

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

SENT TO D.C.

11-13-12

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

1. Name of Property

historic name Zoe Theatre
other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 209 North Madison Street not for publication
city or town Pittsfield vicinity
state Illinois code IL county Pike code 149 zip code 62363

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 at the following level(s) of significance:

national statewide local

[Signature] /DSHPO 11-9-12
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

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

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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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	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Recreation and Culture/Theater

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Vacant/Not in Use

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Modern Movement/Art Moderne
Modern Movement

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: Concrete
walls: Structural glass

roof: Asphalt
other: Stainless steel, Aluminum,
Porcelain enamel

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Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

The Zoe Theatre in Pittsfield, Illinois, is a rectangular, two-story brick building with a single-slope roof and concrete foundation, occupying one city lot at 209 North Madison Street in Pittsfield's historic commercial district. Designed in 1950 by Ted Dell in a late Art Moderne architectural style with Modernist influences, the Zoe Theatre is a remodeling of an older building. The building's distinct square façade is clad entirely in panels of tri-colored structural glass and features a large semicircular stainless steel and porcelain enamel canopy topped with an internally-illuminated attraction sign and a vertical porcelain enamel and neon sign. A polished aluminum box-office with three full-glass entrance doors are recessed under the marquee. Only minor alterations have been made to the building over the years and the Zoe Theatre retains excellent integrity. The nomination consists of one contributing building.

Narrative Description

Setting

The Zoe Theatre is situated on the west side of the 200 block of North Madison Street, less than a block away from the northwest corner of the courthouse square in Pittsfield's historic commercial district, listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. Due to the building's age at the time of the district's National Register listing, Zoe Theatre is a non-contributing resource. Surrounding properties are commercial, including an adjacent two-story building to the south and a one-story building to the north. The building has zero setback and a concrete sidewalk running parallel to the building along Madison Street forms the eastern boundary of the lot. A blind concrete alleyway forms the western boundary.

Exterior

The Zoe Theatre was completed in 1950 from the designs of local designer Ted Dell. The first-run movie theatre is a complete remodeling of an 1870s building, originally an agricultural product/feed store and later an auto parts store. The elegantly modern theatre was designed in a late Art Moderne architectural style with Modernist influences. A concrete foundation supports a tall two-story space with a balcony, concealed on the exterior by a windowless cladding of structural glass with a streamlined marquee and neon sign.

Due to the building's mid-block location, the east (main) elevation is the theatre's only primary façade. The flat square form with little surface ornament is raised on a very low concrete foundation. The exterior wall is clad entirely in three colors of structural glass—red bulkheads sit below a continuous plane of ivory glass while above the theatre marquee, the windowless and symmetrical façade features a decorative border of spaced squares of beige glass panels with smaller squares of red glass centered within, extending vertically from immediately above each side of the marquee up to and across the parapet level and terminating just shy of the façade's centerline, on either side of the neon sign. Beige-colored panels are inlaid into the ivory, while red squares are in relief—affixed to the beige panels beneath. Barely noticeable are thin horizontal metal dividing strips underneath each row of structural glass, their use beginning above the canopy and continuing to the top of the façade. A small wooden door (access panel onto the marquee) is to the south of the vertical building sign. Although some of the structural glass panels are missing from the main elevation, most are stored in the building for future restoration.

Below the canopy, the ground-floor façade is comprised of a recessed slightly off-center entryway and box office. The narrow south edge of the recessed opening is clad in structural glass, matching the design of the main façade. The entryway consists of three full glass doors at the south end of the recessed opening, set at an angle so that the north end of the entryway penetrates deeper into the building than the south end, creating a sidewalk vestibule. The floor of the vestibule is composed of square and rectangular ceramic tiles in three shades of green, set in a block random pattern. The three tempered polished plate glass doors lack supporting cross sash between them, with only top and bottom channels of anodized aluminum (locks are in bottom channels). Originally, each door had a pair of horizontal tubular Lucite pull bars (one on each side of the door), placed off-center and held in aluminum fittings. The pull bars are missing

