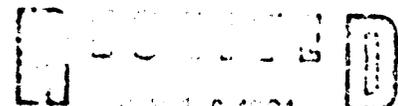


895

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



JUN 10 1991

NATIONAL REGISTER

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Little Theatre
other names/site number Theatre Jacksonville/ 8Du5809

2. Location

street & number 2032 San Marco Boulevard n/a not for publication
city, town Jacksonville n/a vicinity
state Florida code FL county Duval code 031 zip code 32207

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> objects
			Total
			<u>1</u>

Name of related multiple property listing: n/a
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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 forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
[Signature] Date 6/6/91
Signature of certifying official
Florida State Historic Preservation Officer
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Signature of commenting or other official _____ Date _____
State or Federal agency and bureau _____

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:
 entered in the National Register. **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] 7/12/91
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation & Culture/Theater

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation & Culture/Theater

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Modern Movement: Art Deco

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Concrete Block

Concrete

roof Other: Tar & Gravel

other Brick

Metal

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

PLEASE SEE CONTINUATION SHEETS.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Entertainment/Recreation

Architecture

Significant Person

n/a

Period of Significance

1938-1941

Significant Dates

1938

Cultural Affiliation

n/a

Architect/Builder

Smith, Ivan H./Whatley Davin & Company

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

PLEASE SEE CONTINUATION SHEETS.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

PLEASE SEE 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 # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Less than 1 acre

UTM References

A

1	7
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4	3	7	2	2	0
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3	3	5	2	3	7	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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--	--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Zone Easting Northing

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The property occupies all of Lot 9, Block 9 of the San Marco Subdivision, Jacksonville, Florida.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the entire city lot that has historically been associated with the property.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title William Adams & Barbara E. Mattick/Historic Sites Specialist

organization Bureau of Historic Preservation date June 1991

street & number R.A. Gray Bldg., 500 S. Bronough Street telephone (904) 487-2333

city or town Tallahassee state Florida zip code 32399-0250

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 1 Little Theatre, Jacksonville, Duval Co., FL**SUMMARY**

The Little Theatre, located at 2032 San Marco Boulevard in Jacksonville, Florida, is a 1938 two-story, Art Deco building, constructed of structural steel and brick, and finished in stucco. With the exception of a 1954 two-story concrete block addition to the east and north elevations, the building retains much of its original appearance.

SETTING

The Little Theatre is located in San Marco, a suburban area of Jacksonville which stretches along the east bank of the St. Johns River south of the city. The theater is on San Marco Square, the commercial area of the neighborhood. It occupies Lot 9 of Block 9 of the San Marco subdivision which was platted by Telfair Stockton in 1925. An alley runs along the east and south (rear) sides of the lot. With its north facade fronting San Marco Boulevard, the theater is a landmark at the southern end of San Marco Square. The Little Theatre is one of two Art Deco theaters on the square.

EXTERIOR

An example of the Art Deco style, the architectural elements of the Little Theatre are expressed by simple forms - both vertical and horizontal (Photo 1). Built of structural steel and brick, character defining features in its design include stucco exterior wall fabric, a flat roof, a stylized cornice, an entrance surround, and a side-facing double entrance stair on the main facade. The cornice is comprised of an unadorned frieze and a stringcourse relief. Traditional theatrical masks representing Comedy and Tragedy flank the main entrance surround in the center of the upper half of the main facade. The entrance surround, which dominates the facade, includes full height pilasters topped by fluted panels, which frame a rectangular plate glass window. "LITTLE THEATRE" is embossed above the window. The recessed entrance, also centered between the pilasters, has a double door with fixed windows in the shape of half moons and a transom with "X" patterned mullions. The entrance stair has a solid railing wall which follows the stairs in a series of rises and landings. The railing wall is echoed by a stylized drip course on the main facade. Finished in stucco, the two-story 1954 addition to the east and north elevations has a series of fixed rectangular

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 2 Little Theatre, Jacksonville, Duval Co., FL

windows set vertically, and its cornice continues the pattern established on the original facade.

