

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received JAN 20 1984
date entered

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

1. Name

historic Warner Theater

and or common Warner Theater

2. Location

street & number 68-82 Main Street n/a not for publication

city, town Torrington n/a vicinity of 6th Congressional District

state Connecticut code 09 county Litchfield code 005

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 checked="" 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	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	n/a	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military <input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Northwest Connecticut Association for the Arts

street & number P.O. Box 1012

city, town Torrington n/a vicinity of state Connecticut

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Torrington Land Records, Municipal Building

street & number 140 Main Street

city, town Torrington state Connecticut

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title State Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1981 federal state county local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission

59 South Prospect Street

city, town Hartford state Connecticut

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Title: Torrington Historic Resource Survey

Date: 1983 __federal __state __county xlocal

Depository for survey records:

Connecticut Historical Commission
59 South Prospect Street
Hartford, Connecticut

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 type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Warner Building, located on the east side of Main Street, is a two-story, four-bay, irregularly shaped flat roofed structure that contains an Art Deco theater, two (originally three) storefronts and seven second-story offices. It measures 224 by 112 feet and is nearly continuous with the Chamber of Commerce Building to the south and the Modernistic W.W. Mertz Building to the north. (Photographs 1 and 2). An alley actually separates the north wall of the Warner Building from the south wall of the Mertz Building, allowing room for the emergency exits necessary in a theater and the connection to parking in the rear. The building is one of a number of Modernistic¹ buildings in the downtown area and is an integral part of an unique block.

Foundation walls of reinforced concrete support a superstructure of brick. The side and rear walls of the building are of brick laid in American common bond. (Photographs 3 and 4). The basement is made of concrete with interior partitions of brick, except on the second floor where hollow clay tile is used instead.² A two-way truss system supports the theater roof; these are supported in turn by huge masonry piers that also support the balcony of the theater. The facade is primarily of cast-stone; the storefronts consist of plate-glass display windows surrounded by brick, wood, or aluminum facing. (Photographs 1 and 2). Extensively changed, the store facades were once composed of veined black marble, glass and cast-stone. (Figure 1).

The storefronts are marked and separated by three piers and, toward the southern end, one of the theater towers. The original storefront facades were separated by cast-stone piers which ran from ground level up through the second floor and terminated in a ziggurat form above the parapet wall. (Figure 1). The middle pier of these three is obscured on the first floor level by a new storefront but the two on either side are completely intact. (Photograph 2). These piers and the tower are ornamented by reeding in four parallel lines which run centrally up their faces. (The tower on the southernmost side of the building is also marked with this ornament.) The bases of the piers are all scored three feet above ground level with the same ornament, running horizontally, that marks the piers vertically. (Photograph 1). There is no cornice. Second-story windows in the storefronts are recessed, paired and of a casement type with a transom above each pair. There are four windows to a piers bay, twelve in total. (Photograph 2). Each store has its own entrance; a small pair of doors with glazed center panels in a recessed entry lead to a short flight of stairs which in turn lead to the second floor offices. A long hall divides this part of the building into two sections; some offices face Main Street, others, across the hall, face balcony exits. Second-floor interiors are original with the exception of furnishings which have changed with the various occupants of this area of the building.

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The most dominant element of the Warner Building is the theater itself with its large soaring facade and projecting marquee. The theater facade consists of a large concrete central section with a stepped, recessed center; this section is flanked on both sides by towers with ziggurat caps. The smaller of the two, to the north and closer to the adjacent storefronts, repeats the motif of the piers. The larger tower is similar in its design but is topped by a stepped metal cap and has three rows of reeding running down its front, similar to that found on the piers. The marquee also has a stepped front and is black with white front and side panels of metal. The lettering on the side panels is black on a white background but the Warner Brothers logo, permanently displayed on the top front of the marquee, is white on black. (Photograph 1). The marquee's original lights were incandescent bulbs used in a "running" display; the newer neon lights are being replaced as renovation continues. A large vertically hung "Warner" sign originally projected from the taller south tower over the south side of the marquee but was removed in the early 1940s. (Figure 1).

