rm No. 10-300 REV. (9/77).

UNITED STATES DEPARTMEI
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PS USE C
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DATE ENTERED

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTOR
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC
Orpheum Theater and Office Building
AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
200 N. Broadway Street — NOT FOR PUBLICATION
CITY, TOWN
Wichita — VICINITY OF — CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
No. 4, Dan Glickman
STATE
Kansas — CODE 20 — COUNTY Sedgwick — CODE 173

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
__DISTRICT	__PUBLIC	__OCCUPIED	__AGRICULTURE	__MUSEUM
X BUILDING(S)	X PRIVATE	X UNOCCUPIED	X COMMERCIAL	__PARK
__STRUCTURE	__BOTH	__WORK IN PROGRESS	__EDUCATIONAL	__PRIVATE RESIDENCE
__SITE	**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**	**ACCESSIBLE**	X ENTERTAINMENT	__RELIGIOUS
__OBJECT	__IN PROCESS	X YES: RESTRICTED	__GOVERNMENT	__SCIENTIFIC
	__BEING CONSIDERED	__YES: UNRESTRICTED	__INDUSTRIAL	__TRANSPORTATION
		__NO	__MILITARY	__OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
Orpheum Theater Company
STREET & NUMBER
Depew and Gillen, 721 First National Bank Building
CITY, TOWN
Wichita — VICINITY OF — STATE Kansas 67202

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Register of Deeds
STREET & NUMBER
Sedgwick County Courthouse
CITY, TOWN
Wichita — STATE Kansas 67202

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
Historic Sites Survey
DATE
1970 — __FEDERAL X STATE __COUNTY __LOCAL
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
Ks. State Historical Society
CITY, TOWN
Topeka — STATE Kansas 66612

DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
__EXCELLENT	__DETERIORATED	X UNALTERED	X ORIGINAL SITE
X GOOD	__RUINS	__ALTERED	__MOVED DATE_____
__FAIR	__UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The two sections of Wichita's Orpheum Theater--the rectangular seven-story office block and the four-story auditorium block behind it--meet and interpenetrate where the large building curves around the corner of Broadway and First Streets. At ground level the theater lobby penetrates through the office block to a corner entrance which is adorned with a marquis. Above this the theater entrance is further accentuated by a tiara of shaped pediments and other decorative embellishments which interrupts the tiled shedroof that skirts the office block's roof.

The facade of the office block is articulated by a simple grid pattern of wooden double-hung windows which, like a horizontal cornice at the sixth floor, continues around the corner of the building. There are six storefronts on the ground floor of the office block. Originally, the upper floors were divided into one hundred suites with three rooms each.

steel pan w/ concrete structural system

As is evidenced by the exposed north end wall, the Orpheum is a steel-framed ← ? structure with a brick veneer. It was described by the supervising architect in 1922 as "the last word in fireproof construction." The auditorium roof is concrete supported on five 8-ton steel trusses. The surfaces of the auditorium and office block roofs are covered with asphalt.

"Oak Bark" brick, which was used to face the upper stories of the north, west, and south walls of the building is rough and dark brown in color. Common red brick was used on the sides of the building which are not visible from the street.

The entrance to the office block faces on Broadway. It is articulated on the interior by a small foyer decorated with an ornamented ceiling. A facing of light-colored terra cotta rusticated at the corners distinguishes the first floor from the other stories of the office block. Pilasters, copings, window architraves and other decorative elements of terra cotta also ornament the walls of the building.

Prominent features of the auditorium facade on First Street are the three pairs of exit doors with terra cotta jambs. Above these are three arched windows set into a framework of pilasters and ornamental pediments. Above this feature is a projection extending about four feet beyond the brick face of the building, and ornamented by a terra cotta base and triple windows.

Interior

The generally restrained detailing of Spanish Baroque derivation which ornaments the exterior not only conforms to the business operations originally housed in the office block, but, especially in the corner tiara, also hints at the whimsical environment of the theater within, which is modeled on the architect's concept of a Spanish courtyard.

Although the entrance vestibule has been altered, the main theater lobby, auditorium, and mezzanine are substantially intact as originally designed. The lobby retains its original terrazzo floor and grand marble stairway. The foyer to the auditorium contains the original benches, mirrors, and light standards. The stairways to the mezzanine are ornamented with the original iron railings, plaster grilles, and arched doorways. Throughout these spaces the original wall treatment remains.

The proscenium arch (42 feet wide) at the north is the main feature of the auditorium, which is entered at the south and contains 1030 seats on the main floor and 730 seats in the balcony. The plasterwork is patterned with a scene of a Spanish patio. The side walls of the auditorium are punctuated by niches with mock tile roofs and grilles. Wooden latticework arches across the ceiling.

