

PH0660914

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	JAN 24 1978
DATE ENTERED	FEB 23 1979

**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**

HISTORIC  
PELLISSIER BUILDING  
AND/OR COMMON  
FRANKLIN LIFE BUILDING

OCT 12 1977

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER  
3780 Wilshire Boulevard  
CITY, TOWN  
Los Angeles  
STATE  
CA

VICINITY OF  
24

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT  
24

COUNTY  
Los Angeles

CODE  
06

CODE  
037

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
			<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  
Franklin Insurance Company  
STREET & NUMBER  
800 South Sixth Street  
CITY, TOWN  
Springfield  
STATE  
Illinois  
VICINITY OF  
62703

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.  
Los Angeles County Hall of Records  
STREET & NUMBER  
320 West Temple Street  
CITY, TOWN  
Los Angeles  
STATE  
CA

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE  
California Historic Resources Inventory  
DATE  
September 1976  
DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS  
Office of Historic Preservation  
CITY, TOWN  
Sacramento  
STATE  
CA

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Pellissier Building, with its blue-green terra-cotta veneer exterior and black granite base, is divided into four distinct parts that include the theater, shop section, office section and tower. The main entrance to the 2500 seat theater is distinguished by a large neon marquee with raised ornamental detail. The theater, with its foyer diagonal to the street, is located in a tower with an Art Deco detailed marble and metal lobby entrance. The mercantile portion of the structure is two stories with twenty individual shops; eleven on Wilshire Blvd., nine on Western Avenue, and one on Oxford Avenue. The tower is 190 feet in height. Several stories and levels are found on the tower but the primary section consists of twelve stories. A garage is located in the basement.

A small corner pavillion, diagonally situated to the street, is featured on the corner of Oxford Avenue and Wilshire Blvd. The pavillion carries out the Art Deco motif of the structure.

The reinforced-concrete building has an ornamental terra-cotta band over the second story shop windows. Below these windows are decorated pressed metal bands which serve as a back-drop for the commercial neon signs. The store windows on the second floor have been dropped several feet below the normal second-floor level by the architect. All windows, including those located on the tower, have spandrels constructed of steel with lead-coated copper. These window voids reflect the same blue-green colour of the terra-cotta building. A rounded bay window is located over the marquee.

Very few alterations have taken place since the original construction of the structure. Large neon signs have been placed on the top of the tower for the Franklin Life Company but do not alter the original construction. The theater, originally known as the Warner Brother's Western Theater, has had only the name changed on the neon signs; the remainder of the building has very few alterations. The marquee has been altered slightly; a narrow strip of ornamental wrought-iron was removed, probably to meet earthquake standards. A band of iron backing located behind the neon marquee has been removed. The theater ticket booth, located under the marquee, is constructed of steel with lead coated copper and carries out the geometric Art-Deco vertical design.

# 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/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1931

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Morgan, Walls & Clements and  
G.A. Lansburgh

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Originally known as the Pellissier Building, the Franklin Life Company later purchased the structure.

The office and shop portion of the structure was designed by renowned architect Stiles O. Clements while the theater portion was planned by G. Albert Lansburgh, well-known theater architect. The firm of Los Angeles architects Morgan, Walls and Clements first experimented with the vertical Art Deco styling and the Pellissier Building is one of the finest remaining examples of this type of architecture in Los Angeles.

The building has economic significance to the community in that it marks the westward movement of the Los Angeles cultural and business sector from downtown to a gradual move down Wilshire Blvd.

The theater foyer well reflects the building's unique styling. The oval shaped area is designed in a Moderne pattern with colourful terrazzo floors, black marble walls with white metal walls with accents of Tennessee and Loredo Chiaro marbles. The Art Deco-style lobby adjoining the office building has ornamental white metal, black walnut panels on some of the walls and elevators, and copper and glass lighting. Both the theater and office building have not been altered in any major way since their construction which is unusual for a structure that has been in continuous use for such a long period of time. The theater lobby retains most of the original fixtures and furnishings. The furniture not in use is stored on the upper floors. The foyer includes numerous glass chandeliers, painted ceilings in floral design, and floral wrought-iron staircases leading up the center of the main staircase. Ornate wrought-iron grills are found on all floors. The columns on the balcony over-looking the main theater foyer has carved linear designs highlighted with copper. Although there have never been any live performances in the Wiltern Theater, it retains its full working stage.

The theater opened on October 9, 1931 with George Arliss' "Alexander Hamilton". The auditorium itself is impressively tiered. Ornate three dimensional plaster decorations are found throughout the theater. These are dominated by vertical detail. The main decorating motif is spear-like copper and plaster carvings pointing downward. The lighting illuminates from the front of the theater in a sunburst design which was one of architect Lansburgh's characteristic designs.

