

SENT TO D.C.
10-10-03

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**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 How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name **Virginia Theater**

other names/site number **N/A**

2. Location

street & number **203 West Park Avenue** _____ Not for publication

city or town **Champaign** _____ vicinity

state **Illinois** code **IL** county **Champaign** code **019** zip code **61820**

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets _____ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant _____ nationally _____ statewide locally. (_____ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

William L. Wheeler / SHPO
Signature of certifying official

10-8-03
Date

Illinois Historic Preservation Agency

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria. (_____ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

American Indian Tribe

Virginia Theater
Name of Property

Champaign, Illinois
County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other (explain):	_____	_____

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

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 sites
<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 structures
<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 objects
<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 0 Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)
N/A

Virginia Theater
Name of Property

Champaign, Illinois
County and State

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater
COMMERCE/TRADE//business/specialty store

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Italian Renaissance Revival
Spanish Renaissance Revival

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation Concrete

Roof Asphalt

Walls Brick

other Terra Cotta
Aluminum
Steel

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See Continuation Sheets

Virginia Theater
Name of Property

Champaign, Illinois
County and State

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 a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance 1921-1953 Significant Dates 1921

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Crane, C. Howard and Franzheim, Kenneth, architects
Ramey, George, architect

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.) See Continuation Sheet

Virginia Theater
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9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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 # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository **Urbana Free Library; Urbana, Illinois**

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property **less than one acre**

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	16	393893	4441266	3	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____

___ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

See Continuation Sheet

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

See Continuation Sheet

Virginia Theater
Name of Property

Champaign, Illinois
County and State

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Stephen A. Thompson, Campus Historic Preservation Officer
organization University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign date 06 February 2003
street & number 1501 South Oak Street telephone 217/244-5096
city or town Champaign state Illinois zip code 61820

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:
Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

- Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Champaign Park District
street & number 706 Kenwood Drive telephone 217/398-2250
city or town Champaign state Illinois zip code 61820

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. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Virginia Theater

VIRGINIA THEATER DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY

The Virginia Theater is located on the southwest corner of the intersection of North Randolph Street and West Park Avenue in Champaign, Illinois. This 132' x 132' multi-level, mixed-use building was constructed in 1921 in a residential area on the western periphery of the central Champaign commercial district.

The primary elevations of the Virginia Theater's exterior are executed in the Italian Renaissance Revival style, while the formal interior public spaces exhibit Spanish Renaissance Revival style with elaborate baroque influences. Defining exterior style elements include beige terra cotta facing and a central, red-tiled, hipped roof pavilion with adjacent flat roofs fronted by masonry balusters. Interior Spanish Renaissance Revival elements include ornate plaster carvings, wrought iron detailing and original paint color schemes utilizing subdued reds, blues and antique gold.

The Virginia Theater retains a high percentage of its original physical integrity and is an excellent example of an early to mid-20th Century medium sized metropolitan stage and motion picture facility.

EXTERIOR

The exterior design of the Virginia Theater reveals not only the Italian Renaissance Revival style, but also the functions for which the building was intended. The north (West Park Avenue) elevation exhibits the dominant Italian Renaissance Revival features as well as entrance to the theater and adjoining commercial spaces. The view from the east (North Randolph Street) elevation exposes a continuation of the Italian Renaissance Revival style and commercial use, as well as the operational utility of the building as a performing arts facility through the one-story vertical extension over the stage area, street level auditorium exit doors and a balcony-level fire escape. The rear (south elevation) of the building possesses stage entrance doors. The west elevation contains auditorium exit doors at the main and balcony levels plus a trunk chute access door.

The Virginia Theater Building possesses three types of roofs; a hipped, tile-covered section over the central pavilion, flat, asphalt-covered sections adjacent to the main pavilion and stage area and a slightly pitched, trapezoidal truss roof with membrane covering over the main auditorium.

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Ventilation exhausts are present in the truss and flat roof areas. Noteworthy mechanical and ventilation spaces with asphalt covered, gabled and hipped roofs have been constructed above the auditorium and stage rooflines. Masonry parapets are present on the flat and main auditorium roof areas. The flat roofed parapets are topped with brown colored tile coping. The auditorium roof parapet is capped with blonde terra cotta coping on the north elevation and brown tile coping along the south elevation.

Exterior walls of the building are blonde brick. The north and part of the east elevations are covered in blonde terra cotta panels with approximately 24" vertical green terra cotta panels serving as a base at street level. The walls are constructed of common blonde brick in a running bond, with glazed brick covering the east and west elevations. The fenestration pattern on the north elevation expresses commercialism with large display windows and entry/exit doors. The remaining facades promote a more simplistic fenestration pattern with very few windows and irregular entrance and exit openings.

The building site is bordered on the north and east by major city thoroughfares. Across West Park Avenue to the north is a 1960s/70s era three-story office building. To the east across North Randolph Street is a parking lot. The building is bordered on the south by an alley. Abutting the Virginia Theater to the west is the two-story, 1970s-era Housing Authority of Champaign County Building, a former bank. The streetscape directly adjacent to the north and east elevations of the Virginia Theater contains concrete sidewalks, bicycle racks and concrete planters. The plaza directly in front of the theater entrance is constructed of herringbone pavers and is fronted by 42" high cast iron anti-vehicle projections. The streetscape setting throughout the Virginia Theater's period of significance, 1921-1953, was residential with multi-story domestic dwellings lining both sides of the West Park Avenue between North Randolph and North State Streets into the 1950s.

NORTH ELEVATION

The north elevation is the primary exterior elevation for the Virginia Theater. The north elevation displays the best detailing of the building's Italian Renaissance Revival style. The north elevation also presents the building's street level commercial attributes and an exterior sense of the scale of the theater auditorium through the curved wall set back at the upper level.

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Street Level

The three-bay, street level, commercial strip of the building is anchored by the central Virginia Theater entrance. The theater entrance is covered by a 1950s triangular, illuminated marquee constructed of light gauge aluminum and is attached to the upper level façade by 2" chain link. The marquee contains oscillating, underside bulb lighting and neon tube lighting surrounding the translucent amber panel playbill listing area. Eight recessed, aluminum, plate glass entrance doors lead from the exterior to the ticket lobby. Above the doors are two fixed aluminum transoms. On the west side of the theater entrance doors is an exterior ticket window. Terra cotta panels around the ticket window are missing and have been covered with blonde painted 3/4" plywood. To the east of the entrance doors are two lighted, plate glass, aluminum framed playbill poster displays. One is located in the entrance recess and the other on the main façade. Terra cotta panels are missing in these façade areas, also.

Adjacent to the public entrance of the Virginia Theater are commercial store fronts, two to the east and three to the west. Each commercial unit contains large plate glass display windows set in dark green mottled terra cotta frames with steel support elements. Fixed, dark green glazed plate glass transoms are above the display windows. Brown slate covers the fixed transoms to the east of the theater entrance. Ornamental dark green terra cotta features associated with the display windows include small, engaged colonettes at the vertical edges. The colonettes carry to a cornice composed of triglyphs above the fixed transom windows which are topped by a shell and scroll pattern. Centered and evenly spaced on the main façade directly above the commercial units are approximately 30" diameter blonde terra cotta roundels with acanthus ornamentation.

Recessed door openings are present in each of the commercial units except the middle unit to the west of the theater entrance. This entrance was replaced with an extended display window in the year 2000. A dark green concrete panel inserted to simulate the terra cotta below the display windows, fills the area of the former door opening recess. Transoms originally existed above the door openings. These have been infilled with plywood or air conditioning units. Two original wood framed, plate glass doors exist in the commercial units immediately adjacent to the Virginia Theater entrance. A rectangular, aluminum, plate-glass door currently exists in the far eastern unit and the original door in the far western unit has been replaced by an arched, wooden door with a circular light at approximately the five foot level.

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Upper Level

The substantial volume of the theater auditorium, setback from the street level façade on the upper level, serves as a backdrop for the Italian Renaissance Revival architectural features at this level. The façade of the auditorium angles slightly to the rear from its connection at the central pavilion to the east and west edges of the building. The auditorium wall is executed in blonde brick with minor projections and recesses incorporated into the bond to express slight façade depth. A blonde terra cotta course line exists approximately 24" below the auditorium parapet line. The parapet is covered in blonde terra cotta tile.

The central pavilion extends vertically above the street level theater entrance and, with its adjoining flat roof balustrade, best defines the exterior Italian Renaissance Revival architectural style of the building. The central pavilion's hipped roof is covered in red tile and has a bracketed, light-gauge metal cornice with integrated gutters.

The side walls of the pavilion are covered in blonde terra cotta panels to a depth of approximately 4' on the east and west elevations and have metal downspouts connected to the cornice gutter system. Storm water is discharged directly onto the flat roof of the commercial units and empties into centralized drains. A contemporary fire-rated exit door leading to a steel fire escape exists on the west elevation. A wooden, dual sash, window exists on the east elevation. The pavilion face brick on the west elevation is covered with blonde painted, vertical wooden siding. The east elevation of the pavilion to the rear of the terra cotta panels is covered with a stucco finish. A wooden, dual sash, multi-light window is covered by the wooden vertical siding on the west façade of the central pavilion. There exists a wooden, dual-sash, multi-light window on the east side of the pavilion, which accesses a exterior wall-mounted steel rung ladder providing an approach to the beige colored York HVAC unit mounted on the roof over the east commercial units.

The primary façade of the central pavilion contains three pairs of rectangular, steel-framed, multi-light, dual-casement windows separated by spiral columns topped by baroque capitals, which support three round arches. The columns, capitals and arches, as well as other façade ornamentation, are executed in blonde terra cotta. Directly above each dual window surround is a rectangular pediment with an elongated "S" design. A medallion relief of what appears to be William Shakespeare is centered in each pediment. Above the window crowns are recessed relief within the arches. The relief detail contains painted scrollwork, carvings of winged cherubs supporting and standing either side of a wreath of bunched fruit topped by budding flowers surrounding a fleur-de-lis embossed shield. The color scheme of the arched depictions is

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a pastel blue background with subdued yellows, blues, greens and reds highlighting the carved figures. The ribbon arch molding contains unpainted carvings of fruit and a formal arch crown. Evenly spaced on the central pavilion façade above the arches and the roofline dentil course are four typically painted roundels approximately 24" in diameter with a shield displaying unknown coats of arms surrounded by wreaths of fruits and budding flowers.

Either side of the central pavilion above a dentil course are flat roofs fronted by a blonde terra cotta, spindle work balustrade. Atop the balustrade dividing panels are blonde terra cotta, covered flower vases with acanthus relief.

EAST ELEVATION

Observation of the three-bay east elevation of the Virginia Theater Building affords the best opportunity to interpret the primary functions of the building from the exterior. Beginning at the northern boundary of this through-section view, the building displays the theater entrance marquee, commercial space and auditorium/stage structure.

Theater Entrance and Commercial Space

The previously described theater marquee is visible from the east. Although set back from the east façade, very little imagination would be required to sense that this is the formal entrance to a theater. The street level commercial units are carried around the east façade by two large display windows with brown slate covering the fixed transoms. These display windows and transoms are surrounded by typical blonde and dark green terra cotta detailing which is capped by the cornice line terra cotta balustrade. Original steel window framing has been replaced with silver, anodized aluminum elements. Incorporated into the green terra cotta base panels near the junction of the north and east elevation is a green concrete panel identifying building architects C. Howard Crane and H. Kenneth Franzheim, as well as building contractor A. W. Stoolman.

Below grade egress, in the form of concrete stairway risers, surfaces from the sidewalk below the east elevation commercial display windows. This egress is apparent at street level in the form of a subdued, green painted, steel balustrade. The upper level of this bay offers a side view of the Virginia Theater's central pavilion and pseudo east balcony.

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Auditorium

The central auditorium bay expresses the voluminous space contained within its 50' height and 65' width. The roof features ventilator intake and exhaust vents and the gabled roofs associated with the integrated, upper level mechanical rooms abutting the stage bay in the southwest quadrant. A brown anodized aluminum gutter system runs the length of the auditorium roofline and continues along the stage bay roofline to a downspout and drain. A downspout and drain also exist at the link of the auditorium and commercial bays.

The exterior wall is comprised of glazed blonde brick interspersed with a small percentage of brown glazed bricks. The fenestration of the façade wall exhibits dual, auditorium fire exit doors at sidewalk level. Two sets painted dark green are in close proximity to the link of the auditorium and commercial bays and three sets painted grey are present near the junction of the auditorium and stage bays. Over each set of fire doors is a wire covered glass lighting fixture adjoined by exposed, blonde finished, metal wiring conduit. Three concrete planters are adjacent to the street level auditorium exit doors.

At the midway point on the mezzanine level is a single, gray painted, balcony fire door leading to a steel fire escape which angles 45 degrees at the meeting of the auditorium and stage bays to the sidewalk below. The fire escape walkway and balustrade is supported from below by four triangular 3" angle iron brackets. Three triangular 2" angle iron brackets with interior spiral design connect to the fire escape walkway with 3/4" steel rods and supports the walkway and its balustrade from above. The fire escape and supporting brackets are painted black. One window unit is present on the east elevation, this being a blonde painted horizontally oriented, wooden, dual hopper unit above the auditorium exit doors next to the commercial bay.

Stage

The east elevation reveals the principal operational attributes of the building through observation of the stage bay.

The stage area proper is contained in a 60' in height rectilinear vertical section set back approximately 16' from the east elevation lower level façade. The flat stage roof is bordered by a stair step parapet topped with brown tile coping on the east and west elevations. A 12'x10'x8' stage light ventilator with hipped roof is visible on top of the stage's flat roof. A single 30" fire door leading to the stage fly gallery is evident in the stage section just above the street level projection's roofline. The street level façade contains the aforementioned aluminum gutter,

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downspout and fire escape elements. A black steel pipe grip bar is attached to the wall as a supporting element of the fire escape. Located on the façade wall near the bottom fire escape risers are two stainless steel hose fittings for external feed of the building's fire suppression system. A pipe rail barrier is present under the lower level of the fire escape risers. A single, gray painted, fire door exists below the fire escape in the vicinity of the intersection with the auditorium bay.

SOUTH ELEVATION

The south elevation of the building is faced with common blonde brick and best expresses the form and function of the stage area.

The central, rectilinear main stage area, topped by the stage lighting ventilation exhaust, is 100' wide by 60' in height and has 16' grade level extensions on either side. The flat roof parapet at alley and auditorium levels has brown tile coping. A brown anodized aluminum gutter extends the length of the stage roofline. Storm water drains down two equally spaced downspouts on the stage bay façade. Two white-painted, dual fire door units are located at the alley level. One set exists in the adjoining alley level projection to the east, the other in the far western portion of the main stage area. In the projection to the west of the main stage area is a single fire door leading to the backstage and dressing room areas.

WEST ELEVATION

The form of the west elevation of the building somewhat mimics the form of the east elevation with slight deviations in detailing.