The theme of a Spanish courtyard is continued in the decoration of the balcony. Seats and urns are contained in wall niches. Doors with stained glass panels and transoms above mark the entrances to offices, a smoking room for men, a powder room for women, and a nursery.

Alterations

Some minor exterior and interior changes have not significantly impaired the historical integrity of the Orpheum Theater and Office Building. At the corner entrance, a vertical "Orpheum" sign has been replaced by a smaller horizontal art deco version. Wooden doors have been replaced with aluminum doors and frames. The original arched transoms with fanned muntins have been changed to rectangular transoms. A fascia grill on the marquis has been removed. Striped window awnings on the upper floors have been removed.

Of the interior areas the theater vestibule is most changed. The original blue and yellow mosaic tile floor has been replaced by green terrazo. Playbill niches have been covered. Original walnut trim, iron grilles and plaster cornices have been removed from the box office.

Spanish style benches, mirrors, and light standards have been removed from the lobby. In the auditorium wooden balusters, which once enclosed the orchestra pit and defined box seating, have been removed.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
PREHISTORIC	__ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__COMMUNITY PLANNING	__LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	__RELIGION
1400-1499	__ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__CONSERVATION	__LAW	__SCIENCE
1500-1599	__AGRICULTURE	__ECONOMICS	__LITERATURE	__SCULPTURE
1600-1699	X ARCHITECTURE	__EDUCATION	__MILITARY	__SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
1700-1799	__ART	__ENGINEERING	__MUSIC	X THEATER
1800-1899	__COMMERCE	__EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	__PHILOSOPHY	__TRANSPORTATION
1900-	__COMMUNICATIONS	__INDUSTRY	__POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	__OTHER (SPECIFY)
		__INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1922 BUILDER/ARCHITECT John Eberson, Architect, Orpheum Building Company

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Built in an era of economic prosperity and civic optimism, the Orpheum Theater and Office Building is a distinctive remnant of a period of transition in American popular culture. Presumably, the office block helped to justify construction of the "first-class theater" which leading citizens in Wichita thought the city needed in 1921. Originally a vaudeville playhouse, only seven years after its opening, the Orpheum began to show talking motion pictures exclusively. This transition was made easily because of the skill and imagination of architect John Eberson. Although the Orpheum is an early example of his work, the design is characteristic of the theaters which made Eberson the most important designer of movie palaces in the "atmospheric" style.

History

A group of businessmen, praised later by the Wichita Eagle as public-spirited town builders, formed the Orpheum Building Company in 1921. Each man contributed $20,000 to give the project a start. Richard M. Gray was president of the company. Other members of the group were J. O. Adams, O.S. Shirk, Walter Innes, H.V. Wheeler, Arch Butts, A.L. Derby, Dan Callahan, W. A. Vincent, and George M. Brown. An elevation of the proposed structure signed by John Eberson appeared in the Wichita Eagle May 11, 1921. At this stage the cost of the building was estimated at $700,000. The Orpheum eventually cost $750,000.

Construction of the Orpheum Theater and Office Building proceeded for about a year. Architect H. E. Weaver moved to Wichita for this period to supervise the job for Eberson's firm. Vaughan Construction Company of Omaha, Nebraska was the general contractor for the building.

Most of the subcontractors and suppliers were from Wichita. E. E. Kelley excavated for the foundation. The firm of E. C. Baker poured footings for the building and also performed all the carpentry and interior woodworking. Charles E. Mahaney's roofing company put down 21,000 square feet of asphalt roofing. The American Cornice Works Company tiled the projecting roofs on the southwest corner and west end of the office block. This company also hung a canopy across the front of the office block and one over the corner theater entrance. They installed the iron and zinc ornamentation and some metal doors.

The Reliance Brick Company of Kansas City, Missouri, which had a branch office in Wichita, supplied $53,000 worth of brick, tile, and terra cotta for the Orpheum. The distinctive brown face brick was manufactured in Pawhuska, Oklahoma and all other masonry materials came from Kansas. 3,000 barrels of cement (Grasshopper brand) went

into the building. This was provided by the Fredonia Portland Cement Company.

J. W. Metz Company of Wichita supplied lumber and the United Mill Work Company processed a special order of red gum wood for the windows, doors and inside finish of the building.

When erected in 1922, the electric sign above the Orpheum Theater entrance was one of the three largest in the world according to Nathan Herog, who installed the sign for Electric Lu-Mi-Nus Signs, Inc. of Chicago. The sign, which cost $7,500, was 50 feet tall and 12 feet wide spelling Orpheum in daylight blue electric bulbs.

