

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

<b>FOR NPS USE ONLY</b>	
RECEIVED	
DATE ENTERED	

**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 Ohio Theatre

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER 39 East State Street

CITY, TOWN

Columbus

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

\_\_\_NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

15th

STATE

Ohio

CODE

039

COUNTY

Franklin

CODE

049

**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 type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input checked="" 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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME Columbus Association for the Performing Arts

STREET & NUMBER

41 East State Street

CITY, TOWN

Columbus

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

Ohio

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, Franklin County Court House  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

STREET & NUMBER

380 South High Street

CITY, TOWN

Columbus

STATE

Ohio

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE

not yet entered

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

1100 L Street

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The following description was written by Larry Alan Beers for the National Register:

"Built of brick with stone-faced facade in 1928, the Ohio Theatre is one of the most magnificent structures of its type extant in the United States. A massive building, the theater is about two hundred feet square, and stands nearly eight stories tall. Though the exterior is rather severe, the interior is extremely ornate.

The north side of the theater shows the only embellishments on the exterior. The entrance is recessed in the center three bays of the five bay facade. This section is columned above the first floor (storefront and marquee) level, while the end bays are pilastered. Above the second stage are windows across the facade with pilasters between.

A long row of brass doors are provided for ingress and egress at the front of the theater. Upon entering the foyer, one is overwhelmed by the intricate gesso wall decorations. The lobby reaches nearly three stories to the ceiling, and is graced by a huge, crystal chandelier. Wide stairways lead to the upper levels on the east and west sides. Below the lobby and on the first level upstairs are lounges for men and women. At one time, the walls and ceilings of these areas were decorated with intricate, hand-painted designs. Fortunately, much of this decoration remains and the present owner is actively restoring the remainder to its original appearance. Again, in the main part of the theater, the walls and ceilings around the seating area are embellished with elaborate gilt and gesso decorations. A significant feature of the theater is the "Mighty Morton" theatre pipe organ, which is one of the finest in the Nation. The original swagged brocade curtains remain at the doorways and the main stage curtain is also original.

The following account, quoted from The Country Music Star News, December, 1972, clearly describes the theater on opening night:

"As forty handsome ushers, resplendent in brand new uniforms, directed the audience to the plushiest seats the American Seat Company had ever made, feet sank into luxurious carpeting."

"The bronze drinking fountain, stained glass chandeliers, lavish velvet draperies and a specially built player grand piano caused further ripples of excitement as many hurried up the sweeping stairways to lean over the bronze railings of the mezzanine to catch the splendor below."

"Elaborate gold leaf-covered carvings soared above the proscenium, and a richly brocaded curtain hid the stage. Marvelously draped boxes were seen on the east and west walls; high overhead a blazing chandelier with clusters of electric candelabra and tiny flying horses was noted before the lights

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# 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 1928

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Thomas W. Lamb

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Ohio Theatre was designed during the golden age of movie palace construction by one of the most prolific and best known architects, Thomas White Lamb, whose career began in 1909 designing for William Fox in New York. One of the few remaining "palaces" that is fully refurbished and occupied today, the Columbus, Ohio building is a magnificent example of the gilded extravaganzas that afforded escape from the ugly realities of the Depression.

Thomas Lamb and "Opera House John" Ebersson were the most famous theatre architects of the 1920's working for the Fox Brothers and the flamboyant S. L. Rothapfel - "Roxy" as his friends called him. Movie Palace construction reached its zenith in 1927 when the ten million dollar Roxy Theatre was built on Broadway in New York.

Lamb designed more than 300 theatres all over the world in a variety of styles; Adam, French Baroque, Louis XVI, Italian, Hispano-Suiza, Hindu and Persian. At first they were "high class" (two balconies and an orchestra pit), later referred to as "de luxe," when the familiar first balcony came to be known as the loge.

Ben Hall describes the design process: "The movie palace architect's most valuable ally was the decorator, for without him the pleasure domes would have been as barren as dirigible hangars. All through the planning and building stages they worked together to create just the right effect of awe mingled with euphoria on the absorbent Ids of moviegoers. The decorator usually moved in after the structure was fairly well completed to deck the hall with boughs of gold leaf and all the other trappings that were his stock in trade.

Though there were a number of first-class professional theatre decorators in the field, Mrs. William Fox was not one of them. From days of watching the cash box and nights of poring over plans while her husband built his theatre chain from a few ten-cent shows to what finally became--for a few months--the giant of all the chains, Mrs. Fox had developed the business acumen of Hetty Green combined with the decorative flair of a demented Elsie DeWolfe. She climbed stairs to factories and lofts to see with her own eyes how furniture and decorations were made. She knew all the problems; even seat

(CONTINUED)

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Arter, Bill, Columbus Vignettes IV. Columbus, Ohio; Nida-Eckstein Printing, 1971.

"Ohio Theatre - Pride of Columbus", Country Music Star News, Columbus, Ohio: December, 1972, p. 11.

Motion Picture News, June 30, 1928.

Hall, Ben M., The Best Remaining Seats, Bramhall House, N. Y., 1951, pp. 105-118.

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY \_\_\_\_\_

UTM REFERENCES

A	1 7	3 2 9 2 2 0	4 4 2 5 0 0 0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

(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

Carolyn Pitts, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey Division, National Park Service

DATE

2/18/77

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street NW.

TELEPHONE

202-523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C. 20240

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL X

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.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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dimmed. The rich sound of the orchestra was heard. As they rose majestically into view from the orchestra pit, this novelty brought forth thunderous applause. The orchestra sank from sight, and velvet curtains parted to show a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer newsreel. The George Lyons, master of ceremonies for the day, appeared in front of the curtain and presented a display of the magic the theater offered. He explained the orchestra life (a screw jack) the organ elevator, and ran the gamut of lighting effects."