The east elevation is comprised of the two-story 1954 concrete block addition, and an original one-story concrete block curved wall which follows the property line, extending to the southeast corner of the stage portion of the theater. The north segment of the 1954 addition is clad in stucco and has coping at the roof line (Photo 1). A recessed entrance, which is part of the addition, is located near the north end of the curved wall (Photo 2).

The south (rear) elevation rises almost three stories to accommodate lighting, curtain, and set infrastructure. Other details include a brick chimney, two large entrances enclosed by overhead garage doors, and a small vestibule which contains heating and air conditioning units (Photo 3).

The west elevation is surfaced in brick and forms the east wall of a narrow alley (Photo 4). A side entrance which leads to the lobby is located toward the front of the building. A second entrance that functions as a fire escape for the auditorium, is located toward the rear of the building.

INTERIOR

Patrons enter the theater through a semi-elliptical lobby with a black marbled tile floor (Photos 5 & 6). A check room and box office are located at the east end of the lobby, under a stairway which leads to the second floor. A small refreshment kitchen and men's room are located at the west end of the lobby. The stairway at the east end leads to the second floor where there is a lounge measuring 20 X 30 feet. This chamber functions as a "green room" for rehearsals and meetings. The term "green room" was coined in the 17th century English theater as a place where actors received guests and fans after performances. The ladies powder and rest rooms adjoin this space. The control room which overlooks the auditorium is also located on the second story (Photo 7).

The Little Theatre features a three-hundred seat auditorium which slopes toward the stage and offers an unobstructed sight-line for each viewer (Photos 8 & 9). The sight-line formula called for the center section to be wider than the sections on the sides. An orchestra pit is located at the foot of the stage

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 3 Little Theatre, Jacksonville, Duval Co., FL

which measures 51 feet across by 40 feet deep (Photos 10 & 11). A work shop is located just off of the performance area.

ALTERATIONS

A 1954 two-story addition to the east and north elevations includes ladies' and men's dressing rooms with bathrooms, the Little Theatre office, a public ladies' room, and hallways on the first floor; and a storage room and rehearsal area on the second floor. The Little Theatre organization contacted architect Ivan Smith for the original construction plans as a guide for the project. The height, massing, and fenestration of the addition are compatible with the original structure.

The changes made to the main facade of the Little Theatre have been minimal and structural: a plate glass window over the front entrance replaces the original window which had vertically running mullions; modern entrance lights with square lenses replace original electric sconces which had cylindrical lenses and pointed metal ends; and the theatrical masks, new lettering, and the dark paint which now accentuates the frieze are new additions to the facade (Photos 1 & 12).

The most significant change to the interior was the removal of the stage turntable, which became useless for the lack of replacement parts. Other changes include the carpeting of the lobby floor, and the introduction of various doorways from the original building to addition.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 1 Little Theatre, Jacksonville, Duval Co., FL

SUMMARY

The Little Theatre is locally significant under Criterion A for its association with the national Little Theater Movement and its role in the cultural development of Jacksonville. It is also significant under Criterion C as one of the few examples of Art Deco theater architecture in Florida, and as one of the early works of Ivan H. Smith, a prominent Florida architect.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Little Theater Movement

Little Theaters or Community Theaters refer to volunteer groups of people who are dedicated to providing their communities with live theater and opportunities for participation in drama. The first such groups began in the United States in the early 1900s in response to the poor quality of drama then being offered the American public by commercial theater groups. Between 1906 and 1910, four groups, three in Chicago and one in New York City, were established to provide better theater. The Drama League, founded in 1910 in Evanston, Illinois, to promote community expression and participation in drama, sponsored contests in play writing and production. The movement was given impetus when the Abbey Players from Ireland toured the United States in 1911, and were well received wherever they performed. The year 1915 is considered a pivotal year in the development of American drama, for it saw the founding of the Prairie Playhouse in Galesburg, Illinois. It was the first Little Theater established in a small American city. Community theater groups continued to spring up all over the country until interrupted by World War I. Little theaters regained strength after the war, however, and rose to prominence again in the 1920s and 1930s. The movement remains popular; there were an estimated 3500 Little Theater groups in the United States in 1985.