Windows for the Orpheum, including the plate glass store fronts, were supplied by the Western Art Glass Company of Wichita. The company also provided mirrors and art glass for the interior. Paul and Penly had the plumbing contract, and Western Sheet Metal Works supplied a complex ventilating system for the building. There were separate systems for the office building and the theater. The office building was heated by radiators;there were three large fuel oil boilers in the basement of the structure. In the theater a forced air system included an air washing and tempering device. Air from the alley was pulled through a spray wall of water. Electric ceiling fans circulated this moist, cool air. The system was designed to provide continuous circulation with an exhaust on the theater roof.

300 tons of plaster were used in the Orpheum Theater and Office Building. 75 tons of ivory hydrated lime were used in the finish coating as a foundation for the painting and frescos in the theater. Zander and Reum Company of Chicago supplied the plaster decoration in the theater foyer and mezzanine; Architectural Decorating Company, also of Chicago, provided additional model and cast plaster decoration.

Haines Tile and Marble Company of Wichita also contributed to the finishing of the building's interior. Central Electric Company installed the lighting fixtures. Edward Spangenberger painted the walls and woodwork in the theater and the radiators and woodwork in the office building.

In the theater auditorium, scenery made in the Fabric Studio, Chicago, was installed by J.H. Bannon. A custom-made pipe organ for the theater was supplied by George Kilgen and Sons of St. Louis. There were two sections on each side of the stage.

The Orpheum Theater opened on Labor Day, September 4, 1922. There were five vaudeville numbers and a silent moving picture on the program. Ed Raymond was theater manager. Additional staff members included a stage manager, electrician, property master, projectionist, doorman, two cashiers, and an organist. There was

also an orchestra director and several musicians.

Some of the first tenants on the ground floor of the office building included the Tilford Drug Store, Anchor Trust Company, and the G.W. Smith Insurance Agency. The sixth and seventh floors of the building were equipped for doctors' offices and laboratories. When the building opened, all of the seventh floor and half of the sixth were so occupied.

In October, 1929 L.M. Miller, who had business interests in Kansas City and in the Consolidated Amusement Company of Wichita, sold the Orpheum to the Fox Film Company of California. The manager of the theater at this time, Harry Sefton, was one of the most important figures in the early history of the Orpheum. He became manager in 1924 and directed the transition from a live vaudeville house to a motion picture theater. Sound equipment was installed in the Orpheum May 20, 1929. From that time on, the theater showed the finest first run motion pictures. When Sefton was recognized for his long career in 1939, the Wichita Beacon noted that he had trained more new theater managers than any other veteran in the Fox Midwest Division. He was congratulated as "the man who has played 'em all."

In the late 1960's the Orpheum's business declined.The Wichita Eagle in August, 1978 suggested that this was because of downtown congestion and parking problems. Regular showings of Hollywood features ended in November, 1976. An attempt was made to show Spanish-language movies in 1978, but this proved unsuccessful.

Becuase of its prime commercial location, the Orpheum is vulnerable to demolition; in June, 1978, the Wichita Historic Landmark Preservation Committee nominated the building for protection as a city landmark. Later in August, the city awarded a grant for partial funding of a feasibility study to support a grant application for funds to renovate the building as a cultural arts center. The cost of this conversion was estimated at approximately $2 million; the project is still in the planning stage.

Significance

After the Orpheum was completed, architect John Eberson summarized the general program for his work. He stated that owners demanded that,

> architects design structures with attention to details which will provide the greatest strength and fire-resisting qualities combined with architectural appearance and at a cost that will make it possible for the building to pay as a commercial proposition.

Most of Eberson's later movie houses were free-standing buildings. The combination of an office building and theater may represent a particularly conservative plan.

If the theater was a somewhat speculative project, then the office building was a reliable income property. Thus the exterior treatment suggests the theme of the theater environment inside but is still restrained enough for business.

Although the company of Wichita businessmen authorized the building, Eberson's client for the theater was Karl Hobitzelle, president of the Central States Amusement Company which had a twenty-five year lease on the theater when it opened. At this time Hobitzelle managed a chain of vaudeville houses worth $6,000,000. According to the Wichita Eagle, Hobitzelle, "wanted new and original designs for theaters he was to build and employed architects who were talented enough to give him what he wanted."

Eberson also gave many other impresarios what they wanted in this era. As Dennis Sharp proclaimed in his book The Picture Palace,"...the movie palace architect was an escape artist. It was his mission to build new dream worlds for the disillusioned."

