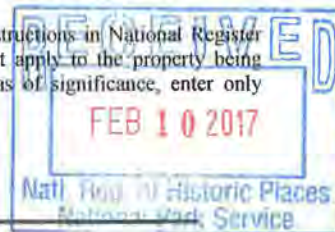


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

MP 779

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.



### 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Azteca Theater  
Other names/site number: Teatro Azteca; Azteca Theatre  
Name of related multiple property listing:  
Latinos in Twentieth Century California  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)


### 2. Location

Street & number: 836-840 F Street  
City or town: Fresno State: California County: Fresno  
Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide X local  
Applicable National Register Criteria:  
X A X B X C \_\_\_ D

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Jenan Saunders/Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer** **Date** 2/1/17  
California State Office of Historic Preservation  
**State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of commenting official:** **Date**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
**Title :** **State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

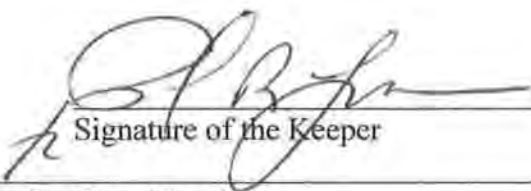
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**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:)

  
Signature of the Keeper

3/27/2017  
Date of Action

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public - Local
- Public - State
- Public - Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>          </u>	buildings
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	sites
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	structures
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>          </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: theater

SOCIAL: meeting hall

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: theater

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT: Art Deco

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: brick, stucco, glass

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

The Azteca Theater is a 15,000 square foot two story brick masonry building that faces southwest onto F Street in Fresno's Chinatown. It is one of many commercial businesses dating from the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries in this neighborhood and was constructed in 1948 in a late Art Deco style. The façade of the rectangular plan building is clad in stucco. Character defining features include the stepped parapet and the vertical fin "Azteca" neon sign that extends upwards from a two sided metal and wood marquee. Central to the building is a recessed foyer with canted walls with frames, two on each wall, for movie posters. The foyer serves as the building's main entrance. A hexagonal ceramic tile, glass, and plaster ticket booth with a stylized "A" in bright blue on the façade of the booth is located in the center of this outer foyer. To each side of the main entrance are identical recessed entryways that previously served small businesses attached to the theater. Four regularly placed casement windows of steel sash with multiple lights are located on the second floor of the building's façade. The auditorium includes a full proscenium wood stage with second floor dressing rooms. The overall integrity of the Azteca Theater is high. The theater remains unchanged since its construction other than the installation of a heavy security gate across the main entrance, and the boarded transoms and entrances on the side business wings. The original theater seats were removed after the building became vacant in the 1980s. New to this theater, vintage theater seats were installed in 2016.

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## Narrative Description

The Azteca Theater is a two-story American-bond masonry brick building with a rectangular footprint. The Art Deco style building is one of many late nineteenth to mid twentieth century commercial buildings that line both sides of F Street in Fresno's Chinatown. Chinatown is a six block area that lies between the original Central Pacific (later Union Pacific) rail corridor on the east and State Route 99 on the west. The neighborhood has been severely impacted over the years by disinvestment, with numerous vacant parcels left from redevelopment policies of the 1960s and 1970s. Although initially settled by Chinese railroad workers, Chinatown quickly became home to numerous ethnic communities and also functioned as Fresno's red light district.

The 15,000 square foot building is located on a 50x150 foot parcel with a zero lot line set back on the side elevations. A concrete bond beam below the cornice line is visible on the rear and side elevations. The façade of the building is clad in stucco, painted a deep brick red. A character defining feature is the stepped parapet and series of projections on the second floor that step out from the plane of the façade on each side of the Azteca vertical fin sign. The front of the building has a deeply recessed central foyer that is open to the street. The walls leading into this outer foyer are canted and have a decorative bulkhead of ceramic tiles painted black that extend around to the façade of the building. Two frames for movie posters are located on each wall. Additional frames for movie posters are located on the street elevation of the building, one on each side of the foyer entrance. These are boarded over. A hexagonal shaped ticket booth of glass and metal with a painted decorative plaster cornice is located in the center of this outer foyer. The base of the ticket booth is clad in deep blue ceramic tiles and is decorated with a stylized turquoise blue "A" on the center panel. Double wood doors are located on each side of the ticket booth and lead into the theater lobby. A single wood and glass panel door is located directly behind the ticket booth. A candy counter is situated in the theater lobby.

