

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

MAY 22 1979

DATE ENTERED

JUL 26 1979

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Bailey Theatre

AND/OR COMMON

same

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Oak Street

--NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Bunkie

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

8th - Gillis Long

STATE

Louisiana

CODE

022

COUNTY

Avoyelles

CODE

009

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
			<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
			<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Le Theatre des Bon Temps, Inc.

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Oak Street

CITY, TOWN

Bunkie

VICINITY OF

STATE

Louisiana

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Avoyelles Parish Courthouse

STREET &amp; NUMBER

Main Street

CITY, TOWN

Marksville

STATE

Louisiana

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Louisiana Historic Sites Survey

DATE

1978

 FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

State Historic Preservation Office

CITY, TOWN

Baton Rouge

STATE

Louisiana

# 7 DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

EXCELLENT  
 GOOD  
 FAIR

DETERIORATED  
 RUINS  
 UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Bailey Theatre is set near the center of the small rural town of Bunkie. It is an imposing three-story brick and hollow tile structure, with a four-story fly gallery at the stage end. The theatre space is spanned by steel trusses, which give a shallow vault shape to the ceiling. This vault increases towards the stage forming a double elliptical proscenium arch.

The building is faced in brick, with a Classical facade formed of Baltimore brick, terra cotta, and cast concrete. The facade is articulated by pairs of colossal brick pilasters with papyrus capitals. The wide center bay contains a wide elliptical arch formed of terra cotta, with garlands, faces, and ribbons. The lower portion of the arch has been bricked in as have the pedimented windows in each of the two flanking bays. But the decorative motifs themselves remain intact. The facade also has three Classical terra cotta decorative panels, a frieze, a modillion cornice, and a parapet with a central shallow Baroque gable, which has a terra cotta panel giving the name of the theatre and the date "1925." The marquee and the theater interior date from the 1940's.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

## PERIOD AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

PREHISTORIC	__ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__COMMUNITY PLANNING	__LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	__RELIGION
1400-1499	__ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__CONSERVATION	__LAW	__SCIENCE
1500-1599	__AGRICULTURE	__ECONOMICS	__LITERATURE	__SCULPTURE
1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	__EDUCATION	__MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
1700-1799	__ART	__ENGINEERING	__MUSIC	__THEATER
1800-1899	__COMMERCE	__EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	__PHILOSOPHY	__TRANSPORTATION
1900-	__COMMUNICATIONS	__INDUSTRY	__POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	__OTHER (SPECIFY)
		__INVENTION		

PECIFIC DATES 1925 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Robert Lee Bailey, Sr. - Builder

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE Fred Nehrbaass - Architect

The Bailey Theatre is significant in the areas of architecture and social history. It is a good representative example of the early twentieth century commercial building in Louisiana. This can be seen in its use of brick and catalogue-ordered terra cotta details to create a roughly Renaissance effect, something which predominated in the grander commercial buildings of Louisiana in the early twentieth century. In addition, the Bailey Theatre, with its three-story colossal order facade, is a local landmark being the grandest and most pretentious structure in the town of Bunkie.

The theatre has social significance because it was <sup>a</sup> major social center for Bunkie and the surrounding rural area of plantations and farms. It was the only place of entertainment within a 35-mile radius and thus the only such place for people in the area who did not have the means to make trips to Alexandria or Opelousas. The Bailey Theatre was built by Robert Lee Bailey, Sr., in 1925, when the town was enjoying its brief heyday as the shipping/marketing center and train depot for a wide area including parts of Avoyelles, Rapides, Evangeline, and St. Landry parishes.

A series of interviews with some thirty Bunkie citizens, black and white, who have memories of the theatre from the 1920's through the 1950's points up the theatre's social significance. These interviews point out that the Bailey offered many other kinds of programs besides movies: plays, beauty contests, dance contests, talent shows, musical programs, dance and music recitals, performances by mind-readers and magicians, and several types of programs associated with the schools. Political rallies were sometimes held there. One person recalled seeing Huey Long speak at the Bailey during one of his campaigns. An undated clipping (probably from the 1930's) from the Bunkie newspaper tells how some 200 persons assembled at the theatre for a meeting of the Avoyelles Parish Chamber of Commerce.