Since the 1920s, Floridians have participated in the Little Theater Movement at an ever growing rate. From 1925-1931, there were approximately 20 Little Theater groups in the state; by 1959, approximately 30 groups; and in 1990, an estimated 130 groups.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 2 Little Theatre, Jacksonville, Duval Co., FL

The San Marco Area of Jacksonville, Florida

The San Marco area is located south and east of the St. Johns River, opposite the Riverside and Avondale residential districts and downtown Jacksonville. It is bounded by Gary Street on the north, the Florida East Coast Railway tracks on the east, Brookwood Road on the south, and the St. Johns River on the west, is comprised of a collection of fourteen small residential developments in South Jacksonville. It is named after the most prominent of the subdivisions.

The area's identity as San Marco is primarily due to that particular subdivision's development during the Great Florida Land boom of the mid-1920s. Before the boom, South Jacksonville grew relatively slowly compared to the areas north and west of the St. Johns River. The early 1920s saw the construction of the first bridge across the river and the establishment of electric tram service to downtown Jacksonville. The increased mobility the bridge afforded, coupled with the availability of prime real estate close to downtown Jacksonville, lured droves of land speculators and settlers to the south side of Jacksonville during the land boom.

After an intensive, but brief spurt of development, the pace of construction slackened after the land bubble burst. South Jacksonville was annexed to the City of Jacksonville in 1932, and development on a large scale resumed in the mid-1930s. Contrary to most Florida communities from 1930 to 1940, the San Marco area experienced its most exuberant period of growth in the few years before the United States entered World War II.

Besides residential construction, a commercial center called San Marco Square was developed at the intersection of Atlantic and San Marco Boulevards. The central point of the square was a tiered fountain topped with a wrought iron sculpture. The first major buildings on the square were completed in early 1927. By the latter half of the 1930s, this commercial center was thriving. Among the most prominent additions to the commercial sector were Setzer's Grocery Store (now Pic and Save, 1937) and the Little Theatre (1938), both on San Marco Boulevard.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 3 Little Theatre, Jacksonville, Duval Co., FL

A survey of the San Marco area was completed in 1990. The results included recommendations for the nomination of several historic districts, one of which includes the Little Theatre and the area around San Marco Square.

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE**Early Development of the Little Theatre: 1920-1937**

The Little Theatre building in Jacksonville has its genesis in a local dramatic arts organization called the Community Players. Founded in 1920, the Community Players is one of oldest Little Theater groups in the nation. In the first six years of its existence, the Community Players organized and performed plays at various auditoriums in the Jacksonville area. In 1926, the group joined the national Little Theater Movement, changed its name to the Little Theatre, and made plans to construct a playhouse. The group's membership of 122 in 1920 had grown to 600 members by 1927, and they made preliminary plans to erect a \$40,000 playhouse. The collapse of the Florida real estate speculation boom in 1926, coupled with the onset of the Great Depression nationally in 1929, delayed construction of the building. By 1936, the Little Theatre's membership had fallen off to 125, and there was talk of disbanding the organization.

In 1937, Carl Swisher, a prominent resident of San Marco and president of Jno. H. Swisher & Sons, Inc., which manufactured nationally popular King Edward cigars, became chairman of the membership and building committees for the Little Theatre. In October 1937, Swisher proposed that a \$37,000 playhouse be constructed through a personal donation and an interest-free loan, both from him, with the condition that the organization increase its membership to 700. Swisher's promise reignited interest in the community and the membership quickly grew to the set quota. Swisher loaned \$20,000 and followed it up with a \$17,000 donation to cover construction costs. The loan was to be repaid by annual installments of forty percent of the ticket proceeds. Due to the success of the theater, Swisher was fully repaid within seven years.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 4 Little Theatre, Jacksonville, Duval Co., FL

Construction of the Little Theatre: 1938

Under the watchful eye of the Little Theatre membership and building committee directed by Carl S. Swisher, plans were made for a three-hundred seat auditorium in the Little Theatre. The stage, which measured 51 X 40 feet, was large for the modest seating capacity. The theater also had an orchestra pit. Representatives were sent to New York City to gather state-of-the-art interior designs which had been initiated in the mid-nineteenth century, most notably by designer J.B. McElfatrick of New York City. One of the designs insured that each member of the audience had unobstructed view of the entire stage. The second scheme was to find a suitable turntable for the stage. A turntable rotated the props, furniture, and actors into place for quick scene changes. The sight-line scheme, the full stage size, the orchestra pit, and the turntable, things normally found in large theaters, were distinguishing features of Jacksonville's Little Theatre.

In 1938, the Little Theatre continued its original function as a community service and opened a summer school with courses in acting, stage craft, fencing, and ballet. Student memberships were initiated to encourage interested high school pupils to participate in the dramatic arts. Along similar lines, a Children's and Youth Theatre was organized by a volunteer. The public outreach programs and scheduled performances caused a surge in theater attendance. By 1939, it took four nights to play for a membership which had risen to 1,300.

The Little Theatre has continued to play an important role as a center for the performing arts in the Jacksonville community. In 1972 the Little Theatre changed its name to Theatre Jacksonville, a name which better represents its function as the playhouse for the entire city.

ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT

Architectural Style: Art Deco

During the height of the Art Deco era, cinema and plays became a popular source of escape from the social and economic impact of the Great Depression. Since the Art Deco

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**Section number 8 Page 5 Little Theatre, Jacksonville, Duval Co., FL

style was widely used in theater architecture, the Art Deco theater became an important landmark in commercial districts for its association with affordable recreation.

Art Deco was the first of the modernistic styles to become popular in America. It represented a complete break with traditional design, emphasizing futuristic concepts, rather than invoking architectural antecedents. The style got its name from the Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs and Industriels Modernes, held in Paris in 1925 as a showcase for new artistic designs. Like the European Art Nouveau movement of the 1890s and early twentieth century, Art Deco was an artistic movement that transcended all areas of the art world, from painting to architecture. Its decorative geometric patterns were mimicked in a wide variety of products, including household appliances, clothing, furniture, and jewelry. Art Deco was most popular as a commercial building style during the 1920s and early 1930s because its decorative designs were especially suited to tall buildings. Few private residences can be considered true examples of high-style Art Deco.

In Florida, Art Deco buildings are most often found in communities that continued to grow despite the collapse of the speculative land boom in 1926. Miami Beach contains the best collection of Art Deco commercial buildings in the state. After 1930 the related Art Moderne style became the more popular of the modernistic styles. Characteristics of the Art Deco style include its flat roof, irregular plan, stucco exterior cladding, and low relief, polychromatic ornamentation in straight line, zigzag, geometric floral, and chevron designs. In Europe the ornamentation was influenced by cubism, while in the United States the designs were based on North and South American Indian art.

Architect: Ivan H. Smith

The Little Theatre was designed by Ivan H. Smith, one of the twelve charter graduates from the University of Florida's College of Architecture. Because there was no architecture program in 1924, Smith completed his first year at the University of Florida as an engineering student. That summer he apprenticed for Fred Hendricks, a St. Augustine architect who later designed the Marineland aquarium, an early North Florida tourist attraction. With

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 6 Little Theatre, Jacksonville, Duval Co., FL

the help of Hendricks, Smith attended the Georgia Institute of Technology architecture program during his sophomore year. He returned to the University of Florida to study under Rudolph Weaver, chairman of a newly established architecture program there. During his term at the University of Florida, Smith held an assistantship which involved design work on new campus buildings. After completing his degree in 1929, he moved to Jacksonville and taught mechanical drawing at Lee High School. By the mid-1930s, the economy slowly came into stride and housing starts resumed. In 1936, Smith established a private practice in the Barnett Bank building, sharing an office and secretary with architect Kenyon Drake.

