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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

NATIONAL
REGISTER

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 Augusta Theater
other names/site number Same

2. Location

street & number 525 State Street not for publication
city, town Augusta vicinity
state Kansas code KS county Butler code 015 zip code 67010

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> </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> </u>	<u> </u> objects
		<u>1</u>	<u> </u> Total

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.

Ramon Powers State Historic Preservation Officer September 14, 1990
Signature of certifying official Date
Kansas State Historical Society
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.
 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:) _____

Beth Boland 10/31/90
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture: Theater;
movie theater

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture: Theater;
movie theater; playhouse hall

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Modern movement: Art Deco

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick

walls Brick

roof Asphalt

other Glass; Metal: aluminum

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Augusta Theater (c. 1935) is located at 525 State Street in Augusta, Butler County, Kansas (pop. 6,968). The two story Art Deco, brick and glass building stands in the center of downtown Augusta. The building has an eastern facade orientation and measures fifty feet from north to south and one hundred and twenty-five feet from east to west.

The exterior of the building was covered with individual tiles of opaque Vitrolite glass. Above the decorative neon marquee the tiles were a pale green with an ornamental design in black and silver. The ornamental design was sandblasted and painted on the exterior of the glass. The glass on the upper section of the building was removed in the 1950s or 1960s and covered with a corrugated metal facade. Carrara glass will be used in the replacement project for the facade. The sunburst neon marquee and the black tiles below the marquee are extant.

The interior walls are covered throughout with hand-built ornamental plaster designs in black, silver, salmon, and green. The entire ceiling of the 675 seat auditorium is covered with individual hand-painted fiber board panels. Elaborately painted murals hang on the north and south walls of the theater. Doors, grilles, switchplates and other details blend together to give the theater an Egyptian appearance. The theater retains its original Simplex projection system, which is in operable condition.

After a fire in 1949 the seats and carpet were replaced, the murals were repainted, and the concession stand was moved to its present location in the lobby. In 1945 the bathrooms were moved to their present location in the basement.

Although the removal of the upper section of the theater's structural glass facade presents an integrity problem for National Register eligibility, the facts that good historic photographs of the original facade exist, that pieces of the original glass exist, that a source for the replacement of the structural glass exists, and that the Augusta Arts Council plans to proceed with the recreation of original facade significantly lessen the perceived integrity problem. However, the overriding factor in this decision to proceed with the National Register nomination of the Augusta Theater is the quality of its interior, which is superb. The theater exhibits high quality decorative details and its neon lights are still operable.

See continuation sheet

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)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1935

Significant Dates

1935

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Larsen, L.P. - Architect
Lite Craft Neon Company
Boller, Robert; Lusk, Dietz - Architects

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

The Augusta Theater (c. 1935) is being nominated to the National Register under criterion C for its architectural significance as an Art Deco movie theater. The theater is located at 525 State in Augusta, Butler County, Kansas (pop. 6,968). The building maintains a moderate degree of integrity on the exterior and a high degree of integrity on the interior.

Built during the final years of movie palace construction, the Augusta is Augusta's only movie theater from this era. Its structural glass front, which has been substantially destroyed but will be recreated, and its opulent interior treatments were hallmarks of the movie palaces that were built across America in the 1920s and 1930s. The buildings were designed to be showplaces, with sumptuous appointments, inviting the rich and poor alike to share the lavish surroundings and escape into celluloid fantasies.

The Augusta Theater was conceived and paid for by D.A. Dave Bisagno and his wife Aline, who moved to Augusta in 1918. Bisagno was a farmer and cattleman who owned much real estate in Augusta. The Bisagno family operated the theater for fifty years before transferring the facility to the Augusta Arts Council.

The Augusta Theater opened on June 19, 1935 to a sell-out crowd. No expense was spared by Dave Bisagno as \$70,000 was spent to give the community a modern, fire-proof, and beautiful theater. Of the opening the Augusta Gazette wrote that "from the time of the 'Nickelodeon' (Augusta's first theater) to the 'Augusta' theaters, Augustans have been served royally by showmen who have made possible a good form of recreation for them."

The theater was built in the gutted shell of a three-story building that once housed a pool hall, a barbershop, a roller skating rink, and an office for the Ku Klux Klan.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Augusta Gazette, 19 June 1935.

Morris, William. "Augusta Theater." (National Register draft, 1989).

Naylor, David, American Picture Palaces - The Architecture of Fantasy. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1981.

Pildas, Ave. Movie Palaces, New York: Clarkan Potter, 1980.

See continuation sheet

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

Specify repository:

Kansas State Historical Society

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property Less than 1 acre

UTM References

A

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4	1	7	1	6	7	0
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Zone Easting Northing

C

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B

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Zone Easting Northing

D

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description The nominated property is located on Lots 12 and 13, Block 21 in the original town plat on State Street in Augusta, Kansas. It is bounded to the east by State Street, to the west by a parking lot, and to the north and south by adjacent property lines.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes all property historically associated with the theater

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Martha Hagedorn-Krass, Architectural Historian

organization Kansas State Historical Society date September 14, 1990

street & number 120 W. 10th Street telephone 913-296-5264

city or town Topeka state Kansas zip code 66612

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The theater was designed by L.P. Larsen of Webb City, Missouri. Larsen was "known throughout the theatrical world for his modern ideas in design." He is said to have designed theaters in Kiowa and Abilene, Kansas during the period that he was involved with the Augusta Theater.

The Augusta Theater was one of the first theater in the world to use neon illumination entirely throughout the interior. The neon lighting and fixtures were designed and built by the Lite Craft-Neon Company of Joplin, Missouri. The Lite Craft-Neon Company was the first company to introduce neon theater illumination and neon decorations for theater facades.

The interior walls are covered throughout with hand-built ornamental plaster designs in black, silver, salmon, and green. The entire ceiling of the 675 seat auditorium is covered with individual hand-painted fiber board panels. Elaborately painted murals hang on the north and south walls of the theater. Doors, grilles, switchplates and other details blend together to give the theater an Egyptian appearance. The theater retains its original Simplex projection system, which is in operable condition.

The exterior of the building was covered with individual tiles of opaque Vitrolite glass. Above the decorative neon marquee the tiles were a pale green with an ornamental design in black and silver. The ornamental design was sandblasted and painted on the exterior of the glass. The glass on the upper section of the building was removed in the 1950s or 1960s and covered with a corrugated metal facade. Carrara glass will be used in the replacement project for the facade. The sunburst neon marquee and the black tiles below the marquee are extant.

Although the removal of the upper section of the theater's structural glass facade presents an integrity problem for National Register eligibility, the facts that good historic photographs of the original facade exist, that pieces of the original glass exist, that a source for the replacement of the structural glass exists, and that the Augusta Arts Council plans to proceed with the recreation of original facade significantly lessen the perceived integrity problem. However, the overriding factor in this decision to proceed with the National Register nomination of the Augusta Theater is the quality of its interior, which is superb. The theater exhibits high quality decorative details and its neon lights are still operable. The Augusta Theater is certainly an exception to the rule that in most cases an altered facade would automatically disqualify the building for the National Register.