There were two major schools of movie palace design. The standard school derived its form and decoration from the nineteenth century opera house and vaudeville theater tradition. On the other hand, the "atmospheric" school concentrated on creating interiors that would provide the patron with the feeling that he inhabited a landscape setting. John Eberson was the creator of the "atmospheric" school.

Born in Austria and educated in Vienna and Dresden, Eberson's first commission in the United States was a porch addition in 1908. Then he traveled through the Midwest with a promoter of small town "opera houses." By the time he was hired to design the Orpheum, Eberson had settled in Chicago.

Even though Sharp has classified the Orpheum as "pre-atmospheric," it is characteristic of the "atmospheric" style. When he discussed the Orpheum, Eberson stated that his objective was to create "an atmosphere which surrounds the audience with an affect of coolness and repose, of depth and distance..."

His plan to accomplish this effect was "to treat the interior as an exterior." The Orpheum was conceived as "a garden of old Andalusia. Its entire conception is that of a Spanish garden, or court, made festive by music and torch light." The Wichita Eagle, September 3, 1922, noted that the Orpheum was one of only three similar theaters in the United States with the others in Terre Haute, Indiana and Flint, Michigan. Sharp considered the Majestic Theater in Houston, Texas, which Eberson designed for Hobitzelle in 1922, to be the world's first "atmospheric" theater.

The Orpheum, however, has a fully developed decorative theme and the sky and star projections popularly associated with the "atmospheric" theater. The Eagle remarked on the electric remote control board operated by the theater electrician "who puts the blue, amber, and pink colors in the sky scene, and makes the stars twinkle."

When it opened, the Orpheum was described as "one of the most beautiful, delightful, and comfortable playhouses in the United States...so beautiful is it that you instantly feel a peace steal over your senses and you feel that here in this environment all your troubles, all your trials and all your worries have ceased to be." If this was the effect, then Eberson's design was psychologically successful.

His designs were also attractive for their economy. They cost one quarter as much to build as the standard monumental theaters. The simple plaster vault over the auditorium was inexpensive and since almost all the decorative details were cast in a factory, the theater appeared elaborate without being costly. In the Orpheum Eberson also demonstrated a skillful integration of practical functions with ornamentation. For example, in the theater auditorium, an antique archway is also a fire exit. Decorative window grilles also provided sound openings for the pipe organ. Cool air was delivered at the tops of the courtyard walls while the niches and windows served as registers of the heating system.

Because Eberson's designs were so successful at both psychological and practical levels, many later designers copied him. Person ally, he created over one hundred "atmospheric" theaters including the Uptown in Kansas City, Missouri. Eberson not only inspired American, but also British and French theater designers. The four main Astoria theaters in London at Briton, Finsbury Park, Streatham, and Old Kent Road were styled as "atmospheric" environments. In 1932 Eberson was the associate designer with the French architect, Bluysen, for the REX, the first "atmospheric" theater in Paris.

The Orpheum Theater has significant associations with the development of Wichita as a city. From the viewpoint of cultural history, it evidences the end of vaudeville as an entertainment form and the establishment of motion pictures. In architectural history the combination of an office building and theater is noteworthy, and the theater is particularly outstanding as an early work by John Eberson, creator of the "atmospheric" school of theater design.

THIS STATEMENT REFLECTS CURRENT KNOWLEDGE AND MAY BE SUBJECT TO FUTURE AMENDMENT.
***** ********* ********

Bibliography

Kansas City Star. August 4, 1973.

Wichita Beacon. 10-7-1929, 12-10-1939.

Wichita Eagle-Beacon. 6-29-1978, 8-11-1978.

Wichita Morning Eagle. 5-11-1921

Wichita Sunday Eagle. 9-3-1922

Hall, Ben M. The Best Remaining Seats. (New York: C.N. Potter, 1961).

Sharp, Dennis. The Picture Palace. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969).

Verbal Boundary description:

The nominated property occupies Lots 32,34,36, 38 and 40 on Lawrence Avenue, now Broadway, in J.R. Mead's addition to the city of Wichita. These lots are located at the southeast corner of Broadway and First Streets.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(See attached sheet)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1

QUADRANGLE NAME Wichita East QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24

UTM REFERENCES

	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
A	14	646825	4172120	B			
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION (see attached 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 Julie A. Wortman, Architectural Historian and Dale Nimz
Historic Preservation Department

ORGANIZATION Ks. State Historical Society DATE 10-1-80

STREET & NUMBER 120 West 10th TELEPHONE 913- 296-3251

CITY OR TOWN Topeka STATE Kansas 66612

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ___ STATE ___ LOCAL X

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE Joseph W. Snell

TITLE Executive Director, Ks. State Historical Society DATE 10-14-80

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST: DATE

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION