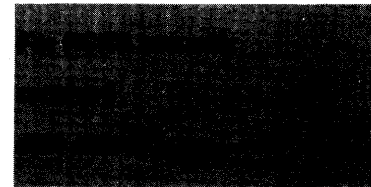


**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections



**1. Name**

*Uptown Theater*

historic Majestic Theater

and/or common Uptown Theater (preferred)

**2. Location**

street & number 1426-1430 Washington Avenue \_\_\_ not for publication

city, town Racine \_\_\_ vicinity of congressional district First

state Wisconsin code 55 county Racine code 101

**3. Classification**

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

**4. Owner of Property**

name Robert Despins and John Ekezian

street & number 1428 Washington Avenue

city, town Racine \_\_\_ vicinity of state Wisconsin 53403

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Racine County Courthouse

street & number 730 Wisconsin Avenue

city, town Racine state Wisconsin 53403

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Wisconsin Inventory of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1980 \_\_\_ federal  state \_\_\_ county \_\_\_ local

depository for survey records State Historical Society of Wisconsin

city, town Madison state Wisconsin 53706

*Jan 81*

## 7. Description

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

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

The Uptown Theater is located on Racine's Washington Avenue (State Highway 20) where the major thoroughfare takes a northeasterly turn from its east-west course. The building is closely woven into the commercial fabric of the city, in an area composed largely of two-story brick buildings of late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century vintage.

A special Uptown edition of the Racine Journal News of May 1, 1928 detailed the construction of the theater and its architect in full. Accompanying sketches reveal that the original facade has been altered considerably. No evidence could be found to document the date when remodeling of the center unit of the three-unit facade took place, but the character of the Carrara glass storefront and brick above suggest a time in the late 1940s; installation of the projecting marquis may have been as recent as the 1950s. The original structure "...of steel, concrete, and stone"<sup>1</sup> was dominated by a center "keep," probably of "fluted" concrete enclosed by taller limestone "towers" and thinner colonettes like those which still frame the building facades to either side. Ball finials and Gothic lamps trimmed the towers. An elaborately ornamented pressed-metal marquis was suspended beneath windows at the second-story level, which are more visible in the remodeled design. "The treatment of the entrance [was] unusually fine. Three columns carrying Gothic arches [gave] access to the permanent open vestibule."<sup>2</sup> Elements of the vestibule are still intact: over the sloping floor, ribbed vaults still spring from limestone "Gothic heads." The sweeping stair of the lobby and crocketed arches over the theater doors are still in place in the present frame shop.

Although the present exterior is not significant to the nomination, three building facades on Washington Avenue still span the width of the theater. The altered center unit, with projecting 1950s-vintage marquis, is red brick with a plate glass and aluminum storefront on the ground story. The brick false-front above is carried higher than rooflines to either side: trimmed in concrete, the brick coursing is stepped to echo the stepped recessions of brick creating recessed arches below. The original multi-paned casements are set into the recessions at the second-story level, one in each narrow arch at the sides and three in the grand arch in the center. The Avenue Frame Shop now occupies the ground story, using the former theater lobby as its sales floor.

The buildings to either side of the center, parts of the original design, are constructed of stone- and concrete-trimmed brick, with aluminum and plate glass storefronts on the ground story. Full-height fluted limestone colonettes frame the far east and far west ends of the buildings. The westernmost structure retains the small stone corbel beneath each of the thin stone strips applied to the upper elevation. A thin concrete course tops the building. Multi-paned casement windows with large multi-paned overlights are grouped into two large openings set into false bays. The multi-paned glass transom over the ground story is still visible beneath the covered area above. The ground story houses a restaurant.

Gary's Hobby Shop occupies the retail space in the easternmost building of the three. The altered plate glass and aluminum storefront is spanned by a large aluminum sign overhead. Three units of multi-paned casements are set within limestone frames on the second story, ruled by thin horizontal and vertical limestone strips like those on the western building. An ornamented building stone with the name Klinkert is attached to the center of the building below the recessed limestone cornice.

<sup>1</sup>Racine Journal-News, May 1, 1928.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

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Through disuse, the nominated building interior has deteriorated considerably (peeling paint, falling plaster), but the integrity of the original 1928 design is complete. The 10,400-square-foot interior of the Uptown Theater had a seating capacity of twelve hundred. With the thirty-one-foot-deep stage attached, the theater length exceeds one hundred seventy feet. Although the seats were removed in the 1960s, the rest of the interior remains intact. A grand elliptical-arch wood proscenium fills the north end of the auditorium, trimmed with a band of painted plaster coats-of-arms above. An ornamented crest over center stage is applied to an arched mural of classical figures and putti. Pierced pointed-arch wood screens with projecting bartizans frame the stage; doors to restrooms below are enclosed by multi-profiled elliptical arches, with blind pointed-arch arcading above. The ascending orchestra pit and stage floor are of wood. Second-story balconies at the sides of the theater are set behind paneled wood balustrades and within pointed arches formed by rib vaults above. Spandrels of the pointed-arch arcading along the east and west sides of the audience are filled with plaster ornament. Poured concrete forms the auditorium floor and stairs to the balcony at the south end of the theater. Four exits were located at the side and center aisles. Plaster ornament fills the circular ceiling. Some of the house lights remain. The complete stage rigging is still in place, and the curtains and drapery are in possession of the building owner.