To each side of the main entrance are identical recessed entryways that previously served small businesses attached to the theater. These entryways are partially infilled, with a security screen door covering each entrance. Four regularly placed casement windows of steel sash with eight multiple lights each are located on the second floor of the building's primary façade.

Another character defining feature is the vertical fin Azteca sign that extends upwards from a two-sided metal, wood and plastic marquee. Azteca is spelled out in relief block letters on either side of the sign. The top of the sign is curved and the wood edge of the sign facing the street projects slightly and is painted sea green. The two-sided marquee is metal, wood, and plastic with a row of lights across the top of each side.

The rear of the building faces northeast onto China Alley and has a simple stepped parapet. Two 8-light steel sash casement windows are located on each end of the second story, presumably to provide light and ventilation for each dressing room. Three pier buttresses are located on the southeast elevation and two metal double doors on the rear elevation lead out to the alley. A

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mural celebrating the multi-ethnic history of Chinatown was painted on the rear of the building in August 2016.

The interior of the building includes a large auditorium open to the rafters. A two-story mezzanine on the southwest end of the building houses the projection room with original projector, an office, and bathrooms. A central aisle leads from the double doors to the proscenium stage on the northeast end of the auditorium. The auditorium floor has a gentle rake; there is no orchestra pit. The stage has a wood floor and is accessible from two sets of stairs, one on each side of the stage. Footlights are located along the edge. Dressing rooms on each side of the stage are accessed by steep narrow stairs. The walls of one of the dressing rooms are covered with graffiti from prior performers. In 2016, vintage theater seats were installed to replace the original seats that had been vandalized and later removed while the building was vacant.

### **Alterations/Integrity**

The integrity of the Azteca Theater is high. Other than new exterior and interior paint, improvements required to meet building codes, and seat replacement, the only apparent changes are the large security screen across the outer foyer as well as the partial infill of the entrances on the side businesses. The tenant is using the theater as a community arts center. Programs include Spanish-language films, concerts, dances, and theater and arts classes for children and adults. A Spanish-language TV program uses the stage as a set. Work to the building has included painting of the exterior and interior, construction of the entrance gate due to numerous break-ins, replacement of exit doors to meet health and safety codes, replacement of the lobby carpet, and replacement of the HVAC.

The Azteca Theater remains in the location where it was built in 1948 and thus retains integrity of location. The theater has lost some design integrity due to the installation of a security gate across the façade and the boarded transoms and entrances on the side business wings. The character defining features of this late Art Deco building including the stepped cornice, blade sign, marquee, and ticket booth are unchanged. The character of this area of Fresno's Chinatown has remained constant since the theater was constructed in 1948 with the exception of a 1960s era (former) Bank of Tokyo on the southwest corner of F and Kern Streets, and the property retains integrity of setting. The theater retains its original exterior construction materials, including the original windows, stepped parapet, ticket booth, blade Azteca sign, and marquee. The interior auditorium still has its wood proscenium stage and retains integrity of workmanship, although the old theater seats have been replaced by vintage seats from another theater. Other than the two changes noted for the exterior, the theater retains its integrity to the 1948 original construction period. Feeling and association are evident in the theater and link it to its role in the social history of Fresno's Latino community.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ETHNIC HERITAGE: Hispanic

ARCHITECTURE

SOCIAL HISTORY

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1948 to 1966

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1948

1966

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Tirado, Arturo Romualdo

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Johnson, J.C.

Johnson and Moore, Consulting Engineers

\_\_\_\_\_



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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Azteca Theater is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the area of Social History for its role in the Mexican American community in Fresno, under Criterion B in the areas of Ethnic Heritage: Hispanic and Entertainment/Recreation for the theater's association with impresario Arturo Romualdo Tirado, and under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as a modest but forthright example of a "single-screen neighborhood theater in the Art Deco style" (Architectural Resources Group 2006). The period of significance is 1948 to 1966, from the date of construction through the rally held by César Chavez en route from Delano to Sacramento. As a performing arts venue, cultural center, and studio or workplace of a prominent person, all property types associated with the historic context Making a Life: Latinos in the Arts, the Azteca Theater meets the registration requirements of the *Latinos in Twentieth Century California* Multiple Property Submission.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