But what most people recall about the theatre is the movies and the events associated with them. For many years there was an annual "Kids Day" when children were admitted free to see a movie and a magician. For a long time there was also a "bank night" held once a week when the lucky person whose name was drawn received a \$50 free prize. The persons interviewed mentioned many films and stars, including The Sheik, The Jazz Singer, Arsenic and Old Lace, the "3-D movie" The House of Wax, the Tarzan movies, Clara Bow, Theda Bara, Gary Cooper, Charley Chaplin, the Marx Brothers, Gene Autry, and Roy Rogers. They recalled the serials, especially The Perils of Pauline and

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Chain of Title on Bailey Theatre property, copy in National Register file for Bailey Theatre, State Historic Preservation Office, Baton Rouge.  
 "Chamber of Commerce Meets in Bunkie Wednesday at the Bailey Theatre," undated clipping, copy in National Register file for Bailey Theatre.  
 Eakin, Sue, Research Reports on Bailey Theatre, including excerpts of interviews with thirty Bunkie citizens, copy in National Register file for Bailey Theatre.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one

QUADRANGLE NAME \_\_\_\_\_ QUADRANGLE SCALE \_\_\_\_\_

UTM REFERENCES

A	1 5	5 7 7 8 5 0	3 4 2 4 3 4 2 5 6 8 0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Because the building occupies most of its lot, there can be no question of constructing boundaries to encompass its setting. So the exterior walls of the theatre are the boundaries of the nominated area.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Sue Eakin, Assistant Professor of History

March 1979

ORGANIZATION

LSU Alexandria

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

203 South Marshall Boulevard

TELEPHONE

(318) 346-2161

CITY OR TOWN

Bunkie

STATE

Louisiana

# 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 National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

*Bernice L. Carrigan*

TITLE

State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

5-14-79

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST: *[Signature]*  
 KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER  
 CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE

7-26-79

DATE

7/24/79

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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CONTINUATION SHEET 1

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 2

8. Significance (cont'd)

the newsreels by such commentators as Lowell Thomas.

The transcriptions of the interviews capture the flavor of the memories and suggest the impact which the theatre had on the people who attended it. Lloyd Newton, a local farmer, had recollections of the theatre in its early years:

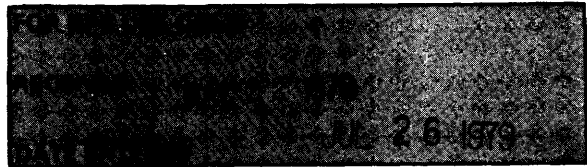
When Burton and I were small, we had a Shetland pony named Tarzan. After we had done our chores on Saturday, we went to town to go to the Bailey to see the "Westerns." We would have to ride through the field, go in front of the E. L. Lyles, Sr. home, so that we would be off the main highway. We would tie Tarzan to an old willow tree that was on the side of the Bailey while we went to the show. The price of a ticket was 5¢ or 9¢. A large bag of popcorn was another 5¢ and candy bars were 5¢. I remember Mrs. Lottie Didier selling us our tickets. It was always a treat because we were never allowed to go on a regular basis, and the Westerns were great--Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, Lash LaRue...Then there was always a serial--Tiger Woman and the like. All the kids in Bunkie went to the show and had a good time.

Mrs. J. O. Laprairie, Jr. recalls the Bailey of a somewhat later era:

Saturday afternoon always meant the Bailey Theatre back in the middle fifties when I was growing up. Where else could one go for 30¢ and get to see two full length features, a comedy, and a serial of Rocket Man or some equally exciting installment that was continued each week--plus enjoy a box of popcorn and a Coke? The Bailey Theatre was Small Town America. In the South and in Bunkie, integration hadn't come into being. Blacks still entered by a side door and the balcony section belonged to them exclusively. Our turf was the main auditorium. Depending on our age, we either sat down front and hurled popcorn boxes flattened into missiles at the screen or we sat in the back where we could hold hands with our current beau. Any of the older generation (those past 20) who were brave enough to buy a ticket for Saturday got to sit in the middle section. I'll never forget Mrs. Didier, (the ticket saleslady) who doubled as a bouncer and patrolled the aisle with her flashlight shining it on those couples who were not within what she considered the boundary of propriety and ejecting the rowdies down front who were making too much noise...