Continued

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Los Angeles Times, October 9, 1931, II, 9.

Los Angeles Uptown Journal, October 7, 1931, pp. 12 - 20.

Southwest Builder & Contractor, February 21, 1930, p. 50; April 4, 1930, p. 45; May 30, 1930, p. 56; August 22, 1930, p. 53; October 31, 1930, p. 63; December 26, 1930, p. 57. continued

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY c. 1 1/2

UTM REFERENCES

A	<u>11</u>	<u>317,932.9</u>	<u>3,716,915.20</u>
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

A lot commencing at the southeast corner of Wilshire Boulevard and Western Avenue and extending 300' eastward to Oxford Avenue, 220' southward, 300' westward, and 220' northward to the original point.

## 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

Pamela Lee Gray

ORGANIZATION

Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History

DATE

September 29, 1977

STREET & NUMBER

900 Exposition Blvd.

TELEPHONE

746-0410 x241

CITY OR TOWN

Los Angeles

STATE

California

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL     

STATE     

LOCAL X

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

*Kenny McEllon*

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE 1/17/78

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

*William Labovitch*

DATE

2/23/79

~~DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHITECTURE AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION~~ **KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER**

ATTEST: William Labovitch  
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE Feb 7, 1979

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Each room carries out the Art Deco/Moderne motif. The smoking lounge has pyrimidal-shaped wood framing on each of the doorways, a floral painted ceiling, marble floors, and copper and glass lighting.

The theater pipe organ is the largest ever constructed by the Kimball Organ Company and is still considered the largest theater organ still in use in the United States. Organ concerts are given several times a month.

Due to the Depression and a shortage of money for such elaborate projects, the Wiltern is the only Art Deco styled theater that was ever built from Landsburgh's designs. The carefully planned decorative colour scheme is retained in the theater section which is most unusual. The Wiltern is one of the few remaining theaters which can make this claim.

The very few alterations that have occurred in the theater include several new stage curtains. The remainder of the theater and office building stands as it did when it was constructed with only very minor modifications.

The Pellissier Building is an exceptional example of Stiles O. Clements vertical Art Deco style, contains the only Art Deco theatre ever styled by reknowned theatre architect, G. Albert Lansburgh, and retains its unique interior theatre styling and color scheme to a remarkable degree.

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The Art Deco architectural style, usually referred to as Zigzag Moderne in the United States, developed "from classical-inspired designs of the teens and early 20s by Bertram Goodhue and from the vertical Gothic schemes of Eliel Saarien; from the forms and ornamentations of the Paris Exposition des Arts Decoratif of 1925, as well as the teens and twenties designs of Frank Lloyd Wright." This style stresses verticality and ornamentation in its use of color, building materials, and decorative patterns. It was originally adapted to the American skyscraper, providing a modern and positive image of the businesses housed in these structures. In California, however, the style is more varied and not so restricted to high rise buildings.

The facades of Art Deco structures are generally dominated by a series of set backs which emphasize the geometric form, recessed windows which form vertical strips separated by flat, slender columns, and ornamentation around doorways, near the roofline, and above the street-level floor which includes zigzag bands and parapet trim, and occasional stylized animal and plant motifs, sun bursts, and spirals. Roofs are flat and frequently topped by a central or off-set tower. Color plays an important role as Art Deco buildings are frequently finished in bright colors or covered with glazed tiles and polychrome terra-cotta. The motifs on the facade are carried out in the interior with highly stylized lobbies, wall surfaces, and fixtures.

The Wiltern Theater/Pellissier Building vividly illustrates the characteristics generally associated with Art Deco styling. The central portion of the building consists of several set backs and recessed windows separated by slender vertical bands, and the flat roof is capped by zigzag parapets and an off-set tower. The verticality of the structure is carried out so well that architectural historians David Gebhard and Robert Winter have commented that the "narrowness of the vertical recessed band windows and the spandrels so remove any reference to scale, that from a distance you would think you were looking at a large skyscraper." The facade is further ornamented by zigzag motifs, geometrical leaf patterns, and a bright blue-green terra-cotta veneer. The highly ornamental interior of the theater (mentioned elsewhere in the application) carries out the Art Deco motif in its use of sun bursts, floral patterns, geometric designs, and elaborate fixtures. Unlike many structures built during this period, the Pellissier Building has not been appreciably altered since its completion, testimony to the quality of its design and construction.