The alley level projection off the vertical main stage supports a modern air conditioning chiller. On the façade of this projection are three wooden, multi-light, dual sash dressing windows covered with plywood. The windows possess limestone sills typical of non-display windows throughout the building. Close to the alley is the trunk chute fire rated door.

The auditorium roof fully exposes the integrated mechanical rooms' forced air intake and exhaust ventilators. The gutter, downspout and drain elements are typical as are the fire escape elements and auditorium fire doors. A steel roof access ladder exists off the fire escape adjacent to the 60' rectangular chimney with an 8" concrete cap. Adjacent to the chimney are two side-by-side, single light, dual sash wooden windows are covered with particle board. A 6' western projection from the chimney contains a typical wooden sash window covered with a white

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ventilation panel. The referenced windows were associated with the original lady's retirement room and toilet. At grade level is a plywood covered door opening, now filled with concrete block that originally led to the Virginia Theater's manager's office. On the western facade of the projection is a covered steel window originally illuminating the manager's office.

At the southern auditorium fire doors is a slightly sloped, concrete, contemporary ADA ramp, which covers the original areaway to the lower level dressing room windows on the stage bay projection. Slightly in front of the northern auditorium fire exit doors are descending concrete risers surrounded by 4' high pipe railing which leads to the basement level boiler room.

The grade-level commercial bay on the west elevation has blonde terra cotta panels extending 4' to the south along the west facade. The flat roof parapet is stair-stepped and is topped with brown tile coping. Two wooden, dual-sashed, multi-light windows, associated with the original far western commercial unit, are present at a height of approximately 10'.

INTERIOR

The interior of the 1,525 seat Virginia Theater consists of five primary levels with height extensions above the auditorium and stage areas. The interior levels are designated basement, auditorium, mezzanine, balcony and attic. The floor plans of these levels define original operational functions for the building.

Interior walls, resting on a poured concrete foundation, range from unfinished common brick in the basement and stage areas, to plastered, highly ornate and painted walls at the auditorium level. Interior doors range from smooth faced, wooden auditorium entrance doors to four panel wooden doors in the dressing room areas. Concrete floors are typical, although original plans specify cement floors, with carpet covering in the lobby and mezzanine promenade and lounge areas. The floor of the stage is a wooden trap model.

Spanish Renaissance Revival interior design with baroque influences, in the form of ornate plaster carvings with arched elaborations and wrought iron balustrades/light fixtures, is prevalent in the main lobby, mezzanine and auditorium.

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BASEMENT LEVEL

Principal basement level building spaces exist in the areas below the commercial and stage bays. Primary functions of these spaces are patron comfort, mechanical, storage and performance support. All floors at this level are concrete.

Under the northwest section of the commercial bays are the fuel, boiler and mechanical apparatus rooms. Many original mechanical units still remain in place and, in some instances, operation.

The fuel room, containing building water lines along the west wall, extends under the sidewalk above. The sidewalk coal hole for the fuel room has been removed. Adjacent to the fuel room is the boiler room, which retains the two non-operative, original Utica low pressure boilers resting on a brick foundation next to the operational Weil McLain LBGH 18 heating unit. To the rear of the boilers is a fire door leading to concrete risers surfacing along the west elevation. On the east wall of the boiler room are an original Kewanee hot water heater, a modern hot water heater and an oversized fire door with a three drop-down bar locks.

Through the east wall interior boiler room door are concrete risers leading to the mechanical apparatus room. The mechanical apparatus room contains the original, yet still operational, Nash electric vacuum pump and supporting elements, as well as the building's well pump.

Through a typical fire door on the south wall of the mechanical apparatus room, are a storage space to the left under the Virginia Theater's entrance lobby and, to the right, concrete risers leading to the western commercial units above, which are now the Virginia Theater's management office.

In the eastern commercial bay, the original storage space was converted into a women's restroom in the early 21st Century. The concrete risers once providing access to the street level commercial units now opens into the theater's main lobby.

At the basement level of the auditorium bay is a ¼ oval, 3' wide, concrete ventilation trench. This trench originates and terminates in the areas of stage (actor's) left and stage right adjacent to the orchestra pit. Vertical ventilation shafts passing between the interior and exterior walls of the auditorium and are linked to the to the fan and machine rooms in the attic level of the auditorium bay. The orchestra pit is also located at the basement level of the auditorium adjacent to the stage.

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The orchestra pit has a concrete floor covered with wood. Radiators units and small audio speakers are incorporated along the stage wall. The theater's Wurlitzer Opus 490 theater organ finished in white with gold trim and hydraulic riser platform are located in the eastern end of the orchestra pit.

In the eastern and central stage bay basement area, there exists a trap room with contemporary fluorescent lighting fixtures under the main stage and stage right. At the bottom of interior concrete risers leading from the auditorium bay along the east wall is a standpipe and elements of the building's fire suppression system. To the west in the trap room area are seven non-original dressing rooms extending 7'-10' inward from the east and south walls. These dressing rooms are constructed of 1"x6" vertical boards mounted on a 2"x4" framing grid and have 3-panel wooden doors. In the west end of the trap room are contemporary Westinghouse electrical switchgear elements and a Spencer Steel Orgoblo fan unit associated with the theater's Whirlitzer organ. Along the northern wall are two single fire rated doors with concrete risers for access to the orchestra pit and the organ platform riser hydraulic mechanical components in a recess off stage right.

Through a wooden door on the west end of the trap room is the trunk room on the left and a restroom on the right. A perpendicular passage past the restroom provides access to an exempt restroom with shower abutting the west trap room wall. Former dressing rooms along the west interior wall house a Carbondale Machine Corporation air conditioning compressor and pump installed in 1936. Wooden dual sash windows covered with plywood on the outside are present in the mechanical room (former dressing room) space. To the west of the trunk room are concrete risers with pipe rail balusters leading to a main stage passage.

AUDITORIUM LEVEL

The auditorium level best displays the multi-use facets of the building through commercial and theater spaces contained within.

Commercial Units

The interior of the commercial units exhibits the most drastic deviation from original design for the entire building. Major modifications to the original configuration of these spaces were undertaken in the 1990s and the early 21st Century.

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The two units to the east of the theater entrance have had the original separating, non-bearing wall and wood floor covering removed. The exposed floor material is brownish/grey terrazzo. This area retains original wall finishes and window display counters. The original east wall display window and easternmost entrance door have been replaced with silver anodized frames and door. In the southwest corner of this space are contemporary heating duct elements and electrical breaker boxes. The basement level access riser barrier wall projecting into the main lobby to the rear of these units was removed in 2000. The three ribbon arched openings separating the former commercial area and theater lobby east of the original riser space were cut out and finished as part of the same project to install the restrooms at the lower level. The arches are concealed from the commercial bay area by black drapes.

The three commercial units to the west of the theater entrance have been similarly modified. Unlike their eastern counterparts, the two original units immediately adjacent to the theater ticket booth were completely finished in the 1990s and serve as the administrative headquarters for theater operations. Original window display counters have been retained. On the west wall are wooden risers leading to an overhanging loft with wrought iron railing along the south wall. The loft is supported on the leading edge by four wooden columns. Recessed under the loft is an office equipment room of standard stud wall construction faced with drywall. The off-white ceiling in this area is cross-timbered and the floor has been covered with low pile carpeting. The display counter, exterior door, loft support columns/trim and office equipment room are painted white. The walls and loft facing are painted dark red and purple.

The far western commercial unit has also been modified. A corridor from the exterior door now leads through office space, which retains the character of the original commercial unit, to the main theater lobby. The area directly to the rear of the contemporary office space was originally the Virginia Theater's manager's office. This space has been rehabilitated and now contains two accessible, unisex bathrooms. The arched opening linking the main lobby to the restrooms was cut as part of the restroom insertion project in 2000.

Theater

Entrance Lobby and Ticket Booth

The original entrance lobby was rehabilitated in 1955. Its green terrazzo floor is 29' wide at its entrance and extends to a depth of 12' to four sets of blonde, vertical-grained veneered, wooden main lobby entrance swing doors mounted in wooden frames. The entrance lobby ceiling is of drywall material and contains three rectangular, flush aluminum lighting fixtures. Above each

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set of main lobby doors is a rectangular aluminum ventilation grille. Mounted on the drywalled wall section to the west of the doors is a small public phone box. The wall above the main lobby doors and the east entrance lobby wall are finished with a quarry-faced, ashlar stone in an irregular course pattern. Mounted on the east wall is a 10'x6'x2", stainless steel framed, plate glass, playbill display case and a small ventilation grille cover.

On the west wall is the drywall faced ticket booth containing three brown anodized aluminum fixed ticket windows and a projecting center bay. The interior of the ticket booth is finished in drywall and possesses a typical exterior ticket window, purple west wall drapes. Arched wooden doors with circular multi-paned lights leads to the adjacent theater management space and the main lobby.

Main Lobby

The main lobby has a carpet covered concrete floor and plastered covered walls and ceiling. The ceiling contain round, adjustable, aluminum lighting fixtures and two round air circulating vents with baroque designed grilles adjacent to the main lobby entrance doors.

Along the auditorium wall opposite the main lobby entrance doors, with wrought iron framed, red/yellow leaded glass exit signs, is a 1951 inserted concession area constructed primarily of stainless steel furnishings veneered in dark, wood grained panels. The ceiling of the concession area is slightly dropped and contains round, adjustable lighting fixtures. Immediately adjacent to the auditorium wall is wooden counter with Masonite top. The wall in the concession area is covered with blonde colored plastic panels.

Set back to the east and west of the main lobby doors are concrete risers with baroque wrought iron balusters topped with an oak railing. At the extreme west and east terminuses of the main lobby are two sets of three panel wooden typical exit doors with push bar hardware. Wrought iron exit signs with amber and red glass are above the exterior exit doors.

The auditorium lobby wall incorporates beige finished, rectangular, timbered wainscoting and has three auditorium openings with wooden, rectangular swing doors either side of the concession area. Mounted on the ceiling above each of the doorways are ½ inch thick, rectangular smoked glass elements incorporating aisle designations. Directly in front of the seating bays either side of the concession area are evenly spaced 30" concrete mezzanine support columns finished in white and gold paper and plaster ornamentation. The auditorium walls adjacent to the eastern and western seating bays project approximately 36" into the main

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lobby. The wall adjacent to the commercial units incorporates baroque carved, decorative plaster column and arch elements finished in beige, red and gold.

Auditorium

The auditorium incorporates seating spaces and other features of both the auditorium and balcony levels. The auditorium has concrete floors, plaster walls and a white finished, lighted, recessed dome with decorative cornice band within a salmon painted plaster ceiling. The ceiling above the auditorium balcony area contains two 48" wrought iron, leaded glass light fixtures, four 24" suspended aluminum dish light fixtures and one rectangular ventilation intake element at the ceiling/wall joint approximately 25' from the east and west walls.. Steel auditorium seats with wooden arms are covered with brown fabric material.

The elongated, fan-shaped, main floor auditorium seating area is subdivided by six carpeted aisles and provides seating for 834. The five seating sections originally contained 23 seating rows each. Approximately 200 original patron seats have been removed at the auditorium and balcony levels to accommodate ADA seating requirements and contemporary theatrical sound and lighting operations. Centered at the rear of the main floor are audio sound board equipment and work stations. The auditorium floor terminates at the raised orchestra pit balustrade executed in dark oak. At the east end of the orchestra pit are wooden risers leading to the stage. Adjacent to the wooden risers and at the west end of the orchestra pit are large public address speakers mounted on a steel supported wood platform. Concrete risers leading to exterior exit doors exist at the auditorium level adjacent to the stage bay wing sections. The supporting columns in front of the risers project an arcade appearance. The east riser area contains a life safety area of refuge, a utility closet and a radiator access grille. The west riser area contains a utility closet and a life safety area of refuge space on opposite sides of the risers. The rear auditorium wall contains dark oak wainscoting and ten contemporary, rectangular audio speakers mounted at the junction of the subject wall and the balcony overhang.

On the underside of the balcony overhang near the junction of the auditorium wall are five, evenly spaced, 48" diameter/width, baroque, wrought iron light fixtures. Two are square and three round. Each is glazed with amber, blue and red leaded glass. Forward on the underside of the balcony near the leading edge are five evenly spaced, 48" aluminum dish light fixtures surrounded by low relief wreath carvings. The sidewalls of the auditorium contain arch and column carved plaster detailing finished in gold and yellow, salmon and green pastels. Integrated into the auditorium walls on either side of the exit risers are 36" high black radiator grille covers.

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Stage

The stage section at the auditorium level consists of four sections; the main stage, east/west stage wings and a dressing room section in the far western reaches.

The 56'x30' performance stage opening is surrounded by a decorative plaster proscenium. Three parallel moldings forming a hooded crown frame the opening and carry into a decorative frieze above topped by a centered medallion carving. The proscenium is finished in black with extensive gilding. The stage floor is plywood over the original wood trap floor. Surrounding and above the main stage are 19 line sets for deploying scenery, screens and curtains attached to the attic level gridiron. The current line set configuration extends from the 2'8" point near the front of the stage to the 27'6" point near the rear stage wall.

The floors of the stage right and stage left sections are concrete covered with wood strip veneer. Centralized in the stage right section is a fly rail with 5/8" multi-line rope attached to suspended counterweights. In an alcove along the auditorium wall at stage right are three, wall mounted, stage lighting electrical control boxes. Along the east wall at stage right is a protruding, drywalled stage door element providing access to the basement level and main auditorium area. Next to the door opening are unfinished wooden risers leading to a concrete slab at mezzanine level and the lower area of the balcony level organ chamber. Exterior fire doors exist near the joint of the east and south stage walls.

In the stage left section there are unfinished wooden risers leading to the balcony level organ echo chamber behind the main auditorium wall. In this area are the organ pipes, sound effects and relay systems. Along the south wall of this section are typical fire doors. Through a sliding fire door on the west wall is a perpendicular passage in the concrete floored stage dressing room area. To the south is the performer exterior entrance door and to the north is a commode with a toilet. Along the west wall is the exterior door for the trunk chute, the descending steel riser to the trap room and three, stud-walled constructed dressing rooms.

MEZZANINE LEVEL

The Virginia Theater mezzanine level space provides circulation and comfort functions for theater patrons. The mezzanine level contains concrete and terrazzo floors. All concrete floors are covered with purple, low pile carpeting with a dark purple leaf and vine design. The walls and ceilings are plaster finished in an off-white color.

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Centrally located on the mezzanine level above the auditorium level entrance lobby is a patron lounge. The lounge possesses three pairs of multi-light casement windows extending to a height of approximately 8' on the north wall. Below the windows are protruding, radiator elements. Dividing the windows are carved plaster pilasters with an ornate entablature supported on spiral colonettes. Both features are finished in golden/yellow and blue hues.