In 1979, the Uptown Program, Inc., a non-profit urban development organization, began to investigate possible restoration and adaptive reuse of the Uptown Theater. At this time the group is pursuing proposals, and hopes that National Register listing will spark community and private interest in the project as a stimulus to rejuvenation of the surrounding neighborhood.

# 8. Significance

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

Specific dates 1927-28<sup>1</sup>

Builder/Architect B. Wade Denham<sup>2</sup>

## Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Although alterations have changed the face of the original Majestic Theater to the extent that the architectural integrity of the design has been lost, the interior of this last remaining grand theater in Racine, including the lobby and theater proper, retains its resplendent Neo Gothic decoration. Inspired by period design of the 1920s most often used in construction of houses and commercial buildings, the Perpendicular motif was then innovative, and is now unusual, in theater design.

The scope of coverage of the building's construction in the Racine Journal-News and Racine Times-Call of 1928 suggests that the Majestic was to be a cultural phenomenon of the day. A special section of the Racine Journal-News of May 1, 1928 focussed on the Majestic as the key element of the Uptown neighborhood, "The Heart of Racine." "Done in pure Gothic style with a daring employment of detail, the creation might well be epitomized in the words of William Jennings Bryan when he characterized as 'frozen music' the beauties encountered in a tour of the fine old European examples of this enchanting type of construction."<sup>3</sup> Architect B. Wade Denham was saluted for his ingenuity in using the "ideal lines" provided by the hill-side site of the building for banking seats to achieve full visibility of the stage at the base of the "bowled" theater, "very much like a giant scoop shovel."<sup>4</sup> Denham, a native of Muscatine, Iowa, was a resident of Racine from 1916 until his death in 1946. He studied civil engineering at Iowa State University until dissatisfaction led him to turn to architecture. Most of his commissions were commercial in nature, and included many "...public and business blocks in various cities."<sup>5</sup> Other Racine works include the Emerson Apartment Hotel, the Avon Apartments, Hermes Building, the Feiges Building, and the "early English" home of Dr. A. S. Pfeiffer.

Construction of the Majestic Theater was sponsored by businessman Ernst Klinkert, as affirmed in "A Tribute to Ernst Klinkert" in the Uptown section of the Racine Journal-News of May 1, 1928. His role in realization of the project is still recalled in the inscription stone of the easternmost facade of the Uptown building. A total of thirty-four contractors were involved in erection of the building, including the Marrand Colton Company of Warsaw, N.Y., which installed its large organ on the second-story balcony of the interior to the left of the stage.<sup>6</sup>

(continued)

<sup>1</sup>City of Racine Building Department Records; Racine Journal-News, May 1, 1928.

<sup>2</sup>Racine Times-Call, May 1, 1928; Racine Journal-Times, May 16, 1946.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Racine Journal-Times, May 16, 1946.

<sup>6</sup>Racine Times-Call, May 1, 1928.

UMM NOT VERIFIED  
ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Racine Journal-News, 1928.  
Racine Journal Times, 1946; 1953.  
Racine Times-Call, 1928.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 0.28

Quadrangle name Racine South, Wis.

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UMT References

A 

1	6	4	3	4	6	2	0	4	7	2	9	3	4	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

### Verbal boundary description and justification

See continuation sheet

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

state code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Diane H. Filipowicz, Architectural Historian

organization State Historical Society of Wisconsin date November, 1980

street & number 816 State Street telephone (608) 262-2970

city or town Madison state Wisconsin 53706

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature *Richard Murray*

title Director, State Historical Society of Wisconsin date 5/8/81

For HCRS use only	
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register	
<i>for</i> <i>Delores Byers</i>	Entered in the National Register date 3/1/82
Keeper of the National Register	
Attest:	date
Chief of Registration	

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After its triumphant opening, the operation failed to compete successfully with other theaters in the city, and closed for the first time in 1930. After remaining open from 1940-1953, the then Uptown closed briefly, then reopened from 1954-1960.<sup>7</sup> Only the retail spaces in the building at the front of the theater have remained in continuous and current use.

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<sup>7</sup>Racine Journal-Times, January 7, 1953; December 23, 1953.

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10. Verbal Boundary Description:

That part of Lot 6, Block 1 of Herrick's Addition to the City of Racine as recorded in Volume 224, p. 392; the Easterly 35 feet of lot 7, except the Southerly 100 feet, Block 1, Herrick's Addition.

Of Lot 6, Block 1, Herrick's Addition, except the following described parcel: Commence at the Southeast corner of said Lot 6; run thence Westerly along Washington Avenue 49 feet; thence Northerly and parallel to the West line of said Lot to a point where said line strikes the East line of said lot; thence Southerly along said Easterly line to the point of the beginning. Also, the Easterly 35 feet in width of Lot 7, Block 1, excepting the Southerly 100 feet in width thereof of Herrick's Addition, a recorded plat.

Said lot being in the City of Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin.

11. FORM PREPARED BY:

Research Assistance by:

Mary Kapreliam/Office Coordinator  
Uptown Program, Inc.  
1501 Washington Avenue  
Racine, Wisconsin

April, 1980