Of the many structures done in the Art Deco style in Los Angeles, the major buildings include the Richfield Building (1929, Morgan, Walls and Clements), Sunkist Building (1935, Walker and Eisen), Bullock's Wilshire (1928, John and Donald Parkinson), Sunset Tower Building (1929-31, Leland A. Bryant), Eastern-Columbia Building (1930, Claude Beelman), Desmond's Building (1928-29, G.S. Underwood), Dominguez Wilshire Building (1930, Morgan, Walls and Clements), Garfield Building (1928-30, Claude Beelman),

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Edison Building (1930, Allison and Allison), and the Wiltern Theater/Pellissier Building. Of these, the first two have been demolished and several others contain strong influences of Classical styling. The Pellissier Building is comparable to all of the above structures in conforming to the basic characteristics of the Art Deco style, and it is the only one to contain a theater.

The design of the office portion of the Pellissier Building was executed by the firm of Morgan, Walls, and Clements, founded by Ezra Kysor in 1868, and now the oldest continuing architectural firm in Los Angeles. Between 1920 and 1937 its chief designer was Stiles O. Clements (1883-1966), a graduate of the Beaux Arts Academy in Paris, who reorganized the firm in 1937 as Stiles O. Clements Associate Architects. During the twenties and thirties Clements was responsible for the design of such structures as the Richfield Building (1928), which David Gebhard has hailed as the "West Coast's most sensitive and convincing argument for the Zigzag Moderne;" the Mayan Theater (1928) and Security First National Bank (Santa Monica, 1931) for which Clements' firm won AIA awards; the Assyrian-inspired Sampson Tyre and Rubber Company factory (Commerce, 1928); and a host of other structures, primarily in the Moderne and Spanish Colonial styles, including the Adamson House (Malibu, 1929) which was recently placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The architect of the theater portion of the building, G. Albert Lansburgh, was a San Franciscan who served as the house architect for the Orpheum Theater circuit for thirty years. In that time he designed Orpheum theaters in Los Angeles, New Orleans, St. Louis, Kansas City, and Chicago. Also a graduate of the Beaux Arts Academy, he was the only non-New York city architect to design a major theater in that city in the early twentieth century. Lansburgh designed six theaters in Los Angeles; the Hill Street Theater (1922), the Wiltern, the Palace (1911), the fourth Orpheum (1925), the El Capitan (1926), and the Warner Brothers Hollywood (1928). In addition, he was the designer for the interior of the Shrine Auditorium (1923-6) which had the largest indoor auditorium (6700 seats) in the world at that time. His most publicized design was that of the War Memorial Opera House (1932) in San Francisco, a remarkable achievement in both aesthetic and acoustical design. Due to the economic conditions during the Depression, the Wiltern Theater was the only one of Lansburgh's many Art Deco commissions actually executed. It remains as a unique example of the work of a very versatile theater architect.

In recognition of the Pellissier Building's architectural and historical significance to the city of Los Angeles, the city's Cultural Heritage Board designated this structure Historic-Cultural Monument #118 in 1973.

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Stiles O. Clements

Stiles O. Clements (1883-1966) was one of the major architects to practice in Southern California, from the teens until his death in 1966. Clements was the designer for the highly successful firm of Morgan, Walls and Clements, from 1920 to 1937. In 1937 he organized his own firm under the title of Stiles Clements and Associates Architects and Engineers. As the principal designer for Morgan, Walls and Clements (Morgan, Walls and Morgan, 1910-1920; Morgan, Walls and Clements, 1920-1936), Stiles Clements produced such major Beaux Arts designs as the I.N. Van Nuys Building (Los Angeles, 1916), the Bank of Italy Building (Los Angeles, 1927) and other major monuments in this style. The firm was also responsible for many of the major Spanish Colonial Revival commercial buildings and residences in the Greater Los Angeles Area during the 1920's. Their best-known work of the 1920's was the often published Richfield Building (Los Angeles, 1928), one of the key landmarks of the Zig-Zag Moderne (Art Deco) in the U.S. (The latter building was surveyed and completely documented by the H.A.B.S. before its destruction in 1968.) During the 1930's and on into the 1940's, Stiles Clements produced a number of important designs in the Moderne style -- including his pioneer designs for drive-in supermarkets. It is remarkable, that in all of these design modes, from the Beaux Arts through the Spanish to the Moderne, Clements ended up producing many of the major monuments. As a designer, his work was amazingly consistent in quality.

Excerpted from a letter to the State Historical Resources Commission from David Gebhard, Director, University Art Galleries, regarding the Adamson House. Excerpted with permission of author, June 26, 1978.



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Motion Picture Herald, December 19, 1931, pp. 12-13; June 1, 1940, p. 32.

California Arts and Architecture, December 19, 1931, pp. 8 & 36-8.

Pictorial California, Vol. 8, no. 3-4 (March-April, 1933), p. 19.

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- Gebhard, David, & Winter, Robert. A Guide to Architecture in Los Angeles and Southern California. Santa Barbara: Peregrine Smith, 1977.
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Pellissier Building

Los Angeles, CA