### **Criterion A: Social History**

The Azteca Theater is located on Block 52 in Fresno's Chinatown, in the heart of the city founded in 1872 by the Central Pacific Railroad. The population of Fresno in 1875 was 600, with a third of the residents Chinese who lived west of the tracks in an increasingly dense community of shanties, stores, Chinese benevolent societies and "female boarding" houses. Fresno was incorporated in 1885. With incorporation, street grades and town lot numbers were established. In November 1887, 1,100 deeds were filed at the county courthouse and the last of the original railroad lots in Fresno were sold. By 1890 the population of Fresno was over 10,000, and land outside of the original town site was subdivided into streets and lots. The first streetcars were introduced in 1892, and this greater mobility allowed for the construction of a variety of streetcar suburbs. Fresno's population is now over 500,000 and the City is the center of the richest agricultural region in the United States.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for the Azteca Theater parcel depict a changing cultural landscape. In 1888 Block 52 was entirely vacant save for a small house and a veterinary infirmary. The east side of the block by 1898 was mostly infilled, while the west side of China Alley (the part of the block facing onto F Street) was almost devoid of buildings. By 1906 both Chinese and Japanese residential and commercial uses were noted. The Congregational Chinese Mission, with boarding, was located on the parcel addressed as 838 F Street with both Chinese and Japanese residential buildings also on the block. At the south corner was a feedlot. In 1918 the Congregational Chinese Mission remained on the parcel with the Westside Garage and "Billiards and Japanese boarding" located at the southeast corner of Kern and F Streets. By 1948 the Chinese Mission was gone and a vacant lot was indicated where the new theater would be constructed later that year.

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By the 1930s Fresno had the largest Mexican community in the San Joaquin Valley, with a resident population of 6,000 that grew to 10,000 each harvest (Gonzalez 2006:50). For this mostly poor immigrant community, Spanish-language movies provided an important escape. Films made in Mexico after the mid-1930s “filled the deep psychic needs of a beleaguered immigrant population” (Ibid:55). Each weekend during the 1940s and 1950s, working class Mexican families came into Fresno to attend dances, eat Chinese food, and see a Spanish-language movie at the Azteca Theater.

The Azteca Theater, or Teatro Azteca, opened on November 30, 1948. It was constructed by Johnson and Moore Consulting Engineers (Ryan Johnson personal interview 14 September 2015) for Gustavo A. Acosta who owned a small theater chain, including a burlesque palace on F Street called the Cal Theater. Of interest is that there were at least two other motion picture theaters on F Street during the 1940s, the Lyceum and the Rex (Sanborn Fire Insurance Map 1948). In 1956 Acosta leased the Teatro Azteca to his friend Arturo Tirado.

The Azteca, under the management of Mexican-born Arturo Tirado, provided a steady diet of films made during the Golden Age of Mexican cinema, and was also a venue for personal appearances by many of the leading actors of Mexican film: Maria Felix, Agustin Lara, Pedro Armendariz, Antonio Aguilar and Pedro Infante (Gonzalez 2006:58). From 1948 to 1980 the theater was the only venue to show Spanish-language films catering to the largely immigrant Mexican American community in this region. The theater with its proscenium stage also hosted cultural events for the Latino community. When in March 1966 César Chavez led striking farmworkers on their march from Delano to Sacramento, they stopped in Fresno, met with Mayor Floyd Hyde at City Hall, and held a rally in the Azteca that featured Chavez and the striking farmworkers. This rally on Thursday, March 24, 1966 was attended by over 1,000 people (*The Fresno Bee The Republican* 23, 24, and 25 March 1966).

### **Criterion B: Ethnic Heritage: Hispanic and Entertainment/Recreation**

Impresario Arturo Romualdo Tirado managed the theater from 1956 to 1980. Tirado brought many of Mexico’s leading film stars to Fresno to give personal appearances at the Azteca. “Don Tirado” was a significant force in Fresno’s Latino community and was given the honorary title, the “Mayor of West Fresno” (Gonzalez 2006:61).

Tirado was born in Mexico City in 1912, the oldest son of a show business family. In 1919 his parents moved the family to Los Angeles where his father, Romualdo Tirado, achieved notable success as an actor, singer, producer, director, theatrical performer, and playwright of *revistas* (one-act sketches). Arturo Tirado’s childhood experiences and early work in theater, as well as music (he played violin briefly with the Xavier Cugat band), the film industry, and even his training as an accountant, led to his personal and professional relationship with every major Mexican film star from the 1930s to the 1970s, many of whom eventually appeared in person at the Azteca. He managed a small theater in Bakersfield in 1944, and in 1956 leased the Azteca Theater in Fresno from his friend, Gustavo A. Acosta.