On the east and west walls of the lounge are identical, carved, low relief, plaster mirror surrounds. The tile mirror glazing on the west wall has been removed and infilled with painted plywood and a wooden hollow core door leading to the cloakroom. The arched glazing area rests on 4-panel wood base and wood frame. A plaster arch rests atop a ½ square plaster column either side of the mirror opening. Adjacent to the decorative mirror relief and resting on wooden pilasters are eclectic plaster columns extending to the ornate entablature carried throughout the lounge wall near the ceiling. Column decorative elements include gargoyle capitals and a pinnacle like finial. Cresting centered above the cornice includes scrollwork and a shield surrounded leafed garland. The decorative plaster finish carries typical golden/yellow and blue tones. Centered on either side of the columns and the adjoining walls are lighting fixtures (incandescent) of dual candle sconces. A circular, eight candle (incandescent) chandelier suspended by a linked chain is centered in a recessed plaster honeycomb ceiling finished in gold, beige, blue and black.

The mezzanine promenade has a concrete floor and slightly vaulted ceilings to the east and west of the flat ceiling area adjacent to the patron lounge. The promenade contains the upper portion of the two main lobby concrete risers. The risers are located east and west of the patron lounge and are bordered by baroque wrought iron balusters with oak railing. A half-circle balcony perpendicular to the promenade north wall, above a conical decorative plaster relief trimmed in gold, overhangs the each riser. On the north wall to the rear of the half-circle balconies are arched recesses in the north promenade wall. Perpendicular to the riser openings on the promenade south wall are vomitories with a four-step concrete riser leading to the balcony cross aisle. Four flush-mounted, elongated lantern shaped wrought iron lighting sconces are evenly spaced on the south promenade wall. A projecting, non-functional, Travertine stone fireplace with blonde terra cotta and baroque plaster detailing is centered on the south promenade wall directly across from the patron lounge.

At the eastern terminus of the promenade are the terrazzo floored men's smoking room and toilet. A utility closet is accessed on the south wall of the men's smoking room. The men's toilet

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has the original urinals, but other fixtures have been replaced. At the western reaches of the promenade are the ladies retirement room and ladies toilet. The ladies toilet possesses a terrazzo floor.

BALCONY LEVEL

The projection room, located above the mezzanine patron lounge, has a concrete floor with square cut linoleum covering and unfinished concrete walls. The south wall has six openings for projection operations. The north wall is covered in red draperies. Mounted on the floor at the mid-point along the south wall are two Norelco AA II 35/70mm projectors. A rewind room is adjacent to the projection room along the east wall. On the west wall is a opening with a four panel wooden door leading to a perpendicular passage. To the north is a commode. To the south are openings accessing the balcony seating area, attic level and steel fire escape discharging to the roof of the western commercial units.

The red finished concrete floor balcony seating area can accommodate 691 patrons in its twelve aisles. A cross aisle leading to the two balcony vomitories is located behind aisle three. The red carpeted cross aisle contains black pipe railing. The openings are surrounded by dark oak spindle balusters with rectangular newel posts and possess wrought iron leaded glass exit signs over wooden swing doors. A wooden, dual swing door unit with original push bars and vertical locking mechanisms is present at the east and west ends of the cross aisle. The doors are painted blue with white trim and are set in a rectangular surround with a three panel frieze with two blue panels and a wrought iron leaded glass exit sign above. The doors are topped by an ornate, low relief, baroque carving. The balcony railing is dark oak approximately 18" wide. A frieze below the balcony rail is of carved, low relief plaster with repetitive panels carrying the images of Spanish explorers Cortez and Alvarado. The panels are ornamented in a heraldic crown and shield motif. Theatrical lights mounted on supporting stands/grids are located at the east and west end of the balcony rail and along the upper balcony rail frieze.

The balcony walls are plaster finished in a pastel yellow and contain decorative entablature at the joint with the ceiling. The walls also contain small rectangular audio speakers. On the east and west balcony level auditorium walls fronting the organ and echo organ chambers are simulated boxes integrating a wooden curved balustrade, interior wooden spindle work and ornate, baroque, high relief, carved plaster surrounds. The interior box areas are backlight with floodlights. Either side of the box openings are simulated, arched top/conical based pseudo

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balcony openings with wrought iron balusters and lattice work background. The box and balcony features are finished in muted blues, coral, purple and gold.

At the balcony level in the stage bay is the 28'x6' concrete floor, fly gallery accessed by a steel wall ladder on the south wall. The fly gallery contains a fly rail for deployment of scenery and a 30" wooden swing door leading to the roof of the stage right area.

ATTIC LEVEL

The attic level exposes the trapezoidal steel roof truss and supporting steel column system. The trusses and columns are 3' angle units assembled with large round head bolts and nuts. A fire door accessed by a steel wall ladder in the projection room passage opens to a passage leading to the concrete floored fan room above the auditorium ceiling dome. A plank walkway with wooden railing around the ceiling dome leads to the concrete floored mechanical rooms in the southwest quadrant above the auditorium ceiling. In the stage bay area at the attic level is the gridiron at a height of 46'.

CURRENT BUILDING INTEGRITY/CONDITION

The Virginia Theater has been very well maintained and is in good physical condition. There is noticeable plaster deterioration in the auditorium ceiling and proscenium areas, as well as missing exterior terra cotta panels on the north and east elevations.

The building has undergone modifications since first constructed, primarily in 1951, 1955 and 2000. Exterior alterations include the replacement of the original rectangular theater marquee with the current triangular version. Also undertaken were the replacement of the original exterior theater doors with herculite aluminum types and the addition of an exterior ticket window as part of the 1955 theater entrance lobby rehabilitation. The commercial storefronts have also been modified, in that the central entrance opening to the central west side unit has been removed and its display window carried to through to the joint of the far western unit. The entrance door on the far eastern commercial unit has been replaced with a contemporary aluminum unit, as has its display window on the east elevation. On the west elevation, the areaway to the lower stage bay dressing room windows has been covered over with a concrete ramp and windows and doors to the ladies retirement room and the theater manager's office have been covered over with various materials, but remain in place. Other than these modifications, the building presents its original 1921 exterior appearance.

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The interior of the building has been renovated in some of the primary and secondary spaces. The commercial units to the west of the theater entrance were renovated in the 1990s to provide contemporary office space for the theater management. The interior dividing wall has been removed, a loft added, and a stud wall to the rear now creates a small equipment/break room. One original exterior entrance door opening with transom remains and the original display counters remain in place. The far western commercial unit retains its door opening, but the interior spaces now possess a passage to the main theater lobby and a stud wall storage area. The two eastern commercial bays retain their exterior openings and internal finishes, window display counters and sense of volume but have otherwise been gutted to provide a large multi-use space for theater operations. The current strategic plan calls for this space to be returned to at least part of the area's original function as the theater's confectionary. The arches in the dividing wall between these commercial spaces and the main theater lobby were cut and finished as part of the year 2000 rehabilitation.

The theater portion of the building has been modified from the original design most significantly in the basement, auditorium and mezzanine levels. Modifications in these areas, excluding the theater's entrance lobby, have been primarily spatial in nature.

Modifications at the basement level include the year 2000 configuration of a women's rest room area in the east commercial unit's storage area, addition of stud wall dressing rooms in the trap room area, removal of the trunk chute and the 1936 installation of air conditioning mechanical elements in the dressing rooms along the west interior wall.

The Virginia Theater's entrance lobby was altered in 1955 at the initiative of the then lessee, Radio-Keith-Orpheum, Theaters, Inc. (RKO). These alterations included the removal/replacement of the two lines of interior lobby doors, refacing of the entrance lobby wall with ashlar stone and removal and replacement of the original square cut floor tile. The main lobby has also been changed with the addition of a 1951 concession area centered on the auditorium wall and removal of the riser wall associated with the east commercial units. The risers are now exposed in the main lobby area and lead to the basement level women's restroom area. Adjacent to the west end of the main lobby, the original theater manager's office has been converted into a unisex bathroom. In the auditorium proper, an area of life safety refuge has been created on the north side of the east wall exit risers near the stage bay. On the mezzanine level, the original cloak room on the west wall of the patron lounge has had its promenade door opening infilled.

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Overall, the Virginia Theater Building has retained a high degree of its original form, engineering and architectural design attributes and materials. It conveys its original architectural design through the exhibition of its exterior Italian Renaissance Revival and interior Spanish Renaissance Revival architectural styles. The building also conveys a sense of an early 20th Century performing arts facility in that it retains a high percentage of original primary spaces, finishes and features.

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VIRGINIA THEATER HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT

SUMMARY

The Virginia Theater is locally significant under National Register of Historic Places Criteria A and C. The Virginia Theater Building meets Criterion A for Entertainment/Recreation for its association with events between 1921 and 1953 that entertained the residents of Champaign, Illinois and surrounding communities. The presence of the Virginia Theater provided an additional venue for an enthusiastic local stage and motion picture audience. Theatrical productions, vaudeville appearances, concerts and motion picture presentations were conducted at this facility during its period of significance, 1921-1953. The Virginia Theater physically expresses these functions through its lobby, auditorium, stage and film projection spaces.

The Virginia Theater also meets National Register of Historic Places Criterion C for Architecture, as it is a well-preserved example of a 1921 performing arts facility executed with exterior Italian Renaissance Revival architectural style details with an interior displaying a Spanish Renaissance Revival design. Italian Renaissance Revival style elements/materials dominating the exterior include, an upper level central pavilion with arched window openings and red tiled roof, flanked by pseudo verandas fronted by masonry balustrades all containing terra cotta facing with integrated, ornate, low relief carvings. The interior Spanish Renaissance Revival style is best expressed in the elaborate baroque plaster carvings, wrought iron light fixtures/balustrades and decorative millwork in the main lobby, auditorium and mezzanine areas.

The Virginia Theater is presently used for many of its original entertainment and recreational functions, as well as a community meeting facility. The Virginia Theater building retains a high percentage of its original exterior/interior physical integrity in design and materials.

CHAMPAIGN, ILLINOIS

The City of Champaign is located 140 miles south of Chicago on the level topography of east central Illinois. The product of early U.S. rail transportation development, Champaign and Urbana, its twin city to the east, have matured into a diverse municipality fueled by the character of its 19th Century settlers, commercial entrepreneurs and longstanding academic community.

An act of the Illinois State Legislature created Champaign County, Illinois, with Urbana as the county seat, on 20 February 1833. The county and its seat were named for an Ohio county and town that was the birthplace of State Senator John Vance of Vermilion County, the chief political

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proponent for the establishment of a new county in his district.¹ In June of 1833, a locating commission fixed the location of the county seat on the southwest perimeter of the Big Grove settlement near the geographic center of the county.²

The population of the county grew slowly over the next two decades, with the primary economic base being agriculture. The difficulty in getting products to and from markets in Indiana and Chicago was a major issue. The building of the Illinois Central Railroad (ICRR) in the early-to-mid 1850s alleviated this problem and provided a conduit for major development throughout Champaign County. The towns of Rantoul, Tolono, Pesotum and others were established along the ICRR's right-of-way. On 24 July 1854, the section of the ICRR's line between Ludlow and a site two miles west of Urbana was opened.³ This site was designated West Urbana, which in 1860 became the City of Champaign.

The county's agricultural production during the Civil War, along with businesses associated with the ICRR's operation, helped to stimulate economic growth. The 1867 establishment of the Illinois Industrial University (University of Illinois), at a site equidistant between Champaign and Urbana, became the most important factor in the development of the City of Champaign. The services provided and needed by the University would eventually bring people from all over the globe to the two communities. To support what was to become a world-renowned educational institution, labor and services were fundamental. Although Champaign continued to support and benefit from the ICRR and local agricultural interests, as the University of Illinois grew, so did the community.

During the later part of the 19th Century, Champaign acquired utility/sanitary services and a public transportation system that made the community a very appealing place to reside. The establishment of several large department and clothing stores secured Champaign's position as a major downstate retail center. By the turn of the century, Champaign County possessed many independent rail lines, as well as the Illinois Traction Company, a regional, light-rail passenger system.

Increased enrollment at the University and a growing business economy was the catalyst behind the construction of educational, commercial and residential facilities in Champaign and the county through World War I. One of the most notable developments during this period was the construction of Chanute Field on the periphery of Rantoul.

After the war, automobiles, trucks and tractors were becoming more numerous in the county and the need for all-weather streets and roads was apparent. Several new highways were constructed

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in the county during the 1920s. By 1924, the City of Champaign had over fifty miles of paved streets.⁴

A building boom the City of in Champaign in the 1920s proved to be a good time to start or enlarge a construction-related business. English Brothers general contractors, Bash Roofing Company and Hughes-Krabbe Electrical Contractors had more work than they could handle during this period.

As the Great Depression gripped the nation, Champaign County marked its centennial. Government funds helped to facilitate the construction of a new Champaign City Building and National Guard Armories in both Champaign and Urbana. W.P.A. labor was also used in the period before World War II to build/rehabilitate over a dozen other buildings, refurbish park acreage and create municipal athletic fields.

In 1937, Chanute Field on the southern edge of Rantoul was designated a permanent U.S. Army Installation. Expanded construction was undertaken at Chanute to support the thousands of aircraft mechanics who would eventually train there during World War II. By 1941, the number of troops was so great that Champaign established a USO Club at the old Central School Building to give the airmen a recreational diversion.⁵

After the war, G.I. Bill educational benefits were the reason for all-time high enrollment at the University. Many servicemen returning from overseas were posted to Chanute Field. This influx of residents was the catalyst for a housing construction boom in Champaign prior to 1950.

Post-1950 development of the Champaign area witnessed the establishment of periphery commercial centers such as Country Fair Shopping Center and Market Place Mall. Other former farmland was developed into industrial and high tech centers such as Kraft's Champaign production unit and Urbana's Magnavox facility. An emphasis on education in the 50s, 60s and 70s resulted in the construction of local school facilities including Parkland College in northwest Champaign. The introduction of Interstates 57, 72 and 74 during this period set new boundaries and corridors for development on the north and west sides of the city.

As Champaign enters the 21st Century with a resident population of 60,000, it, along with its twin city Urbana, remains the most significant educational, commercial and transportation center in east central Illinois. Although Champaign's original commercial center has shifted from its original location adjacent to the ICRR, now the Canadian National Railroad, the city continues to grow and strives to retain its significant historic fabric for future generations.

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CHAMPAIGN-URBANA ENTERTAINMENT VENUES

To enhance the cultural and social aspects of its residents, the Champaign-Urbana community has a long history of providing venues for public enlightenment and amusement. The evolution from early opera houses to the contemporary performing arts/entertainment centers in Champaign-Urbana is not uncommon for a community of its age, size, development patterns and demographic diversity. Its economic bases in agriculture, military, education and commercial enterprise has drawn residents of from a variety of backgrounds and cultures, most desiring varied entertainment options.