As a private architect, Smith was commissioned by the Whatley and Davin Company, a real estate investment and construction contracting firm, to design residential architecture in San Marco and the beach front community of Ponte Vedra. The most notable accomplishments by Smith during this period were the W.K. Hatcher residence, a Mediterranean Revival mansion located on the St. Johns River next to the residence of Carl Swisher; and the Little Theatre. The Little Theatre is the only commercial building Smith designed as a private architect. The appearance of the playhouse was influenced by South American Indian art and the numerous buildings in South Florida and the Northeast that exhibited the Art Deco style.

In 1941, Smith joined in partnership with engineers John Reynolds and George Hills to form a new firm called Reynolds, Smith, and Hills. Initially formed to do military contracts, the firm went on to design roads, bridges, hospitals, and most notably, airport terminals. Its most significant project may have been the Tampa Bay International Airport terminal. Praised by users and interested professionals, the design for the terminal gave Reynolds, Smith, and Hills an international reputation. Smith regards the terminal as his greatest accomplishment as an architect.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Little Theatre is significant as one of few surviving examples of Art Deco theater architecture in Florida; the San Marco Theatre, a motion picture theater

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 7 Little Theatre, Jacksonville, Duval Co., FL

located one block to the west of the Little Theatre, is the only other example of an Art Deco theater in Jacksonville. Although it is plain in design, the Little Theatre incorporates the major distinguishing features of the Art Deco Style, such as a flat, parapeted roof; smooth stucco exterior; and clean, geometric lines. It is a landmark on San Marco Square.

The interior of the building originally incorporated traditional theater features, such as the "green room," as well as a stage turntable, full stage capacities, and seating arrangements which represented the latest technology and designs at the time of their construction. Although the stage turntable has been removed, the other features remain, and continue to make the Little Theatre a highly functional cultural facility for all of Jacksonville.

The 1954 addition, designed in consultation with Ivan Smith, the original architect, is highly compatible, yet easily distinguishable from the original building. The original portions of the exterior have been altered only slightly, and all of the original major features remain intact.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 9 Page 1 Little Theatre, Jacksonville, Duval Co., FL

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Photographs 1 Little Theatre, Jacksonville, Duval Co., FL

Section number _____ Page _____

1. LITTLE THEATRE
2. JACKSONVILLE, DUVAL COUNTY, FLORIDA
3. JUDY DAVIS
4. 1990
5. HISTORIC PROPERTY ASSOCIATES, ST. AUGUSTINE, FL
6. MAIN FACADE, LOOKING SOUTH FROM SAN MARCO BOULEVARD
7. PHOTO NO. 1 OF 12

Numbers 1-5 are the same for photographs 1-11.

6. LOOKING WEST AT EAST ELEVATION
7. PHOTO NO. 2 OF 12

6. LOOKING NORTHEAST AT SOUTH AND WEST ELEVATIONS
7. PHOTO NO. 3 OF 12

6. LOOKING SOUTH AT NORTH AND WEST ELEVATIONS
7. PHOTO NO. 4 OF 12

6. LOOKING SOUTHWEST AT ENTRANCE LOBBY INTERIOR
7. PHOTO NO. 5 OF 12

6. LOOKING NORTHEAST AT ENTRANCE LOBBY INTERIOR
7. PHOTO NO. 6 OF 12

6. LOOKING WEST AT CONTROL ROOM INTERIOR
7. PHOTO NO. 7 OF 12

6. LOOKING SOUTH AT AUDITORIUM INTERIOR
7. PHOTO NO. 8 OF 12

6. LOOKING SOUTH AT AUDITORIUM INTERIOR
7. PHOTO NO. 9 OF 12

6. LOOKING EAST AT ORCHESTRA PIT INTERIOR
7. PHOTO NO. 10 OF 12

6. LOOKING NORTHWEST AT STAGE INTERIOR
7. PHOTO NO. 11 OF 12

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

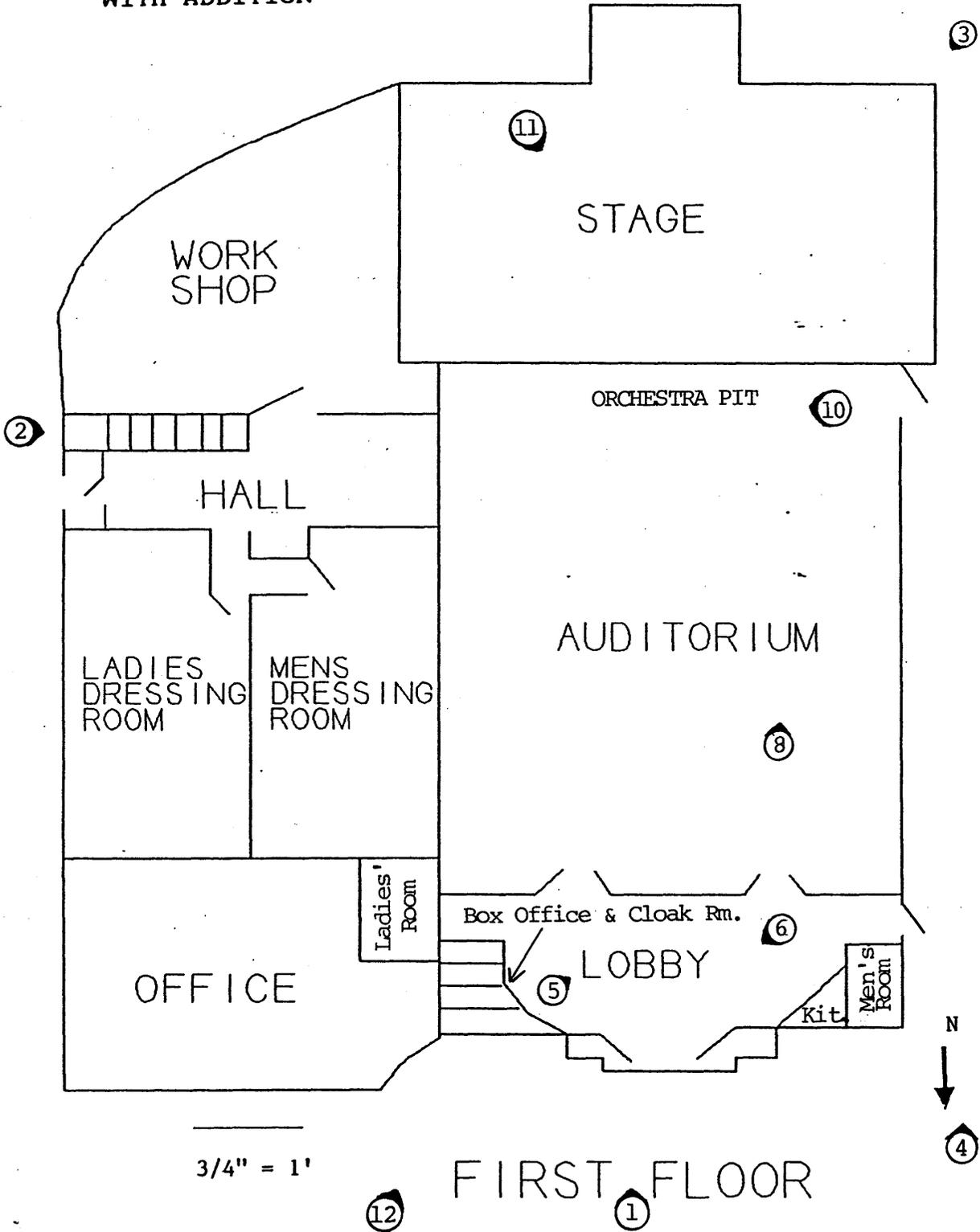
**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Photographs 2 Little Theatre, Jacksonville, Duval Co., FL
Section number _____ Page _____

1. LITTLE THEATRE
2. JACKSONVILLE, DUVAL COUNTY, FLORIDA
3. UNKNOWN
4. c1938
5. HISTORIC PROPERTY ASSOCIATES, ST. AUGUSTINE, FL
6. MAIN FACADE, CAMERA FACING SOUTH FROM SAN MARCO BOULEVARD
7. PHOTO NO. 12 OF 12

LITTLE THEATRE FLOOR PLAN

WITH ADDITION

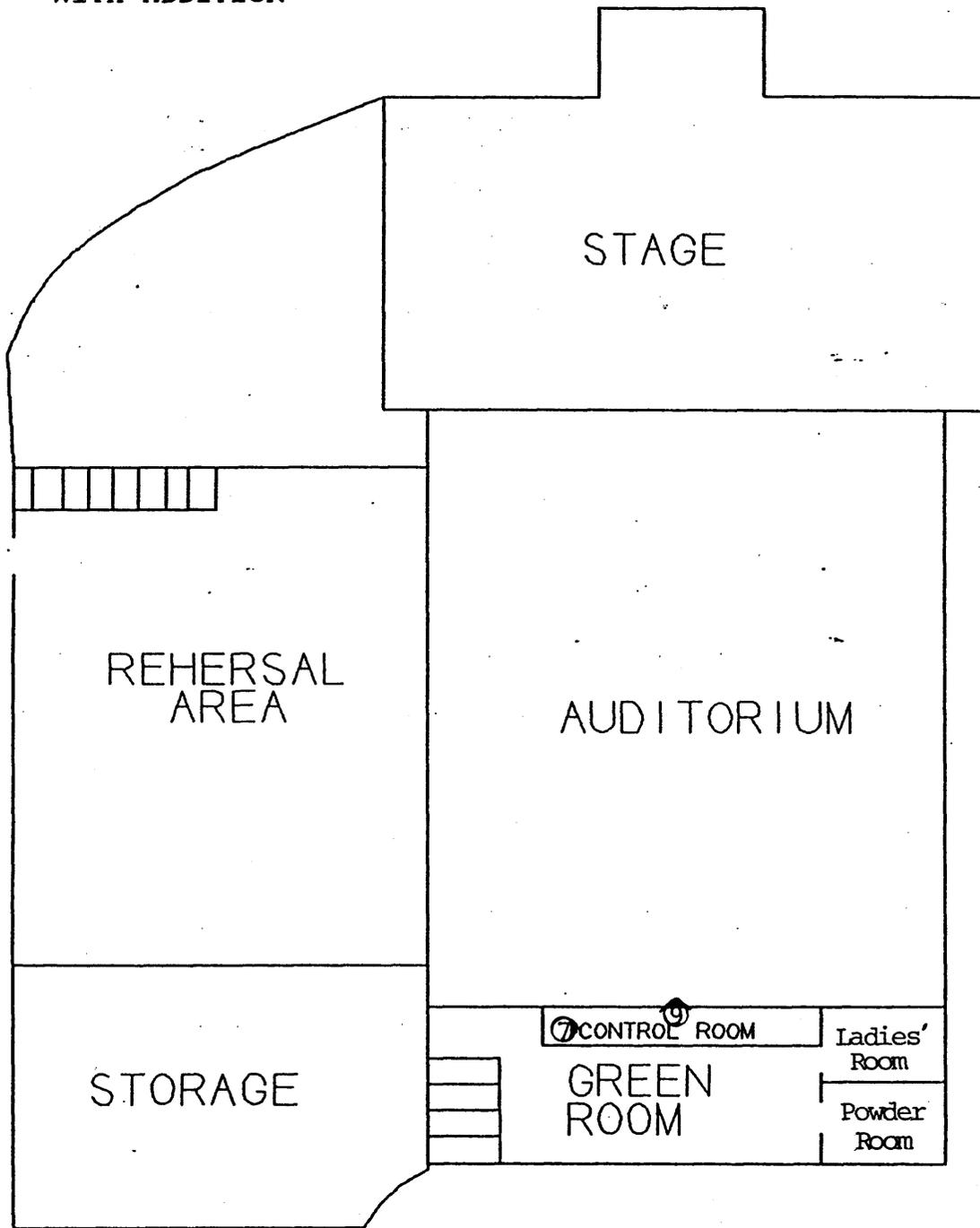


3/4" = 1'

FIRST FLOOR

LITTLE THEATRE FLOOR PLAN

WITH ADDITION



3/4" = 1'

SECOND FLOOR