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Unlike most movie theaters that featured both English as well as Spanish-language films, the Azteca was an exception, all movies were in Spanish. Tirado's booking agent who procured the latest Mexican films was Gustavo Acosta, for whom the Azteca was constructed in 1948. Tirado's influence on Spanish-language movie houses extended beyond his work in Fresno. In 1961 Tirado convened a meeting in San Francisco that resulted in the creation of the Spanish Pictures Exhibitors Association (SPEA), founded as a statewide then national organization to promote the interests of Spanish-language theater owners. Tirado was elected the first President (Gonzalez 2006:56). Tirado also played a significant role as an advocate for the *Mexicano* community in Fresno. He hosted a weekly program on Fresno's KNEX where he offered advice to the Valley's Mexican community, particularly on problems with immigration.

Prior to César Chavez's rally in Fresno, Tirado met with Mayor Floyd Hyde and the chief of police to provide an escort when the marchers came through Fresno. Due to Tirado's influence, Chavez and company did not meet with the hostility that earlier greeted them in towns like Tulare (Ibid:62). The rally staged by Chavez and the marchers at the Azteca on March 24, 1966 drew more than 1,000 people. The all-Spanish language program that night included a reading of the "Plan of Delano," a statement calling for revolutionary changes in agriculture (*The Fresno Bee The Republican*, 25 March 1966).

Arturo Tirado operated the Azteca from 1956 until 1980 when he let the lease run out. The Golden Age of Mexican cinema was over and he turned his attention to civic affairs. Tirado died on January 15, 1998.

### **Criterion C: Architecture**

The Azteca Theater was constructed in 1948 by Johnson and Moore Consulting Engineers for Gustavo A. Acosta. The building was designed by the English-born architect, J.C. Johnson, who was never credentialed as an architect in the United States. Johnson worked for the Pantages Corporation as a designer and was a specialist in detail work that included Fresno's Warnors Theater. He left Pantages to start his own firm, Johnson and Moore Consulting (Ryan Johnson personal interview 21 January and 14 September 2015). Of some interest is that the elevation drawings originally submitted to Acosta were for a more ornate Spanish Revival style building and were changed to accommodate a more modest façade, one quoting elements of the Art Deco.

As designed, the Azteca included character defining features of the Art Deco, including a stepped parapet and stylized fin sign spelling out "Azteca." The interior originally included ten large murals of Mexican and Aztec life on the walls as well as framed photos of Mexican stars. Although Aztlan, the legendary home of the Aztecs, was not a prominent theme in Chicano literature until the 1960s, it is certainly possible that the theater façade, with its subtle quotation of a pyramid, resonated with the Mexican immigrants who frequented the Azteca from the late 1940s into the 1960s.

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Art Deco is normally considered to have been an influential design aesthetic from 1925 to 1940. The name (also called Moderne, Zigzag, or even Jazz Moderne) originated with the *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* held in Paris, April-October 1925. Art Deco ornament was characterized by zigzags, chevrons, rays, stepped arches, stylized flora, and natural forms and was used on items from skyscrapers to toasters. Architecturally it was particularly well suited for movie palaces. American Art Deco architecture borrowed heavily from the indigenous building aesthetics of Mexico and Central America (Benton et al, 2003).

Art Deco faded in the late 1930s and was replaced first by Streamline Moderne and ultimately by modern architectural styles influenced by the International style. However, in the period 1930s to 1950s, a revitalization of art deco, described as “Art Moderne meets Streamlined” developed under the influence of the Skouras Brothers who owned numerous theaters on the West Coast. Their designer, Carl G. Moeller, boldly embellished new theaters and remodeled older ones in what became known as the “Skouras” style. Due to the availability of low cost aluminum Moeller was able to create sweeping, three-dimensional hand-tinted shapes and scrolls that would have been prohibitive in plaster in the earlier Art Deco theaters. Fresno’s Crest Theater (1949, Carl G. Moeller) exemplifies this Skouras style. A few months before the Crest Theater was dedicated, the Azteca Theater, in a much more subdued late Art Deco style, was constructed in Fresno’s Chinatown.

It is unclear why the architect J.C. Johnson changed the original submitted façade plans that depicted a somewhat more ornate Spanish Revival building for the realized late Art Deco design. The Spanish Revival drawings have been preserved by the architect’s family as was another façade in a modern style, but plans for the actual realized design have not survived. The more subdued design may have been less expensive or perhaps more modern in its effect. Architecturally the late Art Deco design does coincide with several other modest commercial buildings in the South Stadium area of Fresno that were designed or redesigned in Fresno at the same time, although the Azteca is the only extant theater. With its stepped parapet and interior murals celebrating Mexican life, the Teatro Azteca undoubtedly felt like “home” for the region’s working class *Mexicanos*.