"Henry B. Murtaugh was on the bench of the Robert Morton theatre organ as it arose from the pit. His performance was followed by a stage show...a vaudeville type revue. After the dancing girls, the first movie ever shown at the Ohio came on. A silent movie, starring Greta Garbo as "The Divine Woman'."

The following description is by Thomas Lamb which appeared in an article interviewing him in 1928 in the Motion Picture News:

"In the auditorium one finds the side walls are divided into bays or sections, in the center of each there is an elaborate shrine, as it were, of carved walnut and gold. This is surrounded by numerous coves which turn and mitre upon each other in the most intricate manner, and being gilded reflect the light in as many directions as there are planes. But rising above these shrines, there is one vast dome of gold culminating in a star formation of rich relief ornament. This vast dome of gold is completely covered with modern painted ornamentation, a semi-natural, semi-conventional ornament of flowers, leaves and birds. While this seems to grow naturally nevertheless it yields, as it were, to a law of pattern and design. The ceiling gradually merges into a sounding board. This is one of the most original schemes ever produced in theatre decoration. It is one vast surface of deep red, completely covered with stars of innumerable sizes and shapes, closely spaced, in fact, almost touching. It forms a mosaic of gold, silver and red, but of such variation and such play of pattern, that it defies the mind to discover the pattern on which it is built. Its effectiveness lies in its texture of metal stars spattered and super-imposed upon a ground of red. The sounding board, in turn, through various transitions passes on to the proscenium arch, which is burnished gold on the richest of relief ornament, with touches of red in the background.

This theatre auditorium is probably as rich an interior as will be found in the country, and with all there is created no feeling of gaudiness, that result which the decorator has most to fear."

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upholstery had to be tested for the effects of perspiration, of Lucky Tiger hair pomade, and for wearing qualities versus cost. And the saving of her husband's money was one of her passions....

Thomas Lamb's great San Francisco Fox was her masterpiece. This time she forsook factories and lofts and went to Europe instead, returning with a boatload of treasures that had San Franciscans goggle-eyed on opening night. But the first pinch of the Depression was just being felt, and Mrs. Fox was loudly criticized by some of her husband's lieutenants for her extravagance. If they had seen her haggling like a rug merchant in Continental curio shops, they might have been less caustic. And in the eyes of at least one young gentleman of San Francisco, Mrs. Fox was completely vindicated; he spent an entire afternoon--while his parents were in the auditorium being dazzled by the Fanchon & Marco spectacle and the Mightiest Wurlitzer west of the Rockies--sitting in all the thrones in the lobby, one after another."<sup>1</sup>

Lamb himself discussed his Ohio Theatre in 1928: "A still further departure from the classical and the palatial type of interior is the Ohio Theatre in Columbus, Ohio, which is probably the most gorgeous in color scheme of any of the theatres discussed. It is a particularly successful rendering of the best that Spain has produced, but at the same time, it has many of the virtues of that which is most modern in decoration.

For the last few centuries we have been copying and re-hashing our European styles, and adding little to that which has already been done. There has in recent years been a decided movement and a successful one to create something that should represent our own century. But neither extreme is entirely right. Both may be blended and this has been accomplished in this theatre.

It contains the sumptuousness of Spain and the intricacy and construction of our modern art. The lobbies in this theatre are not as important as in some theatres, but they are extremely well thought out. One immediately feels that the color scheme is Spanish. It predominates in red and yellow."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Hall, Ben, The Best Remaining Seats, Bramhall House, N. Y., 1951, pp. 109-110.

<sup>2</sup>Motion Picture News, June 30, 1928, unpagged.

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Larry Beers in his National Register form states: "Blessed with a gorgeous interior and perfect acoustics, the Ohio Theatre did not always have as bright a future as it does today. In 1969 the Loew's theater chain sold the Ohio Theatre to a holding company threatening to raze the theater and sell the land to the state of Ohio for the site for a new state office building. A public drive for donations was begun. Fortunately, the fund drive was successful, and the theater was purchased for \$1.8 million by the Columbus Association for the Performing Arts. The state office building was erected elsewhere. The Association has been the most beneficial owner of the building, working meticulously to restore the Ohio to its original condition. Even now, the work that has been completed makes the Ohio Theatre one of the finest early twentieth century theaters in existence."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Beers, Larry, National Register Nomination Form

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**CONTINUATION SHEET**

ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 1

Parcel No. 1:

Being Inlots Number Four Hundred Forty (440) and Four Hundred Forty-one (441) in said City of Columbus, Ohio, as the same are numbered and delineated upon the recorded plat of said City, of record in Deed Book "P", Page 332, Recorder's Office, Franklin County, Ohio, and also all that portion of Inlot Number Four Hundred Thirty-nine (439) in said City of Columbus, Ohio, lying between the west line of Inlot 440 and a line drawn parallel thereto 26 feet and 8 inches east of the center line of said Inlot No. 439, the premises hereby conveyed being the second parcel described in a certain deed from Edward T. Mithoff and wife to said Helen Chittenden Ziegler, as Helen Ziegler, dated September 13, 1905, and recorded in Deed Book 411, Page 568, in said Recorder's Office.

Parcel No. 2:

Being Inlots Numbers Four Hundred Thirty-eight (438) and Four Hundred Thirty-nine (439) in the City of Columbus, Ohio, as the same are numbered and delineated upon the recorded plat thereof, of record in Deed Book "P", Page 332, Recorder's Office, Franklin County, Ohio, excepting therefrom four feet and seven inches (4 ft. 7 in.) off of the east side of said Inlot Four Hundred Thirty-nine (439) be the same, more or less, but subject to all legal highways.