The 19th Century opera houses were the predecessors of present-day theaters in most regards. They contained a stage, main floor seating area and often a balcony. They were almost always in the upper stories of commercial buildings whose owner or resident merchant ran the opera house as a sideline. Often capable of accommodating hundreds of patrons, the opera houses provided a setting for concerts, plays, lectures, vaudeville acts, political speeches and, in the early 20th Century, motion pictures. Church socials and roller skating parties were not unordinary occurrences at the local opera house. These venues were just as common in small towns as they were larger cities.⁶

Barrett's Hall (1865) and the Eichberg Opera House (1872) in Champaign along with Tieman's Opera House (1850) and Busey's Hall (1889) in Urbana were the community's first formal entertainment centers. The first free standing and last operating opera house in Champaign was the Walker (1885). Originally home to a local militia unit and known as the Armory, the Walker was in operation until the end of the 1914 season, when the newly constructed Orpheum Theater replaced it.

Most of the local opera houses typically had a life after they closed in the form of Masonic Temples or union halls. The reason for their demise as a performing venue was often a result of their own popularity. Managers saw the value in providing a space with larger audience capacity. Performers weighed in as well and became insistent about more sophisticated, larger stages. Thus began the transition from performance facilities that were considered a secondary building tenant to new edifices, theaters, with the primary purpose of entertainment.

The first theater in the community was the Illinois (1908) located in Urbana. It was used almost exclusively for theatrical productions. The Illinois Theater experienced a decline after World War I due to competition from newer venues in the community. It was eventually purchased and

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operated by the Zenith Amusement Company, a Ku Klux Klan organization. The building was destroyed in a fire of mysterious origins in 1927.⁷

The new theaters that were established in the Champaign-Urbana area during the first decades of the 20th Century carried over the multi-use approach of the earlier opera houses but a departure from the church social, political meeting activities of the opera houses was evident. Champaign theaters such as the New Orpheum (1914), the Belvoir/Rialto (1915) and the Virginia (1921) continued to feature theatrical productions and vaudeville, but it is evident through their original designs or early alterations that the generic theater was becoming more oriented to motion picture presentations. The oldest remaining Champaign example of a pure movie theater is the Park (1912). Although somewhat altered from its original configuration, it remains in operation over 90 years later under the moniker of the Art Theater.

The modification/construction of movie houses in Champaign-Urbana accelerated as the motion picture industry grew, especially after the introduction of "talkies" in 1927. The Varsity (1906), Colonial (1913) and Princess (1915) all were altered to accommodate new technology. The Coed (1938), the Thunderbird (1966) and Fox Country Fair (1967) increased screen capacity in the community. After World War II, the Twin City (1948) and Widescreen (1950) Drive-Ins were established locally to cash-in on the market created by the large-scale adoption of U.S. society to the automobile and its variants. Towards the end of the 20th Century, the Market Place Cinemas (1979) and the Beverley (1995) in Champaign along with the Savoy (1990) introduced the concept of the expanded multi-screen facility to the area.

For all of its popularity, the motion picture industry did not control a monopoly on entertainment in the Champaign-Urbana area. The public continued its fascination with live performing arts, as well as spectator sports, and venues to support these activities were periodically constructed to support patron demand.

The University of Illinois provided a number of performing arts and spectator sports facilities for its own operations and community use. Present day Foellinger Auditorium (1912) was the first large assembly and performance stage on campus. In the 1960's, the Assembly Hall (1963) and Krannert Center for the Performing Arts (1966) introduced campus facilities that could provide for any activity from an opera, to the Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Circus. Facilities such as Memorial Stadium (1925), George Huff Hall (1925) and the Assembly Hall provided spectator space for highly popular intercollegiate sports contests and large popular music concerts such as the first Farm Aid benefit at Memorial Stadium in 1985.

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VIRGINIA THEATER

The Virginia Theater was the vision of Charles C. Pyle and Richard A. Porter. In 1920, Porter, proprietor of Champaign's Rialto and Varsity Theaters⁸ and Pyle, manager of the Rialto Theater, under the name of Pyle and Porter Theatrical Enterprises, contracted for the design of a new Champaign theater with the Chicago office of Detroit architect/engineer C. Howard Crane. Crane's Chicago office was under the charge of architect H. Kenneth Franzheim. Champaign architect George Ramey was selected as the local supervising architect. The new theater was to be located in a primarily residential section of Champaign at the intersection of North Randolph Street and West Park Avenue just east of West Side (Eisner) Park.

As design plans moved towards completion in 1921 Porter pulled out of the partnership leaving Pyle with insufficient fiscal backing to see the theater built. In September of 1921, Pyle went into partnership with local general contractor A.W. Stoolman, under the name of the Stoolman-Pyle Corporation to acquire the needed construction capital. Stoolman became the major stockholder of the corporation, while Pyle assumed the role of manager for the new facility.

Actual construction of the new theater began during the summer of 1921. In an interview in August of 1921, Pyle stated, "Two nations of Southern Europe have been drawn upon by Architect Crane." "The theater's exterior is of Italian design; the interior is Spanish." "As handsome as money can make, in the words of the architect."⁹ The styles Pyle was referring to were Italian Renaissance Revival and Spanish Renaissance Revival.

The theater building was planned as a multi-purpose structure with commercial spaces on the primary (Park Avenue) façade to fill the vacant areas in front of the auditorium and to provide additional revenue for the owner. This design approach may well have been introduced to carry over the opera house tradition of mixed entertainment and commercial uses for the building.

The erection of the building was unlike any theater construction previously undertaken in the community. A myriad of contractors and suppliers, local and distant, participated in this construction effort. A.W. Stoolman and his crew had their hands full coordinating over 80 firms in the endeavor. Local participants included the roofing and sheet metal fabrication expertise of the Twin City Roofing Company and F.K. Robeson who supplied the carpet. Regional participation witnessed the collaboration of Chicago's Northwestern Terra Cotta Company and Peoria's plastering specialists, the Klein-Watson Company. National contributors included New York's Empire Fire Proof Door Company and the Rudolph Wurlitzer (organ) Company out of Cincinnati, Ohio.¹⁰

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The theater, considered one of the finest in the Central West,¹¹ was christened the Virginia, after Stoolman's daughter Elizabeth Virginia. It was hoped the name would become popular and "...always stand for high-class clean, moral entertainment."¹² Opening night was set for 28 December 1921. The inaugural performance was the live stage production of the hit mystery, *The Bat*, which was in the second year of its run in New York and had been playing in Chicago for almost a year. It had set box office receipt records and been attended by over a million patrons in the two metropolitan markets prior to playing in Champaign.¹³ A motion picture bill followed *The Bat* over the next three evenings and featured current releases *Tol'able David* and *The Boat* with Buster Keaton in the lead. Preliminary musical presentations by the Virginia Theater Orchestra, Virginia Theater Organist George May and vocal soloists Genevieve Cadle and Clinton Brown enhanced the motion picture presentation.¹⁴ In a period of four days, the Virginia established its theatrical, musical and motion picture presentation tradition that continues into the 21st Century.

Another operational element of the Virginia Theater building that was launched in 1921 was the satellite commercial uses of the storefronts adjoining the theater entrance. For over a decade, the far eastern commercial space was the confectionary supporting the theater. The Pembroke Cadillac Company initially occupied the space immediately to the west of the theater entrance. Other tenants of these Park Avenue storefronts over the years have included the Chicago Motor Club, Waltmire's Dress Shop, Rueter Optical Service and Charles B. Younger & Son Realty and Insurance. Small businesses and not-for-profit organizations were active tenants in these commercial spaces until 1999.¹⁵

Stoolman, with Pyle as manager until 1923 and manager Albert Gonsior after the Stoolman-Pyle split,¹⁶ continued to operate the Virginia until 1930. During the Stoolman era, vaudeville acts and motion pictures were the primary presentations at the theater. Talking pictures came to the Virginia on 10 March 1929 with the showing of *The Last Warning*.¹⁷ In May of 1930, the Radio-Keith-Orpheum Corporation (RKO), a national theater conglomerate, entered into a lease with A.W. Stoolman for operation of the Virginia, an arrangement that would continue until 1967.

RKO continued the tradition of booking its Orpheum circuit vaudeville acts at the Virginia until the art form began to lose popularity with audiences in the 1930s due to the emergence of the modern motion picture industry.¹⁸ Vaudeville performers at the Virginia during Stoolman's and RKO's management included Charlie Chaplin, Red Skelton, and Jack Dempsey. Tallulah Bankhead in *The Little Foxes* and Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians participated in the periodic theatrical productions and concerts at the Virginia during the Stoolman and RKO management eras.¹⁹

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RKO fully comprehended the shift in audience preference to motion pictures over live acts. Under RKO manager Grant Martin, the Virginia became a premiere first run movie house programming primarily light/romantic comedies, musicals, dramas and classic literary adaptations produced by major Hollywood Studios such as Fox and MGM. In 1953, RKO introduced widescreen Cinemascope features to the Virginia's audiences.²⁰

RKO's era of management was not physically uneventful for the Virginia Theater building. In 1936, RKO installed air conditioning in the building by readapting lower level dressing room spaces for the required equipment.²¹ In 1955, local contractor C.A. Petry and Sons remodeled the entrance lobby following the specifications of New York based RKO retainer architect James Murmo.²²

Nor were the activities at the theater during RKO's watch totally entertainment or improvement related. During early February of 1937, a gang of thieves backed a truck up to the entrance, broke down an entrance door and carted off the theater's 550 pound safe in an after hours raid. The burglars netted close to \$800 in theater receipts and checks. The truck, stolen from the Kirby Motors used car lot on University Avenue in Champaign, and safe were recovered northeast of Urbana shortly after the incident.²³

RKO chose to terminate its lease with the Stoolman family in May of 1967. Stoolman's daughter Virginia and her husband William Julian assumed day-to-day management of the theater as the Virginia Theater Company, Inc. until selling the Virginia to the Kerasotes Theater Corporation, later GKC, in 1968. With the arrival of the multiplexes in the Champaign-Urbana area in the 1970s and 80s, GKC found it unprofitable to continue presenting movies exclusively at the Virginia. Theatrical productions, such as *Oh! Calcutta*, were presented during this era. Following RKO's lead of the resurgence of concert presentations (Peter and Gordon in 1967)²⁴ at the end of its tenancy, GKC offered the facility to private promoters for a fee. Rock and blues acts, such as Stevie Ray Vaughn and Double Trouble and the Fabulous Thunderbirds played the Virginia during the mid-1980s. Neither of these types of presentations allowed substantial long-term relief from the ever-increasing operating overhead issues plaguing the theater. GKC ceased operations at the theater in February of 1992 with its final movie presentation, *Father of the Bride*, starring Steve Martin.²⁵

Gospel music performers David and Sharon Wyper entered into a lease agreement with GKC in 1992 and began booking a diversified catalog of concert performers and theatrical productions at the Virginia. The Wypers drew on their contacts in the Christian-music industry to present a consistent bill of contemporary Christian acts such as DC Talk, Twila Parks and the Newsboys.

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Popular music artists Tori Amos, Allison Krauss and Material Issue also performed. Touring theatrical groups and local Champaign-Urbana Theater Company presented productions such as *Bye Bye Birdie*, *Phantom of the Opera* and *A Chorus Line* during this era. The facility was also made available for local meetings, rallies and seminars. The 3½ year Wyper's managerial period was successful and proved that the Virginia Theater filled a live entertainment niche in the community.²⁶

In 1995, the not-for-profit Virginia Theater Group initiated a fund drive for \$1.2 million to buy and renovate the Virginia. The deal was closed in December of 1995 with the assistance of a \$500,000 City of Champaign loan. Local businessman William Capel provided a \$100,000 line of credit to address life safety and accessibility code deficiencies.²⁷ The Wypers were retained as managers until the spring of June of 1996 when it became evident there were management problems at the theater. "No, rent has been paid, bills are outstanding and the Wypers have retained all income from the performances", George Scheetz, then Virginia Theater Board President, said at the time.²⁸ The Wyper's managerial contract was not renewed and they were released in June of 1996. The Virginia Theater Board hired John Eby as interim manager and moved forward with their renovation and continued use plans.

Debt reduction funding became a critical issue by 1998 and the Virginia Theater Group initiated another fund raising campaign, this time for \$2.5 million. The campaign netted marginal results. In September of 1998, The Virginia Theater Group merged with the Champaign-Urbana Theater Group to become the CUTG at the Virginia, which owned and operated the building until the end of the century. Even though limited performances continued and Chicago Sun Times film critic Roger Ebert's annual Overlooked Film Festival was introduced, prospects for the Virginia's continued survival did not look good.

The Virginia Theater was likely saved from an undesirable fate in the year 2000 when the Champaign Park District (CPD) assumed ownership. CPD invested \$1.7 million in primarily life-safety code work during its first 2 years of ownership and the City of Champaign contributed to the preservation of the Virginia by forgiving more than \$700,000 in debt.²⁹ A four-phase facility improvement program is currently in its second phase. Major objectives of the improvement program include restoration of the exterior façade and entrance lobby, plaster repairs and a rearward extension to the stage area.³⁰

The CPD continues to present a variety of events at the Virginia. In 2002, the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, classic motion pictures and Roger Ebert's 4th Annual Overlooked Film Festival were just a few of the presentations that were attended by approximately 75,000 Virginia's patrons.

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The 2003 season looks appears more promising with the first major theatrical presentation being the popular *Vagina Monologues*.

VIRGINIA THEATER ARCHITECTURE AND INCORPORATED STYLES

The exterior and interior architectural design of the Virginia Theater building was intended to mimic the opulent expression that characterized the top-line theaters being constructed in the U.S. during the early 20th Century. The application of Italian Renaissance Revival and Spanish Renaissance Revival details to the theater building is consistent with the development of motion picture and atmospheric theater design during that time period. While the French Renaissance Revival interior of Champaign's New Orpheum Theater introduced local patrons to a grander auditorium style seven years earlier, the Virginia's interior exhibition of Spanish Renaissance Revival arched and balcony features with intricate Baroque plaster and wrought iron detailing was unique to the community.

Italian Renaissance Revival Style

The Italian Renaissance Revival style of architecture, which was popular in the U.S. in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, had its origin during the 15th and 16th Centuries Italian Renaissance era. The Renaissance saw the development of the first "modern" architecture. The architectural language invented by the Italian Renaissance architects became the dominant design approach of the modern world, only displaced by the advent of modernist architecture in the 20th Century.³¹

The architects of the Renaissance derived their approach from an interest in Greek and Roman ruins and the multi-volume text by Roman writer Vitruvius, "On Architecture." Also, they invented a new idea of public space in which civic pride and organization would be established on a citywide scale. The art rested on several principles derived from Vitruvius's books. The most important being symmetry that demanded that parts be geometrically balanced. Also important was the principle of disposition where parts of the architectural whole must be harmonious with one another. In the mid 16th Century, some architects such as Michelangelo began to rebel against Vitruvian theory and experiment with asymmetry and wildly incongruous mixtures of architectural elements. This style was designated Mannerist after a similar phenomenon in Renaissance painting.³²

The Italian Renaissance architecture of this period was dominated by flat surfaces and strong lines, inspired by the principles of linear perspective in drawing invented by Italian Filippo

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Brunelleschi. Italian designers created two new types of buildings during this era, the villa and the palazzo. The villa was a country house for the wealthy and powerful. The palazzo was a townhouse incorporating similar features. These designs migrated to public buildings, intending to express the powerful stature of their occupants. The most representative example of the Italian Renaissance style in a public vein is St. Peter's and the Vatican in Rome³³

The Italian Renaissance Revival style was introduced in the U.S. to contrast to Gothic-inspired Victorian styles of the late 19th Century. This revival style imitates more closely than the original Italian Renaissance design that had interpretations through the Italianate style in the mid-19th Century. This was due in part to the visitation of Italy by U.S. architects for observation of the original resources, improved photographic detailing techniques and the perfection of the masonry veneering process after World War I. The style declined in popularity in the U.S. through the 1930s and post-1940s examples are rare.³⁴

Spanish Renaissance Revival Style

The Spanish Colonial Revival architectural style, which had lost its popularity to other styles by the Mid-19th Century, was revitalized in the early 20th Century in the expression of the Mission and Spanish Renaissance Revival styles. The unique features of these revival styles were the ornate low-relief carvings highlighting arches, columns, window surrounds, cornice and parapets. Iron window grilles, balustrades, balconies and wooden spindle work within arched openings were also common design features.³⁵ The Spanish Renaissance Revival style often integrates decorative details from the entire history of Spanish architecture including dramatically carved arched doors emphasized by adjacent spiral columns and pilasters. Large triple-arched window openings incorporating stained glass are also common. It was not until the Panama-California Exhibition in San Diego in 1915 that precise imitations of the more elaborate Spanish styles saw adoption by designers.³⁶

The Spanish Renaissance Revival style is at its most common in the southwestern part of the U.S., but scattered examples exist in suburban developments throughout the country. The style enjoyed substantial popularity during the 1920s and 1930s but quickly diminished in appeal during the 1940s.³⁷

ARCHITECTS, BUILDERS, OWNERS AND MANAGERS

C. Howard Crane -- Architect

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C. (Charles) Howard Crane, the chief architect associated with the design of the Virginia Theater, was an architect/engineer of international distinction. Born in Hartford, Connecticut in 1885, Crane was educated in local public schools and upon graduation from high school went to work as a local draftsman in 1904. In 1905, Crane moved to Detroit, Michigan where he worked for Albert Kahn, noted factory architect, from 1905-07.³⁸ After experience with Kahn, Crane shifted to the newly formed firm of Smith, Hinchman & Grylls, currently the Smith Group, Inc., which received many University of Michigan and General Motors Corporation commissions. In 1909, Crane started his own Detroit based architectural firm, which specialized in theater design.³⁹

Over the ensuing 23 years, Crane would supervise the design of over 200 theaters in the United States. Significant examples include the Fox Theaters in Detroit and St. Louis, the Harris Selwyn Theater (Goodman) in Chicago, the Warner Theater in Washington, D.C. and the United Artists Theater in Los Angeles. Crane also broadened his market by designing facilities such as Detroit's 1927 Olympia Stadium the first home of the Detroit Red Wings National Hockey League franchise and the site of major musical concerts such as the Beatles Detroit performances in 1964 and 1965.⁴⁰ Crane's Orchestra Hall (1919) in Detroit remains one of the premiere symphony orchestra venues in the U.S.⁴¹

In 1932, Crane relocated to London, England where he opened a satellite office and continued to design entertainment related structures. An example of his U.K. theater work is the 1938 Gaumont (Holloway Oden) in North London, which demonstrates Crane's shift from classical influenced designs to the more contemporary art deco/international styles. The most notable U.K. design by Crane is the Earl's Court Exhibition Centre in the South Kensington area of London.

What could be considered a precursor to the Chicago's McCormick Place and the Long Beach Convention and Entertainment Center, London's 1937 Earl Court Exhibition Centre gave the city a facility that could accommodate any type of function from water polo matches to major trade shows. Crane drew from his experience in theater and stadium design to produce a dynamic, triangular, art moderne masterpiece. The Exhibition Centre was built on a twelve acre site at the intersection of numerous London light and heavy rail lines, had over 450,000 square feet of exhibition space, could accommodate a variety of events at the same time and seated over 30,000 patrons.⁴² The Earls Court Exhibition Centre is still in operation. Recent events have included pop music concerts by Madonna and Coldplay and the 2000 London Boat Show.

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During World War II, Crane devoted himself to building British munitions factories. After the war, he helped with the rebuilding of London.⁴³ One of his last commissions was an automobile assembly building for the Austin Motor Company, Ltd. at Longbridge, Birmingham, England.⁴⁴ Crane passed away in London in August of 1952.⁴⁵

Kenneth Franzheim – Architect

Kenneth Franzheim was born on 28 October 1890 in Wheeling, West Virginia. He graduated with a Bachelor of Arts from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1913. After graduation, he worked for Boston architect Welles Bosworth until 1917. Franzheim served as a first flight lieutenant in the U.S. Army Air Corps at Ellington Field outside of Houston, Texas for two years during World War I.

In 1920, Franzheim became a partner with C. Howard Crane of Detroit and worked for Crane in Chicago and Boston. In 1925, Franzheim went into independent practice in New York specializing in the design of large commercial buildings and airports. After gaining numerous commissions in Houston, Franzheim permanently relocated his practice there in 1937. From 1941 to 1944, he worked in Washington, D.C. Upon returning to Houston, he became the foremost commercial architect in the city. Most of the buildings he produced in Houston were of the Modernistic style. Franzheim was particularly interested in incorporating works of art into his architecture. His chief designer was Ben A. Dore, another former Crane partner. Some of Franzheim's Houston buildings include the Prudential Building, Texas National Bank building and Foley's Department Store. Franzheim died on 13 March 1959 in Mexico and was interred in Houston's Glenwood Cemetery.⁴⁶

George E. Ramey – Supervising Architect

George Ramey was born in Paxton, Illinois in 1889. He moved with his family to Champaign in 1900 and attended local schools, culminating with his graduation from the University of Illinois with a degree in architecture in 1912. Working initially for Zimmerman and Saxe in Chicago, Ramey was later in business for a number of years in the Champaign-Urbana community. He was responsible for the design of locally significant Champaign buildings including Robeson's Department Store, the Champaign City Building, Champaign Central High School, numerous University of Illinois fraternity and sorority houses and a new wing to Burnham City Hospital.⁴⁷

Ramey was as dedicated to the nation as he was to the community. He served in France as a Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Engineer Corps during World War I. He served as a reserve officer

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for 20 years and was called to local duty in 1940. In June of 1942, Ramey was assigned to General Eisenhower's staff at Supreme Allied Command in London as a the transportation officer. Ramey supervised much of the work on English harbor facilities in preparation for the massive influx of U.S. troops and equipment and eventually coordinated U.S. Army transportation operations in and around London. Ramey was a Colonel when the war in Europe ended.⁴⁸

In March of 1946, Ramey suffered a cerebral hemorrhage just as he was re-establishing his architectural practice. He recovered but had retired to Hollywood, Florida by the 1950s. Ramey died in Florida in August of 1961.⁴⁹

Almon Winfield (A.W.) Stoolman – Builder/Owner

A.W. Stoolman was born in Paxton, Illinois on 14 September 1876 and sporadically attended the University of Illinois from 1891 to 1897 following a Liberal Arts and Sciences curriculum.⁵⁰ After leaving the university, he became a regional general contractor of note. His firm's contracts included buildings at the State of Illinois' St. Charles School for Boys, the Roberts Hotel in Muncie, Indiana, the U.S. Army Camp McClellan Cantonment in Anniston, Alabama and Smith Music Hall and the Woman's Residence Hall at the University of Illinois in Urbana.

Stoolman came to own the Virginia Theater as a result of his role as general contractor. Virginia Theater developer Charles Pyle approached Stoolman in July of 1921 "...for certain concessions in regard to the erection of the said Virginia Theater not provided for in the contract of said A.W. Stoolman for erection of said Theater and also applied to him for aid in financing the same..."⁵¹ The result was the formation of the Stoolman-Pyle Corporation in September of 1921, which evolved into the Rialto Theater Company in 1922.

The deal that Stoolman eventually made with Pyle in February of 1922 was that Stoolman would buy out Porter's share of the Virginia and Rialto Theaters for approximately \$12,000. Under the name of the Rialto Theater Company, a corporation was formed by Stoolman, Pyle and H.E. McNevin for ownership/management of the Virginia and management of the Rialto. The capital stock held by the partners was Stoolman, 50%, Pyle, 47% and McNevin, 3%. At the first Board of Directors meeting on 28 February 1922 Pyle was elected President, Stoolman Vice-President and McNevin Secretary, Treasurer and Manager of the corporation.⁵²

By April of 1924, Stoolman and Pyle were counter suing each other in the Champaign County Circuit Court over corporation expenditures and auditing of/possession of the books. In the same

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year, Pyle was no longer listed in the Champaign City Directory as being associated with the Virginia Theater management.⁵³ During this period, Stoolman acquired sole interest in the Virginia and operated the facility under the management of Albert Gonsior.

In 1961, the Virginia Theater Company consisted of Almon Stoolman, President, and William Julian, Stoolman's son in law, as Vice President. After A.W. Stoolman's death on 5 April 1965, Julian became President of the company and Elizabeth Virginia Stoolman-Julian performed the duties of Secretary. The Stoolman family ownership of the Virginia Theater ended in 1967, when it was purchased by the Kerasotes Theater Corporation.⁵⁴

Charles C. Pyle – Developer/Manager

Virginia Theater visionary Charles C. (C.C.) Pyle was born in Delaware, Ohio in 1882. The son of a Methodist minister, Pyle attended college at Ohio Wesleyan and afterwards, experimented with a variety of professions including sales, boxing and acting before settling in Chicago in 1910 and finding a niche in entertainment management and sports promotion.⁵⁵

C.C. Pyle, also known as Cash and Carry Pyle, was managing the Rialto Theater in Champaign, Illinois after World War I. Pyle formed a partnership with Rialto proprietor Richard A. Porter and proceeded to plan for the building of a new theater in Champaign, which would eventually evolve into the Virginia. Porter backed out of the partnership and Pyle approached the general contractor A.W. Stoolman for concessions on his contract and fiscal help. The result was a partnership between Stoolman and Pyle, which disintegrated by 1923. Pyle remained in the community, residing at the Beardsley Hotel.⁵⁶

In November of 1925, Pyle surfaced again, this time as the personal manager of University of Illinois football star Harold "Red" Grange. There was a shadow of impropriety concerning Grange's early exit from the Illini football program to sign with the Chicago Bears National Football League franchise. Also in question was at which point a management contract between Grange and Pyle had been executed.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, Pyle went on to manage Grange's career through his retirement due to injury in 1928. It was one of the first instances in U.S. business in which a sports agent successfully pursued and negotiated endorsement contracts for his client. During this period, Pyle also promoted a tour by French tennis star Suzanne Lenglen.⁵⁸ After Grange's retirement, Pyle took on his biggest promotion.

In 1928, Cyrus Avery, a national road network advocate, and the U.S. Highway Association were looking for a vehicle to promote the newly completed Route 66 between Chicago to Los

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Angeles. Avery concluded that the best way to prove to the American public that Route 66 was safe for lengthy driving was to hold a foot race on it. If it were safe for runners, surely it would be safe for automobiles.⁵⁹

The man chosen to organize and promote the foot race, popularly known as the "Bunion Derby," was Pyle. Much hoopla and promotion preceded the start of the race at Ascot Speedway in Los Angeles on 4 March 1928. Pyle had purchased two luxurious touring buses he dubbed "America" for his and his dignitaries comfort during the 3,400+-mile race to New York. A carnival would accompany the race and set up at each night's stop. Pyle also charged communities for having the race just pass through.⁶⁰

The race progressed at an average pace of 40+ miles per day and was not without incident. The carnival was shut down in Rolla, Missouri for holding "games of chance." The luxury tour buses were confiscated in Joliet, Illinois when Pyle's loan at the Illinois Trust and Savings Bank in Champaign was called in. When the race reached its conclusion on 27 May 1928 at Madison Square Garden in New York with Andy Payne of Oklahoma as the winner, Pyle was broke and could not pay the prize money. Pyle was bailed out by legendary boxing promoter Tex Rickard and F.F. Gunn, whose son had participated in and finished the race. Pyle promoted a run from New York to Los Angeles the next year, but upon conclusion, there was no one to bail him out and no prize money was awarded.⁶¹

Pyle turned up next at the 1933 Century of Progress World's Fair in Chicago managing *Ripley's Believe It or Not*. His next venture was as President of the Radio Transcription Company, which prepared recordings for radio broadcasts. Pyle died in February of 1939.⁶²

VIRGINIA THEATER – COMPARISON TO OTHER BUILDINGS

The Virginia Theater has no equal in the Champaign-Urbana area. Its combination of early 20th Century Italian and Spanish Renaissance Revival styles is unparalleled in either commercial or residential form. As an operational, early-20th Century, multi-purpose theater, it stands alone in the community to interpret the feeling and association with this era. Perhaps the only other performing arts resources in the area that could compete with the Virginia Theater are the 1907 Beaux Arts Foellinger Auditorium and the National Register listed 1920 Beaux Arts Smith Memorial Hall on the University of Illinois campus, but the difference in architecture, form and historic uses of these examples demonstrates that they are significant for other contexts than the Virginia.

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The Virginia Theater remains as one of only a few extant C. Howard Crane designed, small market theaters that retain integrity and continue to function as was intended. Other examples that, along with the Virginia, enhance Crane's national context are the Macomb (Emerald) Theater in Mt. Clemens, Michigan, and the Majestic Theater in Detroit.

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⁴⁵ "Crane, Charles Howard," *Who Was Who In America*, Vol. 3 (Chicago: The A.N. Marquis Company, 1960), 192.

⁴⁶ Handbook of Texas Online, "Kenneth Franzheim," <http://www.tsha.edu/handbook/online> (18 November 2002), 1-2.

⁴⁷ "George Ramey, 71, Architect, Dies Sunday," *Champaign News Gazette*, 7 August 1961.

⁴⁸ *Champaign News-Gazette*, 13 November 1940, 24 February 1946 & 7 August 1961.

⁴⁹ "George Ramey, 71. Architect, Dies Sunday," *Champaign News Gazette*, 7 August 1961.

⁵⁰ Christopher Prom. Interview by Stephen A. Thompson. Champaign, Illinois; 04 February 2003.

⁵¹ Rialto Theater Co., a corporation, and A.W. Stoolman v. Charles C. Pyle and H.E. McNevin, 7150 Champaign County, Illinois Circuit Court (1924).

⁵² Ibid.

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⁵³ Scheetz, *Businesses in the Virginia Theater*, 1.

⁵⁴ "75 YEARS...Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," Champaign Park District: Virginia Theater, www.thevirgina.org/history.htm (25 October 2002), 1.

⁵⁵ "The Great American Foot Race: C.C. Pyle," Independent Television Service, www.itvs.org/footrace/progress/ccpyle.htm (04 February 2003), 1.

⁵⁶ *City Directory of Champaign-Urbana, Illinois* (Champaign: Clark and Ewell Co., Publishers, 1923).

⁵⁷ "Grange Turns Professional, To Visit U.I., To Speak at Banquet, Then Go to Bears," *Champaign News-Gazette*, 23 November 1925.

⁵⁸ "The Great American Foot Race: C.C. Pyle," 1.

⁵⁹ "The Great American Foot Race: The Documentary," Independent Television Service, www.itvs.org/footrace/documentary.doc.htm (04 February 2003), 1.

⁶⁰ "The Great American Foot Race: Progress of the Race; Map-Points of Interest," Independent Television Service, www.itvs.org/footrace/progress/ (04 February 2003).

⁶¹ "The Great American Foot Race: Progress of the Race; Map-Points of Interest," Independent Television Service, www.itvs.org/footrace/progress/ny_pa.htm + [il.htm](http://www.itvs.org/footrace/progress/il.htm) (04 February 2003), 1.

⁶² "The Great American Foot Race: C.C. Pyle," 1.

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Virginia Theater

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning at a point approximately 30' southwest of the intersection of North Randolph Street and West Park Street in Champaign, Illinois, proceed west 132' parallel to Park Street. Then proceed 142' south parallel to the west elevation of the Virginia Theater Building. After reaching the alley at the rear of the Virginia Theater Building, proceed east 136' to the intersection of the west side Randolph Street sidewalk. Then proceed 142' north along the east elevation of the Virginia Theater Building to the point of origin.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

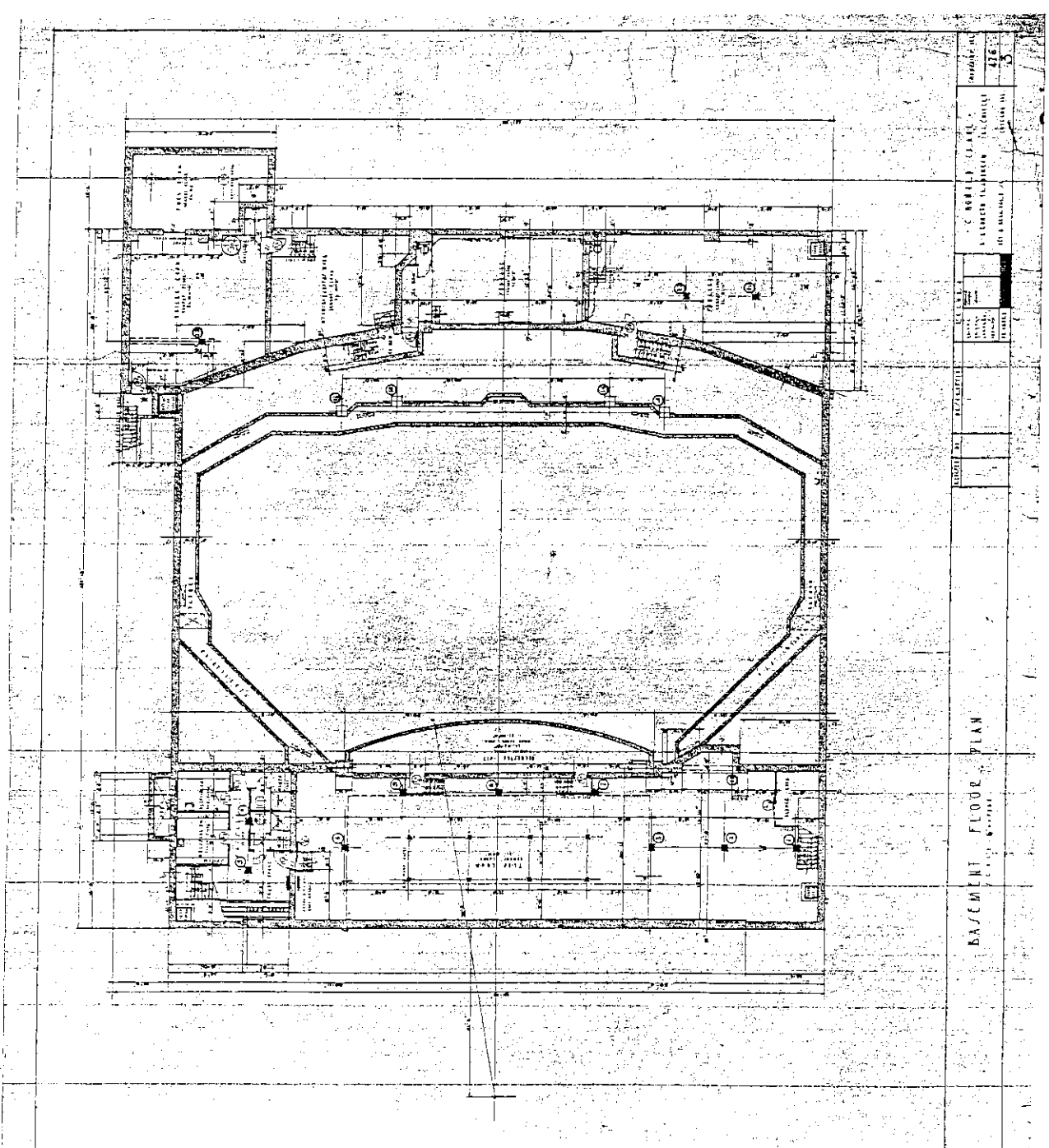
The boundary includes the Virginia Theater Building and adjacent/protruding features; marquis, entry plaza, fire escapes, below grade entry/exit, associated with the Virginia Theater Building and that maintain historic integrity.

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Virginia Theater

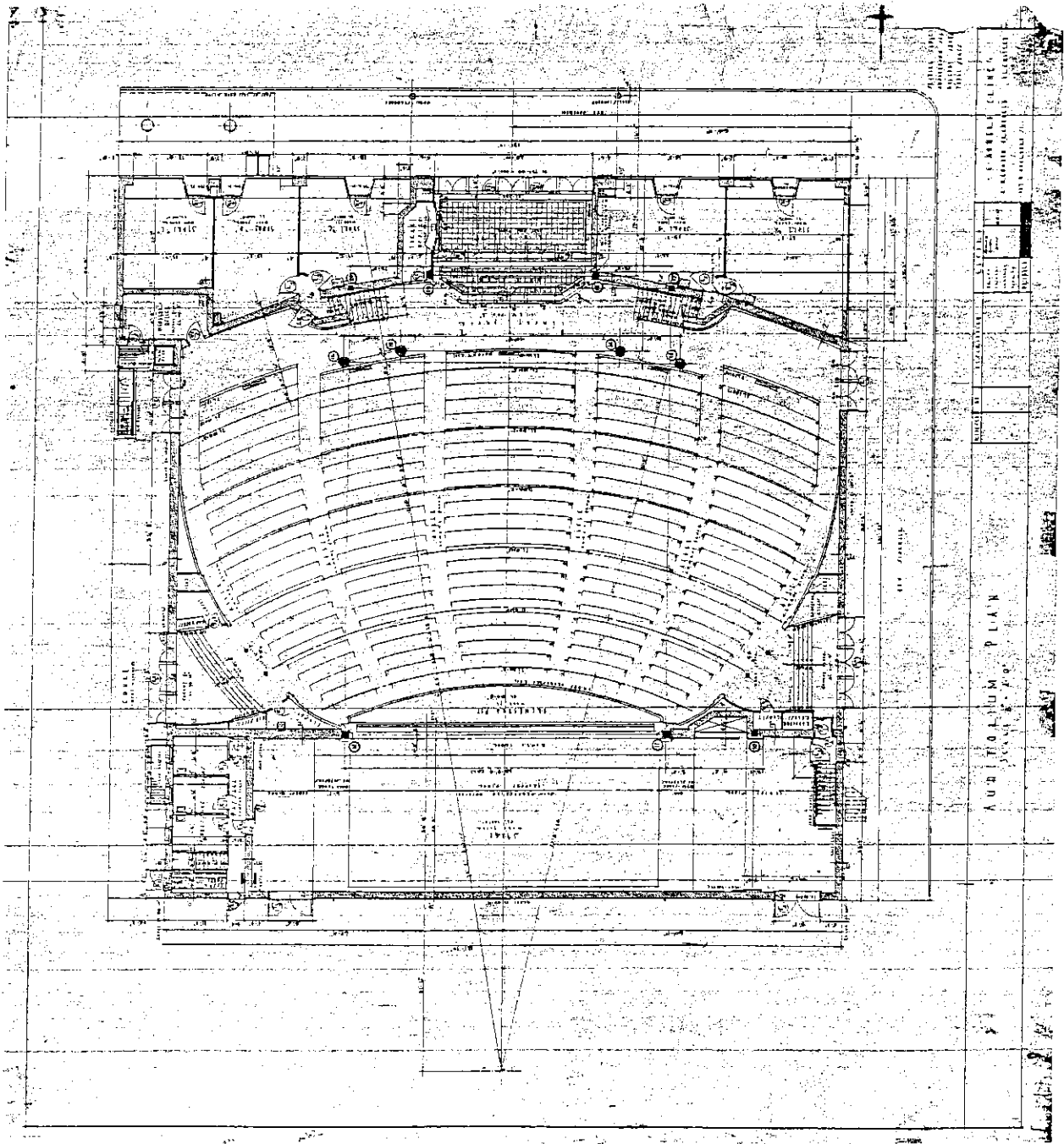


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Virginia Theater

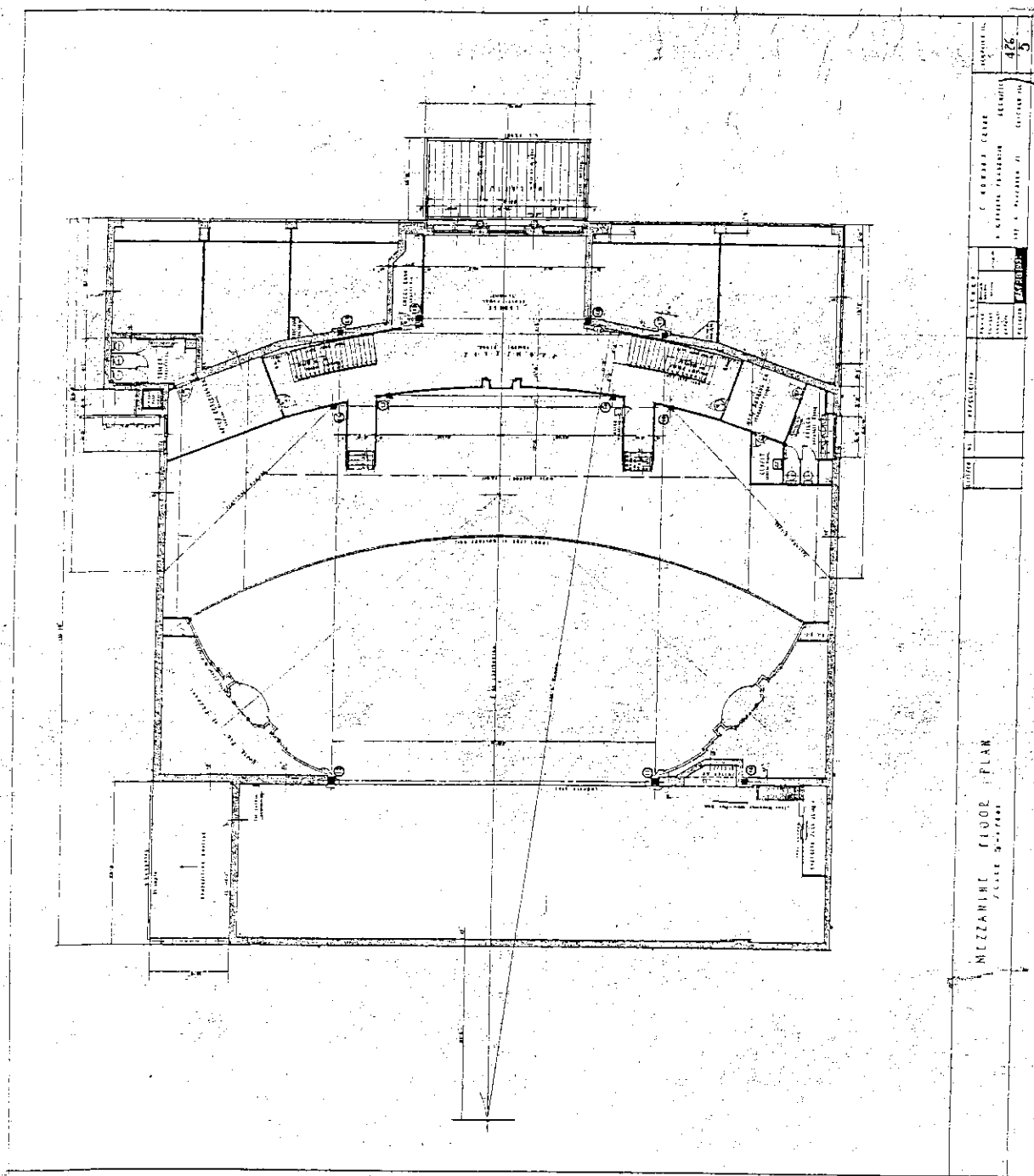


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Virginia Theater

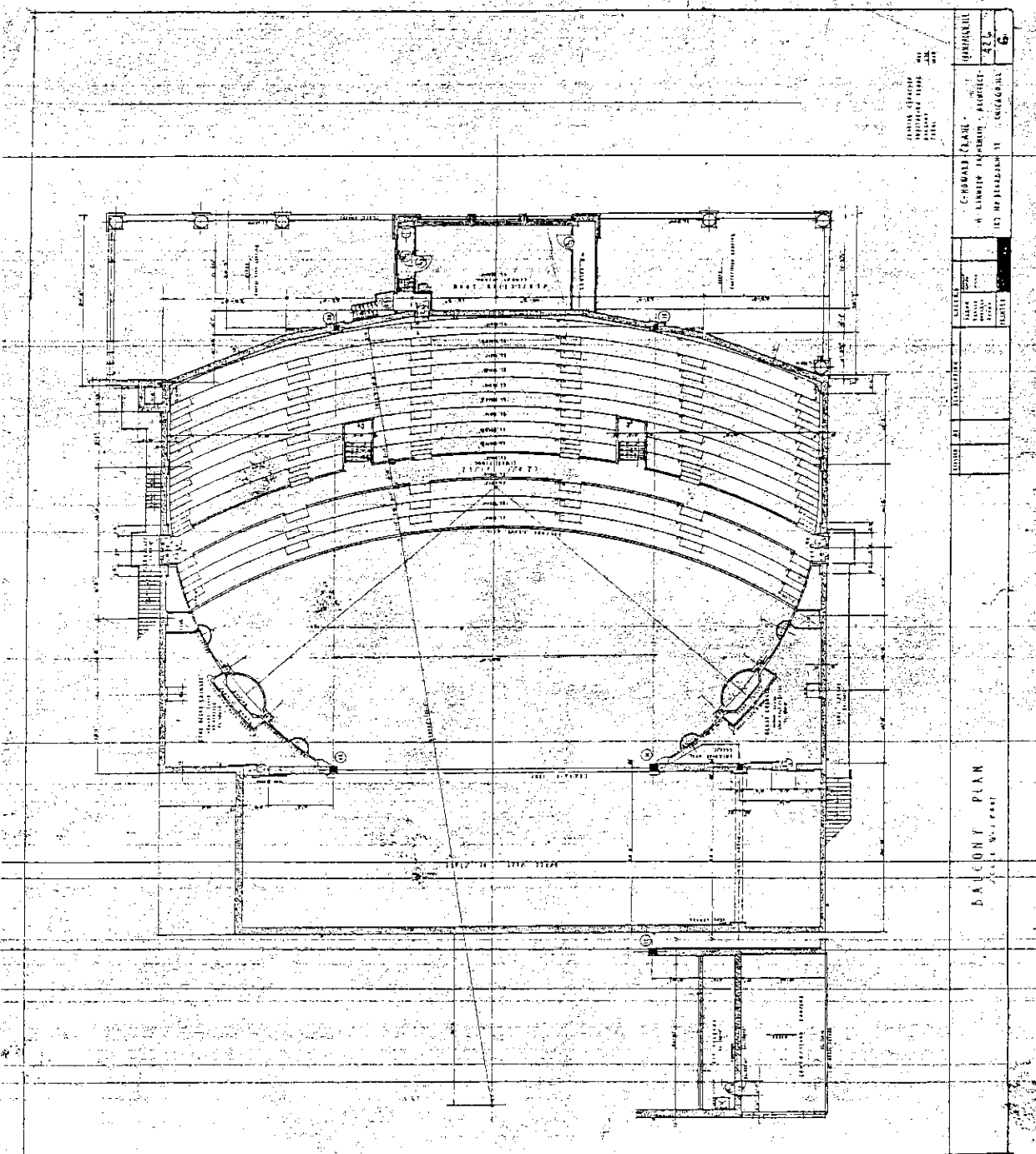


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Virginia Theater

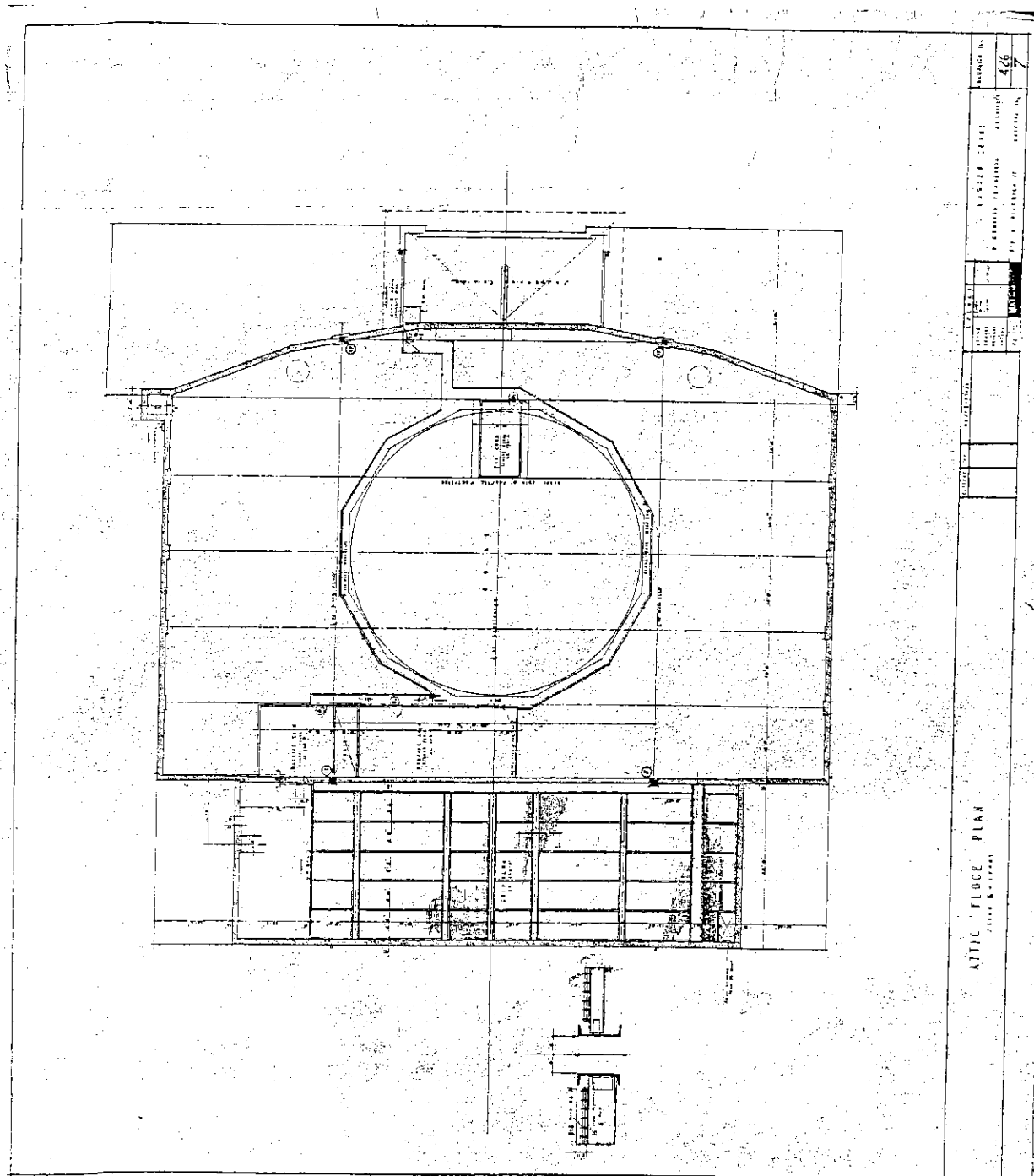


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Virginia Theater



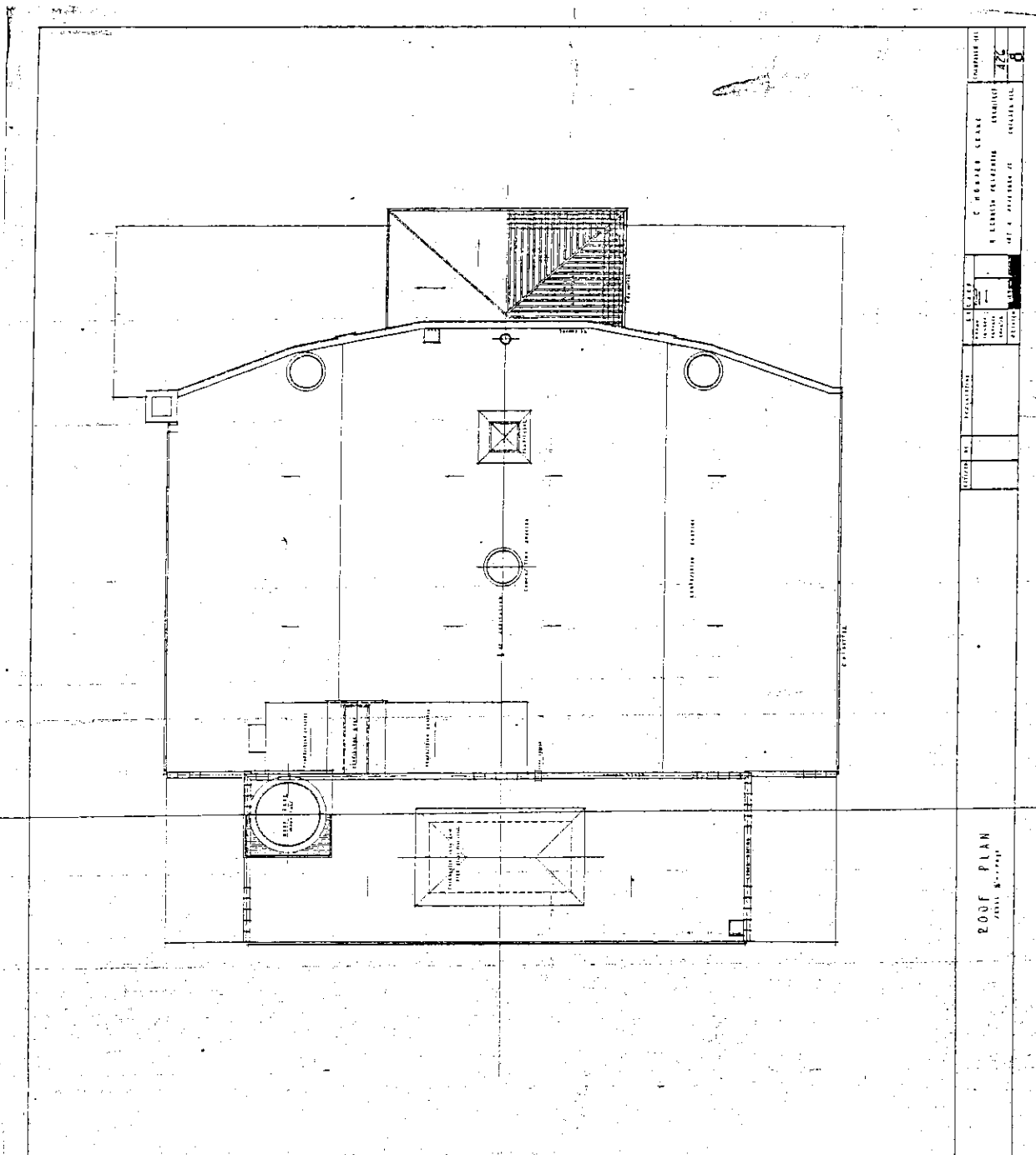
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Virginia Theater



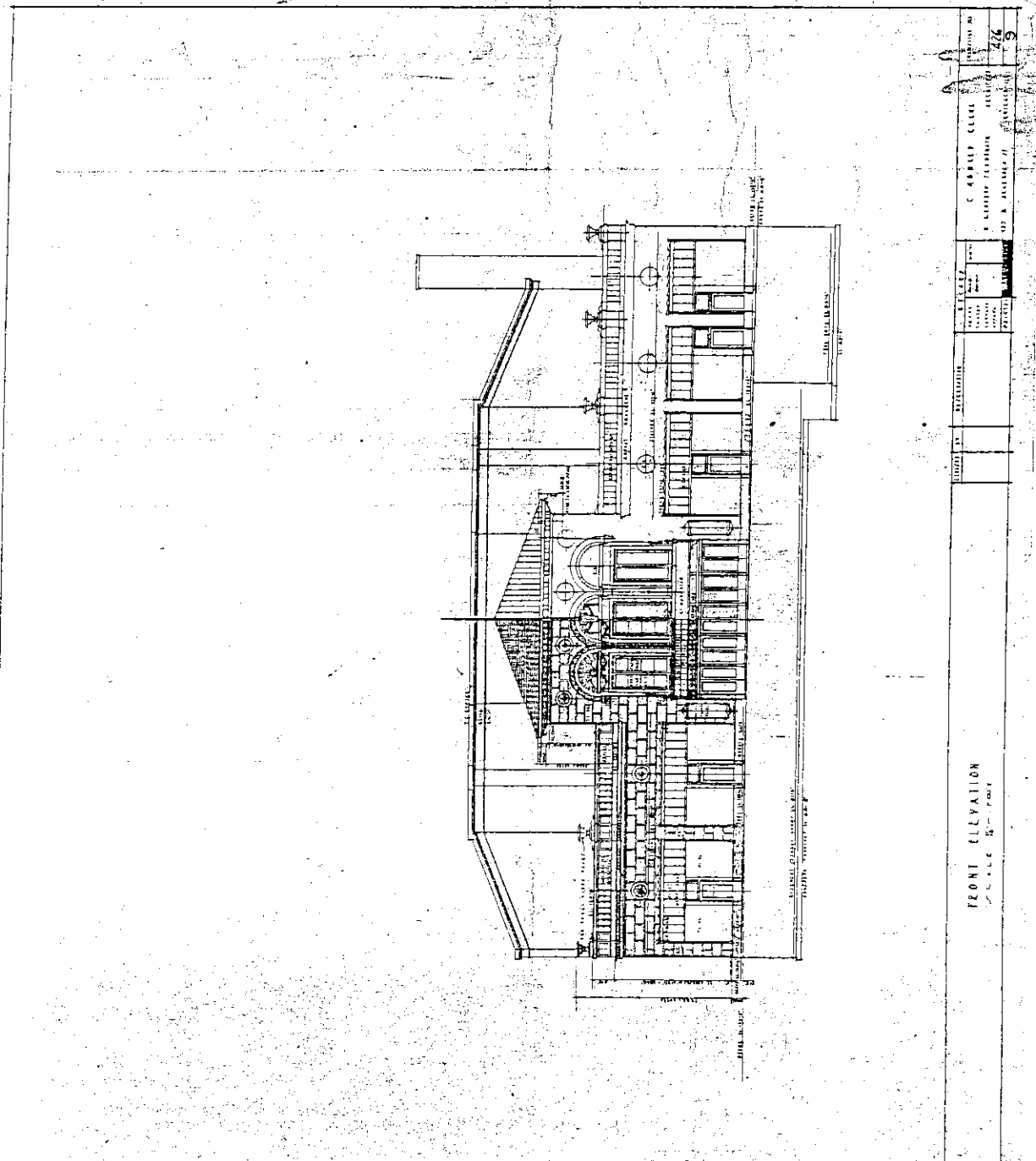
DATE	1988
BY	...
CHECKED BY	...
APPROVED BY	...
TITLE	ROOF PLAN
PROJECT	VIRGINIA THEATER
LOCATION	...
SCALE	...
DATE	...
BY	...
CHECKED BY	...
APPROVED BY	...
TITLE	ROOF PLAN
PROJECT	VIRGINIA THEATER
LOCATION	...
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DATE	...
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Virginia Theater

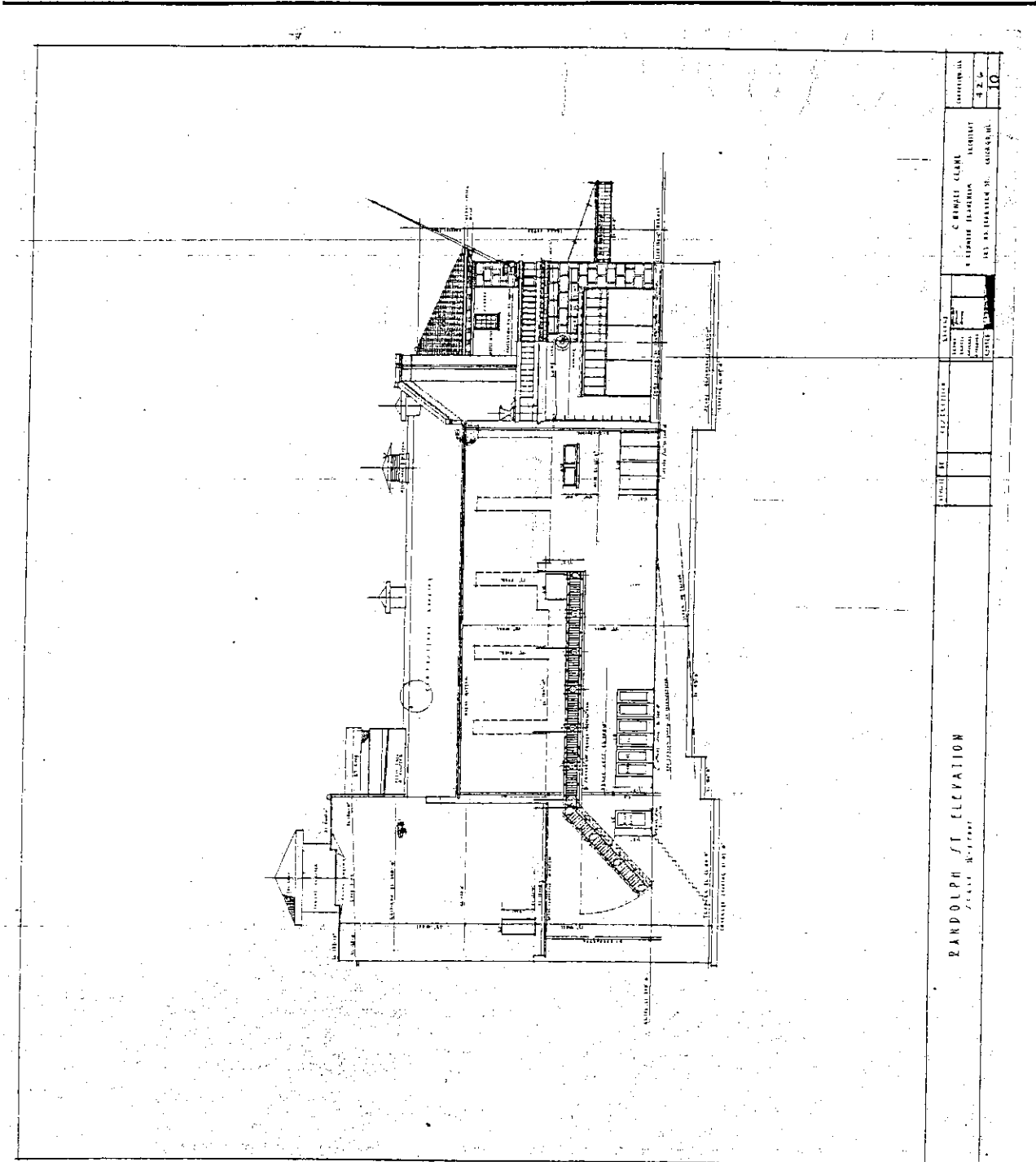


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Virginia Theater

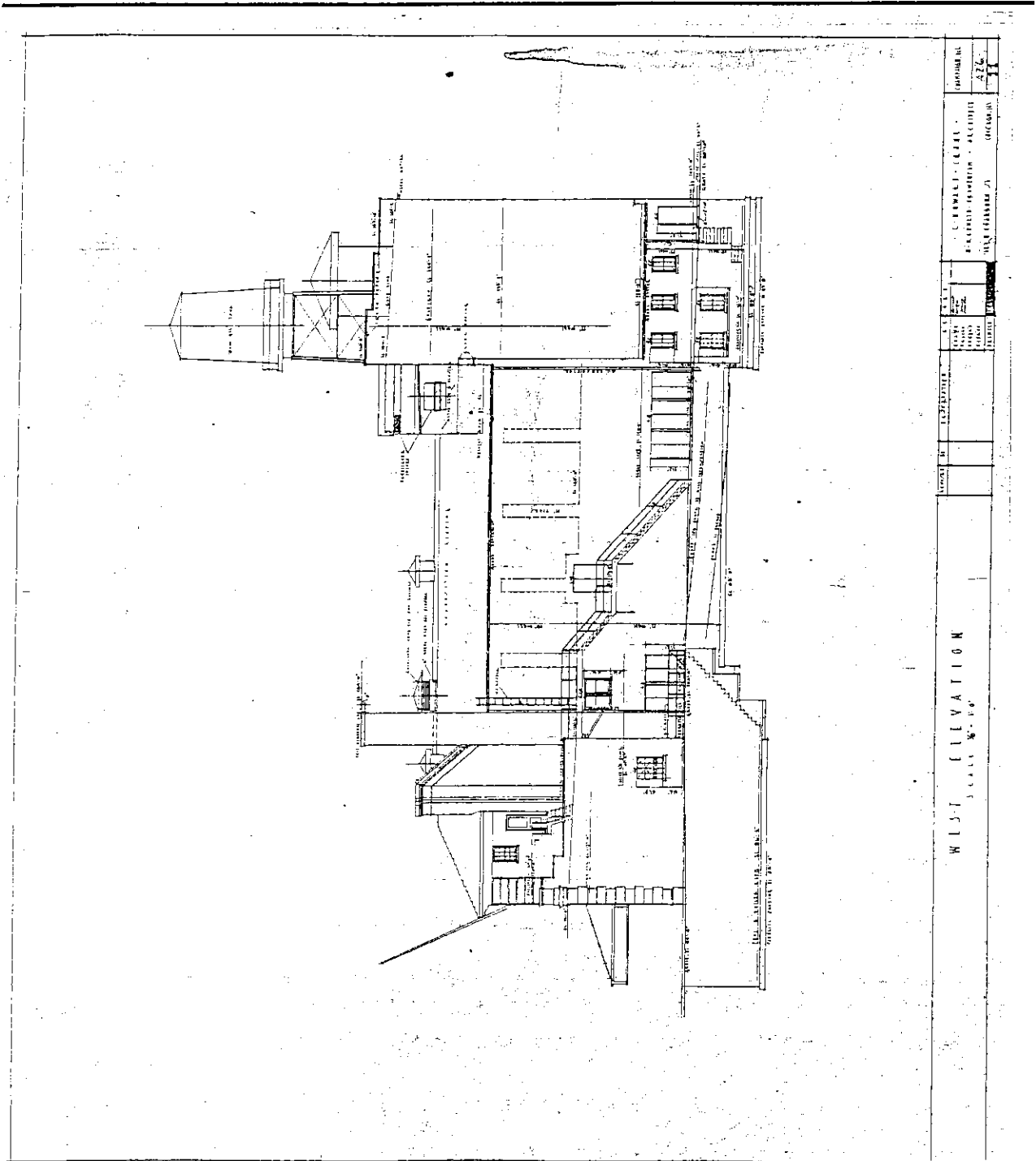


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Virginia Theater

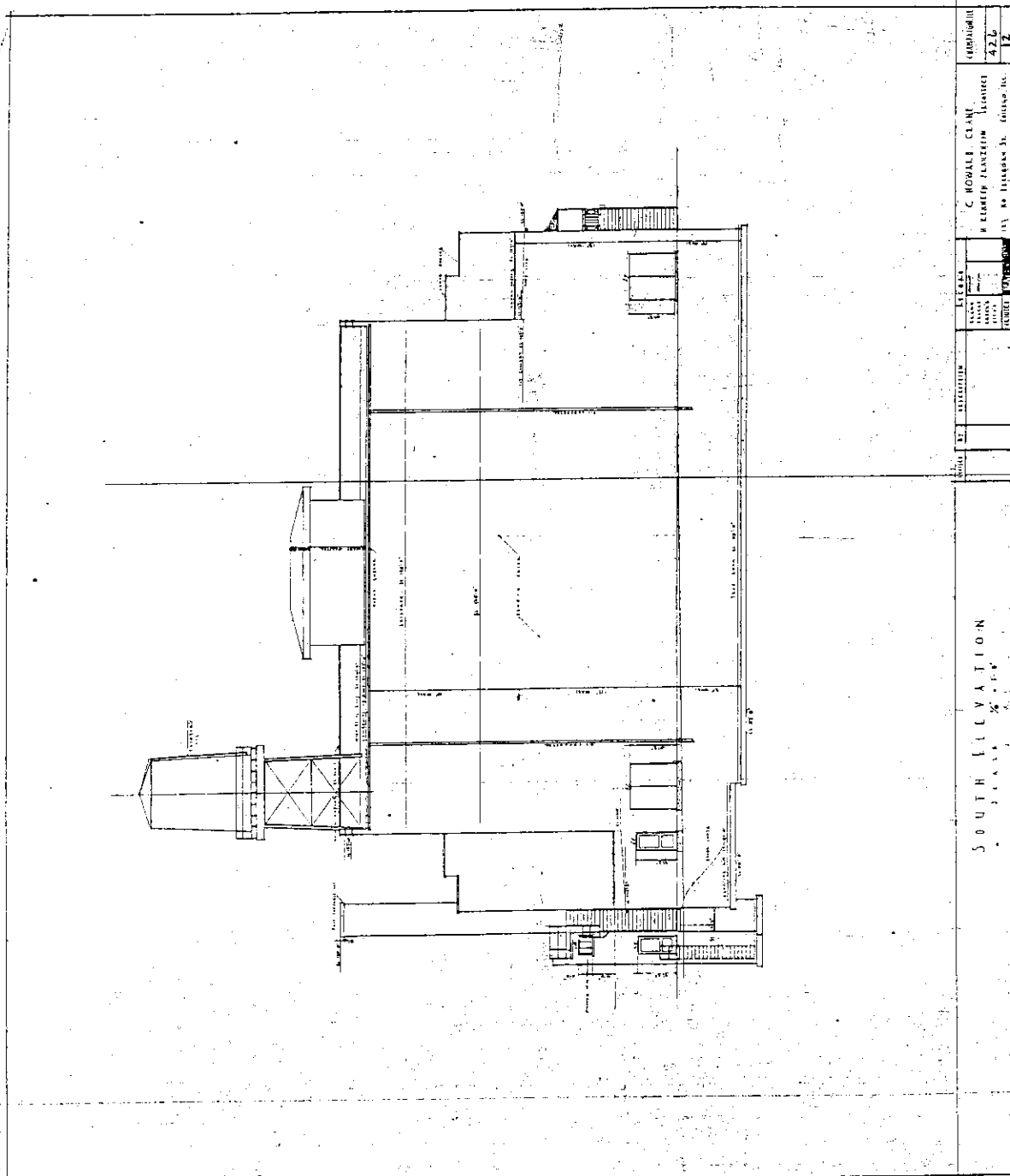


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Virginia Theater



DATE	BY	REVISION	LEADER	PROJECT	NO.	DATE
C. HOWARD CLARK				426		
# 12417 PLANNING - 11/19/61				12		
BY: 11/19/61						

LISTED, 7/02/03

AMERICAN SAMOA, MANU'A DISTRICT,
Faga Village Site,
Address Restricted,
Fitiuta vicinity, 99001228,
LISTED, 11/13/03

ARIZONA, MOHAVE COUNTY,
Peach Springs Trading Post,
863 W AZ 66,
Peach Springs, 03001196,
LISTED, 11/21/03

ARIZONA, MOHAVE COUNTY,
Schoolhouse at Truxton Canyon Training School,
AZ 66,
Valentine, 03001197,
LISTED, 11/21/03

Technical Correction:
DELAWARE, NEW CASTLE COUNTY,
New Castle Court House
211 Delaware Street,
New Castle, 72000285,
DESIGNATED NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK, 07/31/03

ILLINOIS, CHAMPAIGN COUNTY,
Virginia Theater,
203 W. Park Ave.,
Champaign, 03001201,
LISTED, 11/28/03

ILLINOIS, COOK COUNTY,
Des Plaines Theater,
1476 Miner St.,
Des Plaines, 03001198,
DETERMINED ELIGIBLE, 11/28/03

ILLINOIS, DE WITT COUNTY,
Magill House,
100 N. Center St.,
Clinton, 03001202,
LISTED, 11/28/03

ILLINOIS, HENRY COUNTY,
Atkinson Hall,
108 W. Main St.,
Genesco, 03001203,
LISTED, 11/28/03

ILLINOIS, KANE COUNTY,
Riverbank Laboratories,
1512 Batavia Ave.,
Geneva, 03001204,
LISTED, 11/28/03

ILLINOIS, KENDALL COUNTY,
Steward, Lewis, House,
611 E. Main St.,
Plano, 03001200,
LISTED, 11/28/03

ILLINOIS, LIVINGSTON COUNTY,

ILLINOIS HISTORIC SITES SURVEY INVENTORY

INFO ONLY

1. Name of Site:

113788

Common Virginia Theater

Historic

2. Location:

Street and Number

201 W. Park

Township

Section

City or Town

Zip Code

Range

¼ Section

Champaign

County Champaign

3. Classification:

Category (check one)

Integrity (check one)

District Building
 Site Structure

Altered Unaltered
 Moved Original
Site

4. Ownership:

Status (check one)

Private
 Public

Occupied
 Unoccupied
 Preservation work in progress

Access to Public

Yes Restricted Unrestricted No

Present Use (check one or more)

Agricultural Industrial Religious
 Commercial Military Scientific
 Educational Museum Transportation
 Entertainment Park Other
 Government Private Residence

5. Ownership of Property:

Owner's Name

Phone Number

Street and Number

City or Town

State

County

Zip Code

6. Description:

Excellent Good Fair Deteriorated
 Ruins Unexposed

Is there a program of preservation underway? Yes No

7. Historical Themes: (check one or more of the following)

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Archaeological Site | (Pre-Columbian) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Archaeological Site | (Post-Columbian to 1673) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | French Influence | (1673-1780) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Illinois Frontier | (1780-1818) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Illinois Early | (1818-1850) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Illinois Middle | (1850-1900) |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Illinois Late | (1900-present) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Famous People | (give names & dates) |

8. Specific Date: c. 1930, built

Areas of significance (check one or more of the following)

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Aboriginal (historic) | <input type="checkbox"/> | Literature |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Aboriginal (pre-historic) | <input type="checkbox"/> | Military |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> | Music |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> | Political |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Art | <input type="checkbox"/> | Religion/Philosophy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> | Science |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Communication | <input type="checkbox"/> | Sculpture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Conservation | <input type="checkbox"/> | Social/Humanitarian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Education | <input type="checkbox"/> | Theater |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> | Transportation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> | Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Landscape Architecture | | |

Brief statement of significance: (include all names and dates)

Use additional sheets if necessary. Excellent example of terra cotta in Champaign

and Urbana.

9. Form prepared by:

Name and Title:

Date: JUNE 75

Organization:

KEITH A. SCULLE
ILLINOIS HISTORIC LANDMARKS SURVEY

Phone:

Street and Number:

1005 DEVONSHIRE
Champaign, Illinois 61820

City or Town:

County:

Zip Code

During the course of the Survey we often find it necessary to search for a particular site. When filling out the Survey form, please list according to the following example, published references to the site for which forms are being completed. If a bibliography can be compiled, it will greatly deduct from the Survey's task.

Bibliography

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