The building was previously evaluated and found eligible for listing on the California Register of Historical Resources under Criterion 3 as a distinctive example of a type, “the “single-screen neighborhood theater in the Art Deco style” (2006, Architecture and Resources Group). The consultants for the High Speed Rail Authority, with concurrence from the State Historic Preservation Office, agreed with the findings of the 2006 survey (JRP Historical Consulting, 2011). At the time, neither consulting firm found the Azteca eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under any criterion. However, neither survey included an evaluation of the building vis-a-vis its importance in the social history of Fresno’s (and the San Joaquin Valley’s) Latino community. Neither survey referenced the 2006 article by Manuel G. Gonzales Ph.D. in *California History*: “Arturo Tirado and the Teatro Azteca: Mexican Popular Culture in the Central San Joaquin Valley.”

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After Arturo Tirado let the lease run out in 1980, the Azteca operated under new management until 1986 when it went out of business, in part due to the competition from multiplex theaters that were then in vogue. Spanish language films were shown at least through 1982, as evidenced from a photo taken and published that year. It next became a venue for Kung Fu films. By 1995 the building was vacant and in derelict condition. A bad roof repair allowed rainwater to run into the theater auditorium creating a pond. The building was inhabited by vagrants, pigeons, and cats (David Owens 28 July 2010 [www.AztecaTheater.com](http://www.AztecaTheater.com)). David Owens purchased the theater in 1999 and began a clean-up and restoration. He transformed the lobby into an art gallery that specialized in Chinese art (David Owens 29 July 2016). In 2013 Owens leased the theater to a tenant who is returning the building to its original function: a venue for Spanish-language films, live music performances, and community events.

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

“Azteca Theater.” Architectural designs for G.A. Acosta, “F” Street, Fresno. Johnson and Moore Consulting Engineers, Job No. 162, Fresno, n.d.

“Azteca Theater.” Primary Record and Building, Structure, and Object Record Survey Forms prepared by Architectural Resources Group for the City of Fresno, April 2006.

Benton, Charlotte, Tim Benton, and Ghislaine Wood, eds. *Art Deco: 1910-1939*. Boston, Bullfinch Press, 2003.

*Fresno Bee The Republican, The 23, 24, and 25 March 1966.*

Gonzalez, Manuel G. “Arturo Tirado and the Teatro Azteca: Mexican Popular Culture in the Central San Joaquin Valley.” In *California History* 83:4 (2006) 46-74.

Johnson, Ryan. Telephone interview by Karana Hattersley-Drayton 21 January and 14 September 2015.

Owens, David. Personal communications, 26 August 2015, 8 April 2016, 11 April 2016, 29 July 2016; also [www.AztecaTheater.com](http://www.AztecaTheater.com).

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### 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 # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

### Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
  - Other State agency
  - Federal agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - Other
- Name of repository: City of Fresno, California

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** less than one acre

### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 36.729169 Longitude: -119.793107

### Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The Azteca Theater is located on a 0.17 acre parcel on lots 25 and 26 (Block 52) City of Fresno, APN 467-072-06.

### Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries coincide with the legal parcel.

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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Karana Hattersley-Drayton, Historic Preservation Project Manager

organization: Development and Resource Management Department, City of Fresno

street & number: 2600 Fresno Street

city or town: Fresno state: CA zip code: 93721

e-mail: [karana.hattersley-drayton@fresno.gov](mailto:karana.hattersley-drayton@fresno.gov)

telephone: (559) 621-8520

date: April 2016, revised August 2016

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## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

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### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property: Azteca Theater

City or Vicinity: Fresno

County: Fresno

State: California

Photographer: as noted

Date Photographed: as noted

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 5 Primary façade, looking northeast, 2 August 2016, Karana Hattersley-Drayton
- 2 of 5 Snack booth, interior, 29 July 2016, Natalie Robertson
- 3 of 5 Rear elevation, looking northwest from China Alley with new mural, 2 August 2016, Karana Hattersley-Drayton
- 4 of 5 Interior of theater looking towards stage, August 2016, Laura Barboza
- 5 of 5 Extant movie projector, 29 July 2016, Natalie Robertson

### Index of Figures

- 1 of 4 Elevation drawing (altered in final execution) by Johnson and Moore, n.d.; Courtesy Ryan M. Johnson
- 2 of 4 Auditorium floor plan, n.d.; Courtesy Ryan M. Johnson
- 3 of 4 Ad for César Chavez Rally at the Azteca, *The Fresno Bee The Republican* 23 March 1966; Courtesy The Fresno County Library
- 4 of 4 Primary façade, December 1982; Courtesy American Classic Images

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



Azteca Theater  
Name of Property

Fresno, California  
County and State

### Location Map

Latitude: 36.729169

Longitude: -119.793107



Azteca Theater  
Name of Property

Fresno, California  
County and State

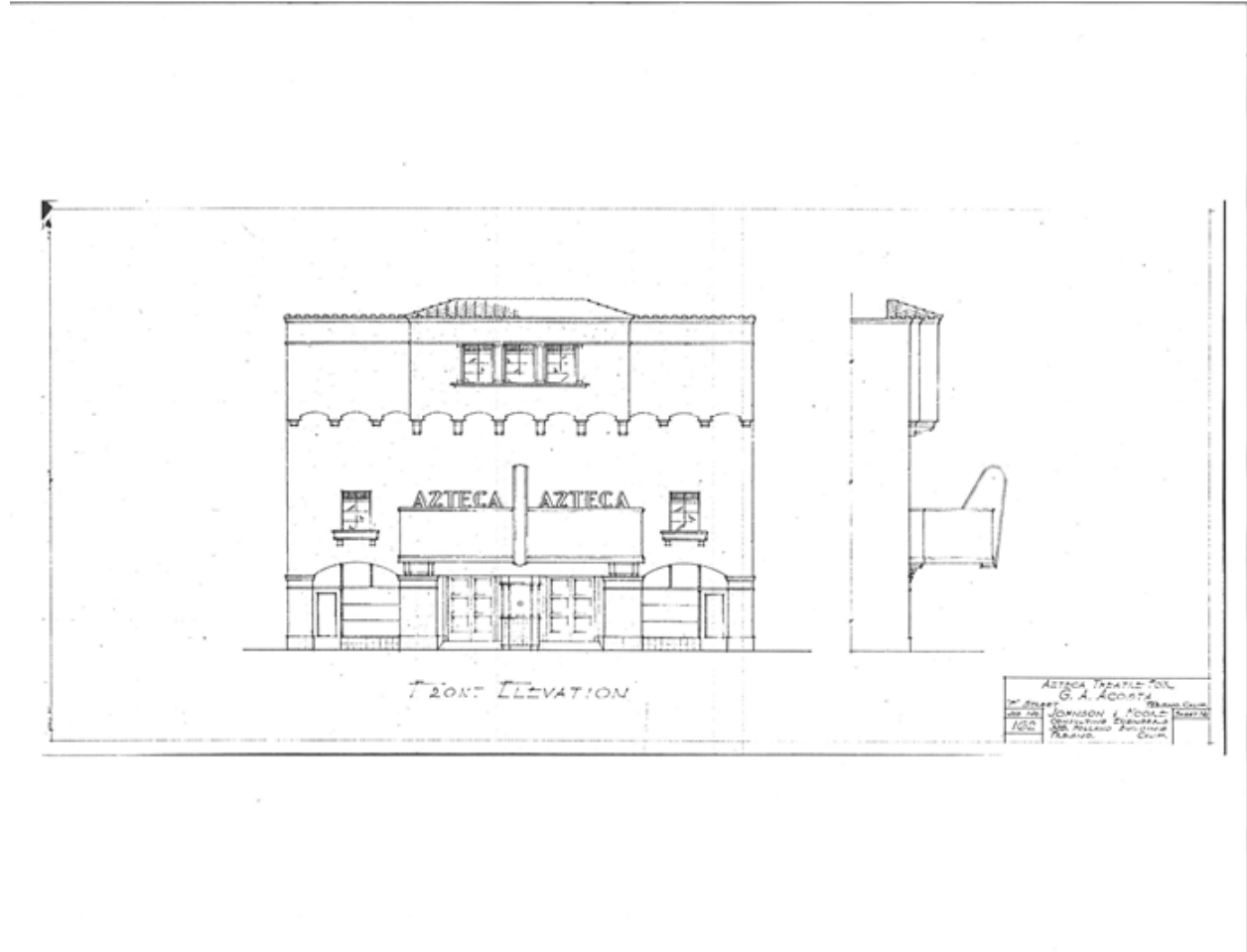
**Sketch Map/Photo Key**



Azteca Theater  
Name of Property

Fresno, California  
County and State

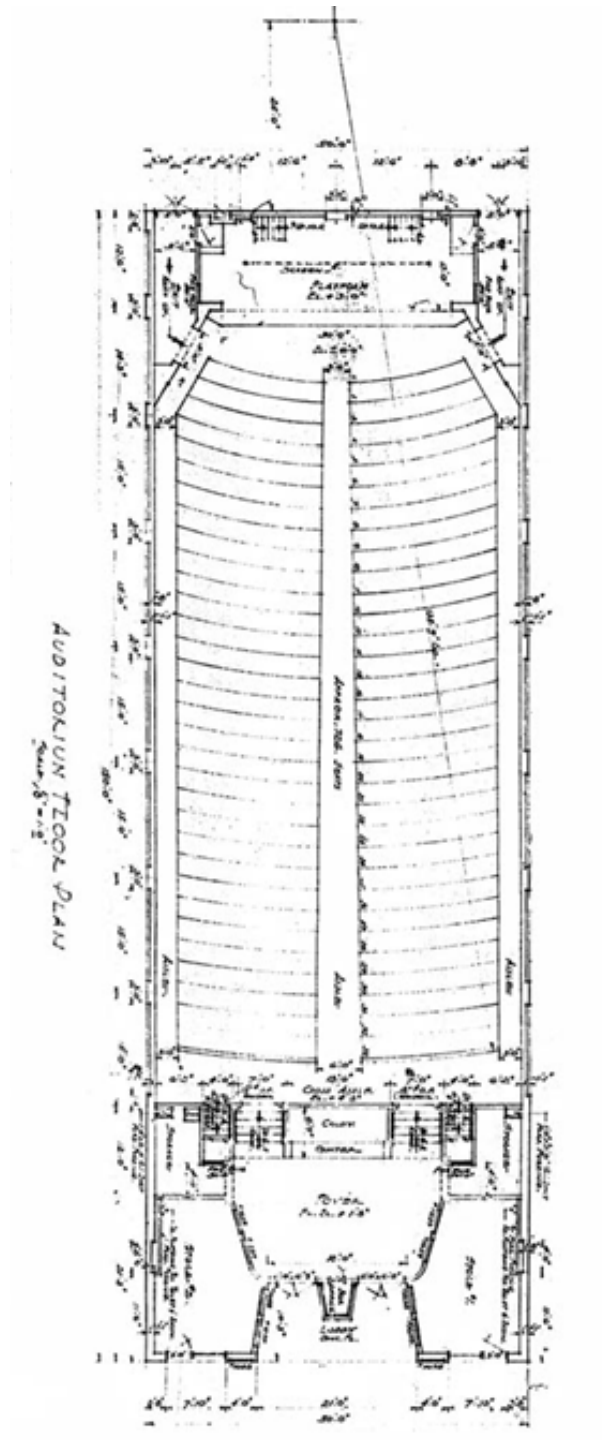
**Figure 1.** Elevation drawing (altered in final execution) by Johnson and Moore, n.d.;  
Courtesy Ryan M. Johnson



Azteca Theater  
Name of Property

Fresno, California  
County and State

**Figure 2.** Auditorium floor plan, n.d.; Courtesy Ryan M. Johnson



Azteca Theater  
Name of Property

Fresno, California  
County and State

**Figure 3.** Ad for César Chavez Rally at the Azteca, *The Fresno Bee The Republican* 23 March 1966; Courtesy The Fresno County Library

WILSON—"Ulysses," 7:11 and 11:15 p.m.  
OC- "Flight of the Phoenix," 8:54 p.m.

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**AZTECA** • SPANISH PICTURES ONLY  
838 F Street Ph. AD 3-6664

**TOMORROW — THURS., 7 P.M.**  
**FREE ADMISSION**  
to see and hear the  
**DELANO MARCHERS**

- Talk by Cesar Chavez
- Entertainment by the Marchers

{ 7 PM to 6 PM —  
Regular Spanish Movies)