An octagonal ticket booth sits in the middle of the entryway to the theater; it is made of wood and glass with a base of veined black marble that is original and of a type used throughout the theater. Four sets of paired entrance and exit doors flank this ticket booth, two on each side. The doors are made of wood with fully-glazed center panels; each pair of doors is topped by a transom. These doors open onto an outer vestibule which is separated from the main lobby or grand foyer by another bank of doors of the same style as those immediately facing the street. There is one more pair of doors, a total of five pairs, in the rear bank. All of these doors open out toward the street and every other is marked PULL in original blue lettering. All also retain their original twin brass hand rails.

The outer vestibule is bordered on the north side by a wall containing a display case, slightly recessed, on a shelf of veined black marble. This sits, in turn, on three cast-iron radiator grills that lie flush with the wall. The south wall has another ticket window, flush with the wall, rising from a graduated, three-tiered corbel in a vertical leaf design. Two display windows flank this ticket window, one on each side, and each rests on a veined black marble mantel, which sits atop the elaborate radiator grills. (Photograph 5). These grills, as well as the others inside the theater, all display a pattern that is a mix of floral and fountain forms (center portion of the grill), ziggurat (lower portion), and geometric forms (right and left panels). (Photograph 6). Originally the center portion was painted silver, with gilt on the rest of the pattern but the grills have since been repainted all in gold. The ticket booth and all of the display cases are ornamented with plaster carved and painted in floral motifs. The top of each of these walls is made up of a carved, tulip-patterned plaster molding in gold on brown. (Photograph 5).

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The floor of the vestibule consists of ten tetrahedral panels of rubber matting with narrow brass surrounds. Large grids of black terrazzo then surround these panels.

The main lobby or grand foyer is off the outer vestibule, through the second bank of doors, and features a multitude of Modernistic design motifs. The walls consist of three large panels on the north and south, flanked at each end by narrow, engaged projecting piers. The four end sections are interrupted a third of the way up from the floor by a relief in a chevron motif; the ends of each set of chevrons are marked by an arrow-like design (three arrowheads, one atop the other). (Photograph 7 and Figure 2). The chevrons are gray-blue-gray with gold arrows. The first and last pair of wall sections are marked by five narrow horizontal bands of blue with a silver and gray pattern complementary to that of the chevron motif. A large roundel of gold and blue is located on the first and last pair of panels; they are elaborate and stylized in a floral pattern that is typical of Art Deco design. The bottom third of the first and third north panels and of the first south panel, below the chevron motif, have recessed display areas set flush with the walls. (Figure 2). Those on the north are divided into three sections, the centers of which are twice the size of the outer sections. They are framed in wood, with glass covers, and they rest on a marble mantel. The bases of these cases consist of three radiator grills (per each display case) in the same design as those grills located in the outer vestibule. The second or center two panels on both the north and south sides are made up of large thirty-foot-high murals depicting two scenes from Torrington's past history. The north mural depicts people alighting from carriages in front of Sheldon's Tavern (a local tavern established in 1760); the other displays a scene at Everitt's Grist Mill, the first mill established in Torrington in 1830. (Photograph 7). These murals are topped by a curved, projecting arch of wood three quarters of the way up the panel from the floor. A gold on blue frieze in relief in a floral-wave pattern sits atop the arch and mural; gray-blue plaster dentil top the walls all around the main lobby. Both the north and south walls have bases of terrazzo in two tones, black and rust.

The ceiling of the grand foyer is painted in tones of brown, rust, yellow, ochre, black and putty in an Indian stripe motif. The plaster of the ceiling has been shaped in fluted, undulating waves, the Indian pattern painted on top of this. (Photograph 7). Suspended from the eastern end of the ceiling is a cluster chandelier of frosted, etched glass. Six smaller cylinders of glass surround a larger one and are bound to it by brass bands and rods, some of which are angled in a stepped fashion. The light bulbs and glass were originally tinted a rose color, the bulbs in a candle effect behind the glass, but the glass has lost its tint with age and the tinted bulbs have been replaced with plain-colored bulbs. The net effect has changed the color scheme from pink to white; as restoration continues, the

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glass and bulbs will be returned to their original condition. (Photograph 8). Another chandelier hangs to the west of the main lobby but it is formed from a single large cylinder and is not as spectacular as the cluster chandelier.

