bros. Pictures) to distribute films.

Soon, successful exhibitors turned their profits back into their businesses and were able to provide additional amenities for their viewership, including comfortable seats, pre-show entertainment, peanuts/popcorn for sale, and accompanying pianists and orchestras for the silent films."¹⁵

Thus, the business model for a new age of entertainment was developed. The Oklahoma City film exchanges were the local vehicle that was part of a national network used by film production companies and related concession and service companies to distribute and deliver the popular entertainment and accompanying amenities that large and growing numbers of people desired. (For example, the number of theaters in Oklahoma City increased 88%, from 17 to 32,

¹³Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁴Tim Dirks. Film History Before 1920. Retrieved February 12, 2007 from <http://www.filmsite.org/pre20sintro2.html>

¹⁵Ibid.

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between 1930 and 1950.)¹⁶

Oklahoma City's nascent film exchanges started out in various locations in downtown Oklahoma City. During the 1920s, there were three successive film exchange districts. A 1922 Sanborn Fire Insurance map shows the 100 block of South Hudson Avenue to have seven buildings dedicated to the trade. By mid-decade, the film businesses moved further south, to the 500 block of South Robinson Avenue. It was the latter part of the decade and into the 1930s when the industry gravitated to the West Grand Avenue (Sheridan) location.

The first film exchange business opened in Oklahoma City in 1907. General Film opened in 1910 in the 200 block of West 2nd Street. In 1914 the Universal Film Exchange was opened at 2nd Street and Broadway. The Pathe Exchange, Inc. was established in 1917 at 508 West Grand (now Sheridan) Avenue. Around 1920, First National Exhibitors opened its offices in Oklahoma City. In 1928, the company became known as First National Pictures, Inc., located at 521 South Robinson. Fox Film Corporation opened its first office in Oklahoma City in 1921 at South Robinson Avenue. In 1928, the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Exchange located at 515 South Robinson Avenue. In 1919, Paramount opened its exchange at 123 West 3rd Street (now Robert S Kerr Avenue). In 1928, Universal Film Exchange, Inc. was established at 519 West Main Street. By 1928, there were twelve exchanges operating in Oklahoma City, serving all of Oklahoma and the Texas panhandle.¹⁷ Of these various buildings, only the buildings at 515-523 South Robinson Avenue and 519 West Main are still extant.

It was natural for businesses serving the film industry to be located in an area that was convenient to major downtown theaters and to transportation. Gradually many of these businesses, including the film exchanges, moved to the area around the intersection of Lee Avenue and West Sheridan Avenue. Reasons for this probably include the new availability of property in an area in transition from residential to commercial that was also convenient to the downtown and to transportation, the convenience of having mutually supportive businesses within close proximity to each other, and the consolidation of many of these businesses as time progressed.

Perhaps the primary cause for the location of the Film Exchange Historic District was the establishment of the Oklahoma Specialty Film Company, started in 1919 by L.C. and R.E. Griffith. The business was located at the intersection of West Sheridan Avenue and North Lee Avenue at 701 West Sheridan Avenue. The Griffiths built their business by acquiring theaters in small towns in Oklahoma, Texas and New Mexico. The company was formed "to distribute motion picture film, accessories, and advertising."¹⁸ This was the beginning of the Griffith film exchange and

¹⁶Dr. Alyson L. Greiner, Thematic Survey of Historic Movie Theaters in Central Oklahoma, 2004-2005, 79.

¹⁷Film Exchange Keeping Pace with State Growth and Movie Improvements (1928, May 13). The Oklahoman, p. 69.

¹⁸Rice, Roger E., (1991), Griffith and Video Independent Theaters 1915-1983. The

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theater management companies, which would later be called "one of the largest independent exhibition circuits in the nation."¹⁹

In 1926, the Griffiths, who owned a controlling interest in the Oklahoma Specialty Company, sold it and formed Consolidated Theaters, Inc. The company grew, added new services, and absorbed the property to the north at 11 North Lee Avenue to expand the 701 West Sheridan Avenue building.

In 1930, the Griffiths formed the Griffith Amusement Company and entered into an agreement with Universal Chain Theatrical Enterprises, Inc. to acquire and operate still more theaters in Oklahoma. They also purchased controlling stock in a company called Consolidated Amusements, merged it into Consolidated Theaters and acquired the Rialto Theater Company. All of these businesses were run from the offices at 701 West Sheridan Avenue.²⁰

The growth of movie theaters and businesses that supported them in the first half of the twentieth century in Oklahoma is exemplified by the growth of the Griffith's enterprises. In 1936, their convention program states, "Our business has grown from one theater in 1915 to approximately 125 theaters, and from personnel of four people to approximately 1000 people."²¹

The location the Griffith's chose became a hub for the many film distribution companies that came to be represented in Oklahoma City:

"By 1930 as many as eighteen movie companies had film distribution or exchange offices in Oklahoma City. These offices were concentrated in the area between Hudson and Shartel Avenues and Sheridan Avenue and Main Street. In 1930 the list of film distributors with Oklahoma City offices included Allied Film Exchanges (704 West Sheridan Avenue), Columbia Pictures Corporation (702 West Sheridan Avenue), General Talking Picture Corporation (531 West Main), Griffith Amusement Picture Company (11 North Lee Avenue), Metro-Goldwyn Mayer Distributing Corporation (515 South Robinson Avenue), and Pathe Exchange (519 South Robinson Avenue).

"By 1950 the number of film distributors in Oklahoma City had not changed, but included still more familiar names like Loew's Incorporated (629 West Sheridan Avenue), Paramount Film Distributing Corporation (701 West Sheridan

Griffith Collection. Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Rice, Roger E. (1991). Convention Program of Griffith Amusement Co., Consolidated Theaters, Inc., R.E. Griffith Theaters, Inc., 1936. The Griffith Collection. Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

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Avenue), Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation (10 North Lee Avenue), Universal Film Exchange (625 West Sheridan Avenue), and Warner-Brothers Picture Distributing Corporation (630 West Sheridan Avenue).”²² By 1937, all of the city’s film exchanges were located near the Lee-Sheridan intersection.

Architectural Significance

The Film Exchange Historic District is eligible for the National Register because it is the best remaining example of a grouping of film industry-related buildings from the first half of the twentieth century in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. It contains three excellent examples of small Art Deco commercial buildings and one excellent example of a small Art Moderne commercial building, as well as good early examples of Commercial Style architecture. While the buildings might wear different stylistic skins, they share one common trait: all were constructed with fire-proof vaults. The delicate and incendiary nature of nitrate film created a fire hazard. Fires in film exchange buildings were a not uncommon event, especially in the early years. So, as the exchanges constructed purpose-built buildings, designs to mitigate the dangerous medium of the film were incorporated.

Architecture

The development of the Film Exchange Historic District illustrates a continuum of growth and architectural styles in Oklahoma City. Oklahoma City grew from frontier settlement in 1889, to a nascent town at the time of statehood and, over the next two decades, became the Oklahoma state capitol with such civic amenities as roads, public transportation, public schools, utilities, and delineated government, business industrial and residential areas.

The Film Exchange Historic District represents not only the development of Oklahoma City but also the evolution of early twentieth century architectural styles in a microcosm. The typical style for commercial buildings in Oklahoma during the first third of the twentieth century was the Commercial Style. With its simple massing, readily available brick construction and multiple windows, the Commercial Style was a straightforward and utilitarian solution for industrial and mercantile buildings. Four out of the nine buildings in the district are Commercial Style and these were all constructed between 1925 and 1931. Three out the nine buildings are Art Deco, the district’s second most prevalent style. These buildings were constructed between 1936 and 1939. These are all striking examples of this style for small buildings, both for the quality of their cast stone and terra cotta ornament and for their architectural and historic integrity. The remaining two buildings in the district are Moderne. One constructed in 1946, is an excellent

²²Dr. Alyson L. Greiner, Thematic Survey of Historic Movie Theaters in Central Oklahoma, 2004-2005 , 78.

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example of the style, with the strong, sweeping, horizontal lines and massing that are its hallmarks. The Art Deco and Moderne buildings of the Film Exchange district correlate to the prevailing trend in theater design of the time. Deco and Streamline movie houses were the norm in the late 1930s through the 1940s.

The Film Exchange Historic District retains a high degree of integrity. Within the district all of the buildings were identified as contributing. The Film Exchange Historic District is an excellent example of commercial and architectural development as related to the cultural life of Oklahoma City in the first half of the twentieth century.

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Verbal Boundary Description:

The Film Exchange Historic District, located in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, is bounded as follows: Starting at the initial point of the alley between West Sheridan Avenue and West Main at the northwest corner of the building at 701-705 West Sheridan Avenue, proceed west across North Lee Avenue to the northwest corner of the building at 10 North Lee Avenue, proceed south down the east side of 623 West Sheridan Avenue and south across West Sheridan Avenue down the east side of 624 West Sheridan Avenue to the alley between West Sheridan Avenue and West California Avenue. From this corner, proceed west to the west side of 708 West Sheridan Avenue, go north across West Sheridan Avenue, proceed east to the west side of 701-705 West Sheridan Avenue, and close the boundary at the northwest corner of 701-705, the initial point.

Boundary Justification:

The Film Exchange Historic District includes nine properties clustered around the intersection of North and South Lee Avenue and West Sheridan Avenue in downtown Oklahoma City. Buildings were constructed between 1925 and 1949. District boundary lines include those properties which share the historic characteristics of building use and architectural styles consistent with their date of construction. The Film Exchange Historic District's consistency of scale, material, architectural styles and setbacks contribute to its delineation as a visually cohesive unit.

Maps:

The Film Exchange Historic District is on a Oklahoma City USGS 7.5 minute quadrangle map; boundaries of the district are marked.

A map of contributing properties is also attached.

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Photographs:

Photographs showing representative building types and styles for contributing properties are included. A disc with electronic images of each photo is on file at the Oklahoma SHPO.

Continuation Sheet for Photo Labels:

Photographer: Jocelyn Lupkin
Date: February, 2007
Negatives: .tif files at OK/SHPO

Photo #1 (OK_Oklahoma County_FEHD_10 N. Lee.tif)
Camera facing southeast; 10 North Lee Avenue

Photo #2 (OK_Oklahoma County_FEHD_629 West Sheridan.tif)
Camera facing northeast; 629 West Sheridan Avenue

Photo #3 (OK_Oklahoma County_FEHD_623 & 625 Sheridan.tif)
Camera facing north; 623-625 West Sheridan Avenue

Photo #4 (OK_Oklahoma County_FEHD_701 Sheridan.tif)
Camera facing northwest; 701-705 West Sheridan Avenue

Photo #5 (OK_Oklahoma County_FEHD_701 Sheridan.tif)
Camera facing north; 701-705 West Sheridan Avenue

Photo #6 (OK_Oklahoma County_FEHD_624 Sheridan.tif)
Camera facing southwest; 624, 628 West Sheridan Avenue

Photo #7 (OK_Oklahoma County_FEHD_630 Sheridan.tif)
Camera facing south; 630 West Sheridan Avenue

Photo #8 (OK_Oklahoma County_FEHD_630 Sheridan.tif)
Camera facing southeast; 630 West Sheridan Avenue

Photo #9 (OK_Oklahoma County_FEHD_700 & 702 Sheridan.tif)
Camera facing southwest; 700-702 West Sheridan Avenue

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Photo #10 (19. OK_Oklahoma County_FEHD_704, 706, 708 Sheridan.tif)
Camera facing south; 704, 706, 708 West Sheridan Avenue

Photo #11 (OK_Oklahoma County_FEHD_700 Sheridandetail.tif)
Camera facing south; detail of 700 West Sheridan Avenue

Photo #12 (OK_Oklahoma County_FEHD_630 Sheridandetail.tif)
Camera facing southeast; detail of 630 West Sheridan Avenue

FILM EXCHANGE
HISTORIC DISTRICT
OKLAHOMA CITY
OKLAHOMA COUNTY, OK

DEWEY AVE.

CONTRIBUTING
NONCONTRIBUTING

N. LEE AVE.

S. LEE AVE.

10

629 625/623
630 628 624
705/701
708/06/04 702/700

NOT TO SCALE

N ↑

SHERIDAN (GRAND) AVENUE

SHARTEL AVE.

CALIFORNIA STREET