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8. Significance (cont'd)

The theatre's architect was a man named Fred Nehrbass, who came to the Bunkie area from Milwaukee in 1919. He worked for the New Orleans architectural firm of Favrot and Livaudais. In 1922 he married Marie Mouton of Lafayette, a member of a prominent family there. Nehrbass also designed the Bunkie High School, the Marksville High School and the Catholic Church in Marksville. Inquiries revealed that the original plans of the Bailey were burned in a warehouse fire.

Robert Lee Bailey, Sr. bought the land in December, 1924, from Joseph M. Weiss in return for a consideration of \$500. The deed mentions that Bailey "is now erecting a brick building on the said lot...to be used as a moving picture establishment" (See Avoyelles Parish Conveyance Book A-33, page 416).

The Bailey was recently purchased by the Avoyelles Parish Little Theatre group - "Le Theatre des Bon Temps" - who plan to renovate the building and use it for their performances as well as for other community programs and activities. Its lobby will be used for art exhibits.

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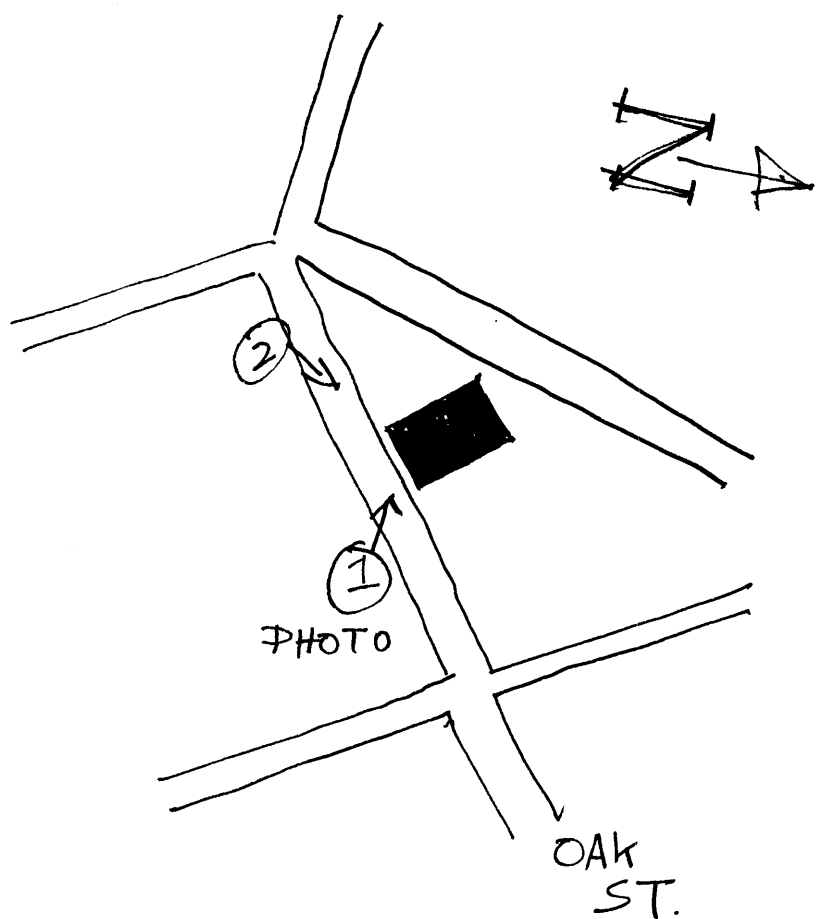
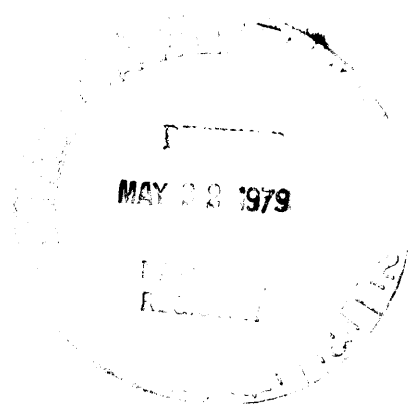
CONTINUATION SHEET 3

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9. Bibliography (cont'd)

"LSUA Chancellor to Sing at Little Theatre Benefit," The Bunkie Record,  
15 March 1979, p. 4.



BAILY  
THEATRE

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