**ADULTS H**

Azteca Theater  
Name of Property

Fresno, California  
County and State

**Figure 4.** Primary façade, December 1982; Courtesy American Classic Images



Azteca Theater  
Name of Property

Fresno, California  
County and State

**Photo 1.** Primary façade, looking northeast, 2 August 2016, Karana Hattersley-Drayton



**Photo 2.** Snack booth, interior, 29 July 2016, Natalie Robertson



Azteca Theater  
Name of Property

Fresno, California  
County and State

**Photo 3.** Rear elevation, looking northwest from China Alley with new mural, 2 August 2016, Karana Hattersley-Drayton



**Photo 4.** Interior of theater looking towards stage, August 2016, Laura Barboza





Azteca Theater  
Name of Property

Fresno, California  
County and State

**Photo 5.** Extant movie projector, 29 July 2016, Natalie Robertson





ANTECA

LA FIESTA  
BAR

FRIDAYS ONLY  
\$20  
Budweiser  
\$15

Cabaret \$15  
de 5

OFFI

87





POSTED  
NO TRESPASSING  
KEEP OUT





25024  
READ & TEST  
**XELAMP**  
L.P. ASSOCIATES, INC.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Nomination  
Property Name: Azteca Theater  
Multiple Name: Latinos in 20th Century California MPS  
State & County: CALIFORNIA, Fresno

Date Received: 2/10/2017      Date of Pending List:      Date of 16th Day:      Date of 45th Day: 3/27/2017      Date of Weekly List:

Reference number: MP100000779

Nominator: State

Reason For Review:

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appeal           | <input type="checkbox"/> PDIL            | <input type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request     | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape       | <input type="checkbox"/> Photo              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waiver           | <input type="checkbox"/> National        | <input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission     | <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource | <input type="checkbox"/> Period             |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other | <input type="checkbox"/> TCP             | <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> CLG             |   |

Accept       Return       Reject      3/27/2017 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments: The Azteca Theater is locally significant under National Register Criteria A, B & C, in the areas of Architecture, Ethnic Heritage-Hispanic, Social History and Recreation/Entertainment. Built in 1948, the theater is a fine local example of late-Art Deco style commercial design, by respected theater architect J.C. Johnson. During the 1950s and 1960s, the theater was operated and managed by Mexican entrepreneur Arturo Romualdo Tirado, who molded the theater into an important social and recreational venue serving the region's large Hispanic population. Hosting Spanish language films, promoting personal appearances by notable Mexican cinema stars, and providing meeting and staging space for political rallies, the theater was also involved with labor organizer Cesar Chavez's work on behalf of agricultural workers (1966), many of whom were also Hispanic. The property meets the Registration Requirements set out in the Latinos in 20th Century CA MPS.

Recommendation/ Criteria      Accept NR Criteria A, B and C.

Reviewer Paul Lusignan      Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2229      Date 3/27/17

DOCUMENTATION:      see attached comments : No      see attached SLR : No

**OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION**

1725 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, Suite 100  
SACRAMENTO, CA 95816-7100  
(916) 445-7000 Fax: (916) 445-7053  
calshpo@parks.ca.gov  
www.ohp.parks.ca.gov



February 7, 2017

J. Paul Loether, Deputy Keeper and Chief  
National Register and National Historic Landmark Programs  
National Register of Historic Places  
1201 Eye St. NW, 8th Fl.  
Washington D.C. 20005

Subject: **Azteca Theater (Latinos in Twentieth Century California MPS)  
Fresno County, California  
National Register of Historic Places Nomination**

Dear Mr. Loether:

**The enclosed disk contains the true and correct copy of the nomination for the AZTECA THEATER to the National Register of Historic Places.** On February 3, 2017 in Sacramento, California, the California State Historical Resources Commission unanimously found the property eligible for the National Register at the local level of significance under Criteria, A, B, and C with a period of significance 1948 to 1966.

The Azteca Theater is eligible under Criterion A in the area of Social History for its role in the Mexican American community in Fresno, under Criterion B in the areas of Ethnic Heritage: Hispanic and Entertainment/Recreation for the theater's association with impresario Arturo Romualdo Tirado, and under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as a modest neighborhood theater in the Art Deco style. As a performing arts venue, cultural center, and studio or workplace of a prominent person, all property types associated with the Making a Life: Latinos in the Arts historic context, the Azteca Theater meets the registration requirements of the *Latinos in Twentieth Century California* MPS.

The property is nominated by the City of Fresno, a Certified Local Government, funded in part by an Underrepresented Communities Grant from the National Park Service to the California State Office of Historic Preservation to increase the number of Latino properties listed on the National Register. The City of Fresno's Historic Preservation Commission, at a noticed public hearing on December 19, 2016, adopted a resolution in full support of the nomination. If you have any questions regarding this nomination, please contact Amy Crain of my staff at (916) 445-7009.

Sincerely,

Jenan Saunders  
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

Enclosure