The south center and end panels flank the beginning of a black terrazzo staircase that ascends from the grand foyer to a balcony which overlooks the lobby. (Photograph 7). A small office sits to the north of this landing; another, shorter flight of stairs leads up to the main balcony promenade and seating area. The lobby balcony and south wall of the staircase have their original brass railings. A beautiful brass finial rests atop the newel on the landing at the head of the main staircase. Black cast-iron balusters in a zig-zag pattern lead to cast-iron candelabra which separate these balusters from those in a square, bar pattern; both sets of balusters face the lobby. The north side of the staircase is wood in a stepped pattern with a carved wooden bannister attached to its south facing side.

Below the lobby balcony is the rear lobby or promenade. Situated immediately outside the main auditorium, the entrance to the promenade is marked by a large, flat archway. Original metal railings that were used to line up patrons directed theater-goers past what used to be a concession stand to the doors of the auditorium. (Photograph 7). The promenade, which runs perpendicular to the main lobby, contains the men's and women's lounges to the west and leads, on its north end, to a small flight of stairs that ascend to the north end of the balcony promenade. The ceiling is stenciled orange on yellow ochre in a geometric pattern. Six triangular frosted and etched glass lights hang from this ceiling; the motif is a combination of floral and geometric. (Photograph 9). The glass was originally tinted a light green but most of the glass has since faded to white, tinged at the edges with green. Restoration has begun on some of this glass. A sun-ray motif in gold on brown makes up the ceiling molding and is continuous throughout the promenade, running up and around the ceiling of the balcony promenade above.

The west side of the promenade contains the two lounges. The same molding motif is found in these rooms as is seen in the main promenade. The rectangular light fixtures are made of the same glass as is used throughout the theater. Yellow and lavender tiles cover the walls of the women's restroom and a pair of original Art Deco mirrors hang in the lounge room; they are surrounded by a stylized wreath design. The men's room has darker, muted tiles. Each lounge is marked by brass signs with cut-out, geometric designs and Art Deco lettering. The west wall of the promenade also contains, between the lounges, a water bubbler made of white marble with a tile base; it is surrounded by white marble panels in a zigurat design. A square, Art Deco design Bulova clock in silver, blue, and white is located above this fountain. Each of these features is original to the theater.

The east wall of the promenade contains five sets of double doors which

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lead into the main auditorium. All the doors have small central windows of yellow-tinted glass and all have their original hardware. The east wall also displayed a painting on satin of two women (Love Goddesses) facing close together and painted in an East Indian style; their garments and headdresses resemble a peacock's feathers (the peacock motif is also used in the auditorium). The wall painting is presently being cleaned and restored.

The north end of the promenade contains two pairs of exit and fire doors as well as the staircase leading to the main balcony promenade.

After the eye-catching intricacies of the grand foyer, the promenade allows theater patrons a brief respite before entering the main auditorium. The five pairs of doors in the promenade open onto the rear of the auditorium. The balcony floor makes up the ceiling of this rear section; this ceiling is decorated with geometric painted plaster ornaments in a ziggurat design topped with floral forms. It is also painted and stenciled in the same colors and motif used on the promenade ceiling. Six lights illuminate the rear section; all hang from a round base embellished with a petal design in blue, gold, and red. (Photograph 10). The lights are made of tiered metal bands with cut-out designs of moons and stars (this "zodiac" motif is repeated throughout the auditorium). Multi-colored bulbs in red, yellow, and blue are used in these lights and can be independently controlled to display all or a single color at a time.

The auditorium itself is made up of four main panels on each side of the theater. The rear panels on the north and south wall are divided horizontally by the balcony. The six westernmost panels (three north wall, three south wall) are covered with a crushed wine-red velour; originally a brighter orange-red color, they have darkened with age. The panels are then flanked by pairs of brocade drapes, gold with some red and green threading in the designs. These, too, have darkened with age. The tops of these panels are decorated with triangular pendants of plywood covered with a red velour cloth that matches the panels. (Photograph 11). A gold triangular design is embroidered into the center of each of the pendants the descending points of which are decorated with hanging, silver-colored tassels embellished at their tops with rhinestone webbing. The upper third of each of these panels is also decorated with a black velour roundel stitched with a floral design in bright silver thread. Six panels are framed between piers of plaster rising from a slightly projecting base to a ceiling frieze. The piers are painted with a grained wood pattern; they are then divided into sevenths by narrow bands of blue with what were once gold, glittering triangles running through the centers. The glitter in the paint has tarnished to a silver-gray color but flecks of the original gold color remain to indicate what it must have looked like when the theater was first built. Rectangular lights with clipped corners decorate the centers and tops of these piers. (Photograph 11).

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The lights are made of the same frosted glass found throughout the theater and are etched in an arrow motif. Two round disks, the top disk twice the size of the lower, extend below the bottom of these lights; the glass used on these is frosted and etched with a floral design. A similar floral design is found on either side of the piers where ornaments of plaster stylized flowers extend from each pier base to the ceiling frieze. The cast plaster designs are painted gold, blue, and red and complement the other auditorium colors. (Photograph 11).

There are two panels to the front of the auditorium that are flanked on either side by pilasters that rise from a plain base to floriated capitals which touch the ceiling frieze above. A tulip and diamond motif on a rectangular background breaks each pilaster a third of the way from the base. The same blue, red, gold and silver are used here as with the rest of the decorative elements in the auditorium. The panels in between the pairs of pilasters are covered with the same fabric as the others but a large silver and gold screen in a floral-waterfall pattern covers most of the panel. These screens originally covered the organ pipes which were sold with the original Wurlitzer organ. Two pairs of exit/fire doors are fitted below the two northeastern most panels and below a southeastern panel. One other pair of doors is located under the northern balcony pier.

The panels and piers are all topped by a frieze that extends along the northern, eastern and southern edges of the ceiling. The frieze is made up of projecting vertical strapwork painted a ruddy hue and embellished with cast plaster rosettes, diamonds, and floral forms in silver and gold. The frieze rises to blue and gold colored plaster modillions that extend all around the ceiling. (Photograph 11). The ceiling is the most extravagant feature of an already ornate theater. A field of rich blue is the background on which peacocks have been painted in gold glitter. Interspersed among the plumed birds are moons and stars, also painted in gold. An eight-petalled floral shape is placed in the center of this background; the petals are arced and painted in greens, blues, and golds in an elaborate floral-and-leaf motif. An eight-pointed star is placed in the center of this design. A four-tiered light hangs from the center of the star. The tiers are made of polished metal strips, the edges of which are curved. The bottom of the light is covered with a decorated disk; decoration is cut out in a moon-and-star motif similar to that used on the peacock background. Lights shine through these designs. Seventy-two yellow, red, and blue colored lights are used to create various moods and change the color scheme within the theater. The incandescent bulbs can be independently controlled from a unit behind the north side of the stage. Eight points of a large star surround this light; they are painted gold and silver and appear to be three-dimensional but are actually two-dimensional. These points radiate

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out onto a background of eight points which are painted in the same motif as the petalled areas. The star finally ends on a three-dimensional background of graduated points painted gold and silver; these are unattached to the ceiling. A cable is suspended from the ceiling through the star's center; when work is done on the light the whole is lowered to the ground and raised back up again when work on it is completed. (Photograph 12).

The auditorium measures 125 feet long by 80 feet wide by 45 feet high. Seats and carpeting are not original; both were replaced after the 1955 flood which damaged some areas of the theater.

The stage, located to the east of the building, is made of brick with steel ceiling girders. The proscenium is made of plaster pilasters painted like those in the rest of the auditorium. The proscenium arch is the eastern part of the ceiling frieze. Drapes hang on either side of the stage; the valence curtain is beige and gathered. The original act curtain is still intact.

An orchestra pit was originally included in the plans for the theater but was covered over with wood before the theater was opened. Part of the restoration process includes uncovering and completing the orchestra pit.

The balcony of the theater (Photograph 13), on the west end of the auditorium, is fronted by a parapet and railing. The parapet is decorated in a motif and design similar to that of the auditorium frieze. The balcony is the only part of the theater that has almost all of its original features completely intact. Original carpeting is still laid out in the balcony and its promenade. (Photograph 14). The original seats and accompanying hardware are also intact (Photograph 15). The north and south walls of the balcony are made up of the northwest and southwest panels of the auditorium. All the fabric covering and decorating on these wall panels is intact. Some decorative elements, i.e., the cloth-covered triangles, are presently being restored and are temporarily missing. Three tassels that hang from these triangles are the only objects missing from the decorative scheme.

Four pairs of double doors lead into and out of the balcony. They are identical to the auditorium doors in design. The balcony promenade contains the women's and men's rooms at the south end but neither is as large or grand as those off the main promenade. Another white marble bubbler is placed in the east wall of this promenade; it is identical to the one found in the rear lobby. Three round fixtures light this area; their design is a floral motif etched in frosted glass. Three pairs of exit/fire doors lead out the west wall of the promenade, as do the main staircase, to the south-east, and the smaller rear foyer stairs, to the northwest. This smaller flight of stairs also continues to the next floor of the building, which

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is a smaller area that houses a small office/storage space used for candy and concession items, and the main projection room. The projection room contains the two original cameras used when the theater was built. Due to the high flammability of earlier nitrate films, the projection room was designed to be as completely fireproof as possible and, as a consequence, is quite bare. The roof above this area is made of gypsum, which is fire resistant.

The side and rear walls of the Warner Theater are made of brick and are topped with light colored cast stone coping. The north and south walls are shallowly stepped. A large, square brick chimney rises from the top of the roof in the southeast corner. (Photographs 3 and 4).

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
Criterion C	<input type="checkbox"/> invention			

Specific dates 1931

Builder/Architect

Thomas W. Lamb

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Warner Theater in Torrington is architecturally significant as the finest surviving Modernistic theater in Connecticut.³ (Criterion C). The theater was completed in August 1931 and is extraordinarily well preserved. It embodies many of the primary characteristics of this style of architecture the geometrical and floral motifs, the ziggurat designs used on the towers and marquee, and the use of unusual lighting and fixtures, all of which are excellent examples of Modernistic theater design of the 1920s and 1930s. The lavishness of the interiors and the feelings these interiors evoke typify the desires of architects and builders alike to create a showcase for films and dream worlds in which the public could, and still can, view them.

HISTORICAL Background

With the increasing popularity of "talking films" during the 1930s, more and more theaters were being built to accommodate movie goers. The Warner Brothers Company got their start in 1904 when Sam and Harry Warner began showing films in New Castle, Pennsylvania. Before long they had organized a successful film exchange. Shortly thereafter they went into the producing field as well achieving success with a string of Rin-Tin-Tin pictures. In 1925 they introduced talking pictures; that same year they bought a New York theater and renamed it "The Warner Theater". Thus began their acquisition of several theater chains and an ambitious theater building campaign. At the time the Warner Theater in Torrington was built they owned 812 theaters in the United States.⁴

In June 1930, Warner Brothers purchased the Smith-Deland Robinson Block in Torrington. The \$275,000 paid for the 119 feet of frontage on Main Street was, at that time, the largest real estate deal ever made in Torrington.⁵ Warner bought this property with the idea that they would be able to try out their movies in Torrington and then take them on to New York City.

By the 1920s and 1930s a theater's design had become as important as the movies being shown within. The public's fascination with film and the accompanying glamour promoted by the major studios led to an increasing embellishment of theater design. The public visited these lavish movie palaces as much to see the theaters as view the films themselves.³ Individual architects began specializing in theater design and some became renowned for their work. Thomas W. Lamb of New York was one such architect. Lamb designed many theaters throughout his career, a number of them in Connecticut. In 1930 Warner Brothers selected Lamb to design the new Torrington theater. Although Lamb's plans for the Warner were

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not as lavish as some of his earlier, pre-Modernistic designs, he described the future theater as follows:

"The advent of the audible cinema presentations,...(has) necessitated the introduction of a theatre design of distinctive conception and application..."⁶

He also said:

"The leit-motif of the facade and the interiors of the theatre is of modernistic architectural expression. By the very nature of its architectural appointments and compositions...the spectator in the auditorium will find himself in an atmosphere of compelling abandon and relaxation."⁷

This sentiment, and the resulting theater, were very much in keeping with the ideas of the large studios, that of providing the public with a place of escape. Lamb was also concerned with providing Torrington with a theater that was modern and up to date. A press release from his office in New York City said:

"We...feel that we have given this community our true interpretation of the modern theater of today, based along deluxe lines favored by the larger cities of our states."⁸

The theater took eight months to build at a cost of approximately \$500,000. G. A. Zimmerman Co., New Jersey, was the general contractor; the decorators came from the Rambush Co. of New York City. Many Connecticut businesses also contributed to the construction of the building. Charles Longhi and Sons of Torrington provided the masonry; E. J. Vanesse of Waterbury supplied the paint. The grand opening was held on August 19, 1931.⁹

Besides performing the function of housing seating for film audiences, the Warner truly embodies the spirit of Art Deco design. The primary motifs and features of this period are found throughout the theater and, of all such theaters in Connecticut, the Warner is the finest example of its kind.

ARCHITECTURE

The facade of the Warner, specifically the towers and piers, demonstrate the skyscraper look, developed during the 1920s and the accentuation of vertical lines that typifies Modernistic design. The low relief ornamentation on the piers and towers especially reinforces the feeling of verticality, of upward movement. The Warner facade again demonstrates vertical emphasis

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in its display of another feature of Modernistic building design, that of components of a building projecting above the roofline; here, they are the towers and piers. (Photograph 1).

The ziggurat motif is found at the tops of these piers and towers. This motif is one of the most identifiable characteristics of the Modernistic style. So, too, is the concentration of ornament at the roofline (towers, piers) and at street level (marquee, outer vestibule); a notable feature of the Modernistic style calls for the immediate points of contact of a building to be decorated and enhanced by design (i.e., the base or points of entry of a building), as well as the accentuation of those parts of a building that are visible from a distance (i.e., the roofline). Art Deco attempted to compensate for any distance (visual) limitations in this manner; a building could stand out close up or afrom afar.¹⁰

Some of the sources for decoration used in Art Deco have been plants and flowers, geometry, animals, and fountains. Sytlized floral, geometric, and animal designs are everywhere found in the Warner. The floral motif is found in the roundels on the grand foyer walls (Photograph 7) and in the lighting and friezes of the auditorium (Photograph 11); the light fixtures are also etched in floral motifs (Photograph 9). Geometric designs are evident in the radiator grillwork (Photograph 6), the balustrade on the balcony in the grand foyer (Photograph 7), and the etched designs on the pier lights in the auditorium. The animal motif is found on the auditorium ceiling and rear lobby painting where the peacock design is used.

Lamb describes the Warner as "enhanced by miraculous illuminating effects."¹¹ The fixtures and lighting used in Modernistic structures are other important aspects of this style. Especially in theaters, where little natural light can be admitted, interior illumination helps create a mood and atmosphere whose effects can be quickly altered. In the 1930s, fixtures often took on sculptural qualities, as can be seen with the cluster chandelier of the grand foyer (Photograph 8). The muted, pink tint of the bulbs and glass added to the rich and luxurious feel of the theater lobby. The same can be said of the star chandelier in the auditorium (Photograph 12) whose multi-colored lights, independently controlled, could instantly change the color scheme of the room. The frosted, etched glass itself was also a favorite Art Deco feature.¹² A combination of translucent and clear, it is used in all the light fixtures in the Warner.

As picture and sound quality advanced, so did the storylines used to create a movie. By the time the Warner was built, large-scale musicals and epic adventures were becoming popular. Theaters and Art Deco design reflected this fascination with large-scale drama, the desire for glamour

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and the quality of otherworldliness. The building of a showcase was accomplished by concentrating on details; muted lights, rich color tones, and furnishing among them. The Warner still contains a number of original furnishings. The women's lounge has original Art Deco mirrors; the rear lobby contains an Art Deco clock, credenza, and wall hanging. The rear lobby also contains a water bubbler, as does the balcony promenade, which is an example of the ziggurat motif as well as a wonderful detail.

All of these features provided a lush backdrop for showing films of that time. Unfortunately, attendance declined over the years and the Warner was closed in 1981. A local arts group, the Northwest Connecticut Association for the Arts, purchased the building in 1982. Water leaks in the roof have damaged some details in the theater and the group has been working on the restoration of the theater.

Because the exterior and interior are basically well-preserved and unaltered, the Warner stands as the finest example of an Art Deco theater in Connecticut. Other Connecticut theaters, such as the Bushnell in Hartford, display interiors or details in an Art Deco style but the Warner is the only wholly Modernistic structure, both inside and out, that retains so much of its integrity and original features.¹³

1. The term modernistic is used to describe the streamlined, Art Deco look of the thirties in accordance with Thomas Lamb's description of the Warner Theater. (See text Item 8, page 1, quote#2)
2. Thomas W. Lamb "Warner Theater Blueprints," (NY, NY July 1930), Roof plan, Balcony, Basement, Transverse Section.
3. Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, "Survey of Connecticut Theaters: Architectural Background," (New Haven, 1983) pp.6,7.
4. _____, "The New Warner Theater," Torrington Register, August 18, 1931, p.8
5. Torrington Land Records, volume 113, p.153.
6. _____, "Description of Magnificent New Theater Being Erected Here." Torrington Register, December 1, 1930, p.5.
7. Ibid., pp.5, 11.
8. Thomas Lamb Advertisement, Torrington Register, August 18, 1931, p.7.
9. _____, "The New Warner Theater," Torrington Register, August 18, 1931, pp. 13-24.
10. Thomas M. Rosa, "Art Deco Architectural and Decorative Forms in the Waterbury and Torrington Areas," (Southern Connecticut State College, 1976), pp. 7, 10.
11. _____, "Description of Magnificent New Theater Being Erected Here," Torrington Register, December 1, 1930, pp. 5, 11.

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12. Rosa, op. cit., p. 11.
13. Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, "Survey of Connecticut Theaters: Architectural Background," (New Haven, 1983), pp.6, 7.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 2.5

Quadrangle name Torrington

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A 18 654060 4629260
Zone Easting Northing

B
Zone Easting Northing

C

D

E

F

G

H

Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property is described in the Torrington Land Records, volume 113, p.153.

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

state n/a code n/a county n/a code n/a

state n/a code n/a county n/a code n/a

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Louisa Roraback; William Devlin - edited by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

organization Torrington Historical Society date July 30, 1983

street & number 192 Main Street telephone 203-482-8260


city or town Torrington state Connecticut

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.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title Director, Connecticut Historical Commission date January 12, 1984

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register Entered in the National Register


Keeper of the National Register

date 2/16/84

Attest: _____ date _____

Chief of Registration

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National Park Service**

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date entered

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Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation. "Survey of Connecticut Theaters Historical and Architectural Background." Manuscript on file, Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, New Haven (January, 1983).

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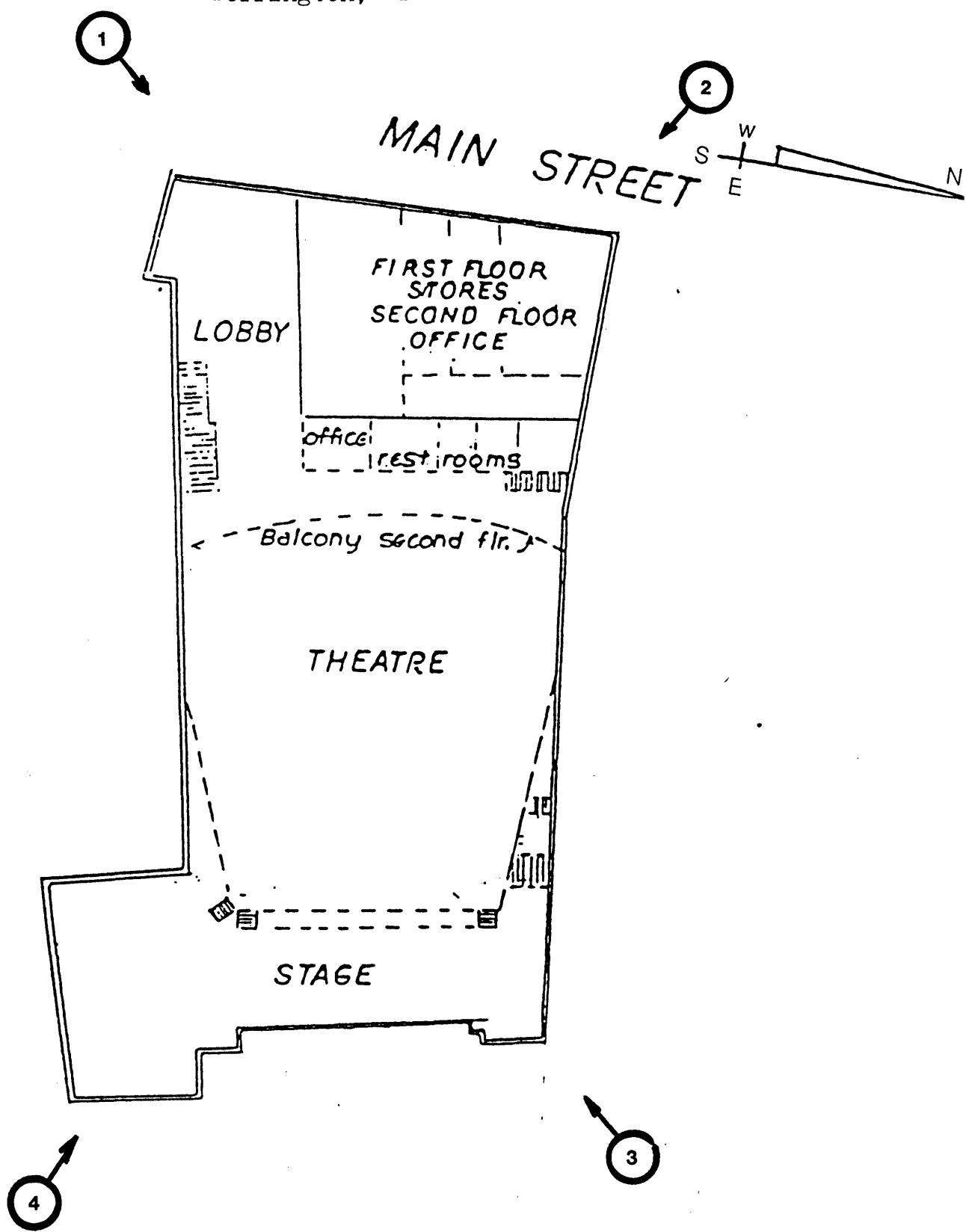
Rosa, Thomas M. "Art Deco Architectural and Decorative Forms in the Waterbury and Torrington Areas." Master's Thesis on file, Southern Connecticut State College (1976).

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Torrington Register "The New Warner Theater." Torrington Register, August 18, 1931, pp. 13-24.

Warner Theater
68-82 Main Street
Torrington, CT



Sketch Plan
Scale: 1" = 40'
Photo key