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from the south door. All three doors are double acting and are set in a polished and anodized aluminum frame with an aluminum threshold. A small manufacturer's mark on the inside frame near each top hinge reads "PITTCO" along with a logo of the PPG.¹ A small polished aluminum box office is in the north end of the recessed opening. The south plane of the booth emanates at a ninety degree angle from the northernmost of the three doors, angles outward at the corner to create a chamfer, then angles again to be flush with the main facade. Three small angled and butt-glazed windows are held in a continuous polished aluminum frame, with vertically-arranged decorative polished aluminum mouldings below. The box office does not extend all the way to the ceiling and matches the height of the entry doors. Polished stainless steel² panels cover a narrow area above the doors, forming a curve behind the box office, and the ceiling of the recessed entrance. To the south of the recessed entryway and separated from it by one panel's width of structural glass is an aluminum-frame movie poster display case, accessible from the inside of the building. The display case begins above the red structural glass bulkheads and terminates at the height of the entry doors and the box office. A matching display case, now boarded up with plywood, exists to the north of the box office. To the north of the northern display case is a slightly recessed door to the balcony level of the theatre. It matches the height of the other doors. Originally, the door was likely glass, as indicated by an extant polished aluminum frame, but the existing door is made of various plywood sections and has a small square light near top center. The recessed edges of the door frame are clad in structural glass.

The theatre marquee remains intact, projecting symmetrically from the center of the main elevation and sheltering the sidewalk in front of the box office and entryway. The bottom of the marquee is a flat and semicircular canopy with a ceiling of white porcelain enamel and polished stainless steel fascia. Above the canopy and perpendicular to the building façade is a large, rectangular, internally-illuminated, changeable-letter, and double-sided attraction sign, encased in polished stainless steel. The front edge of the attraction sign is a narrow vertical strip of yellow porcelain enamel, illuminated by two rows of incandescent bulbs. The narrow strip extends down and along the ceiling of the canopy, all the way to the wall plane of the building. The attraction sign does not sit immediately on top of the canopy; the narrow space between the two elements combined with the strip of illuminated yellow porcelain enamel travelling underneath the canopy, create an illusion of the canopy being suspended from the sign.

Immediately above the attraction sign is a large two-sided vertical porcelain enamel building sign, placed against the building façade and separated from the structural glass only by narrow strips of polished stainless steel. The sign extends vertically nearly to the top of the building. Each face of the sign has vertically stacked sans-serif block letters spelling out "ZOE" in cream porcelain enamel on a field of maroon. At the bottom, also on each side, is a small mark, again in cream over maroon porcelain enamel that reads "C. BENDSEN DECATUR ILL." The front edge of the sign has a rounded profile while the top of the sign is terminated by an offset, quarter-round element in polished stainless steel.

The marquee and signs feature an extensive use of neon. Exposed tubes are placed over nearly all stainless steel surfaces, while the large block letters of ZOE are also outlined in neon. Additional neon tubing is wrapped around the rounded front edge of the building sign, in front of each letter. The neon colors are red and green. Further lighting was provided by chase incandescent bulbs in front of the attraction sign and recessed can lighting in the canopy ceiling. Some of the missing neon tubing has been destroyed, while other pieces are being stored in the building.

The north elevation is a shared party wall with an adjacent one-story building. Above the adjacent structure, the brick wall is exposed and it slopes gently towards the west (rear), where it is extended by a two-story red concrete block addition on a raised concrete foundation, built in 1950 as part of the theatre construction. At the ground level, the concrete block wall has a utilitarian unglazed wooden two-door exit with a flat brick arch. There are no other openings on the north elevation. At the east end of the north elevation is a historic typographic advertisement, painted directly onto the brick and visible above the adjacent structure. The top of the sign is partially obscured by parapet coping and is unreadable. The visible portion spells out "AGRICULTURAL WAREHOUSE," with "SMOKE" and "GREENBACK" below, each as a separate line of type.³ A narrow strip of ivory structural glass panels, part of the main façade, extends vertically to conceal the raised parapet at the east end of the wall.

¹ "PPG" stands for Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. "Pittco" was PPG's line of storefront metal. Here, the mark identifies the Pittco Checking Floor Hinge, used with Herculite Door Frames and Herculite Tempered Polished Plate Glass Doors, all products of the PPG and utilized in the entryway of the Zoe Theatre. Zoe's ivory and beige structural glass was also manufactured by PPG.

² It is difficult to distinguish the polished aluminum and polished stainless steel surfaces on the façade of the Zoe Theatre. The storefront framing and likely the box office metal are Pittco by PPG, which was furnished in aluminum. According to Paul Corrington, who installed the sign and marquee for C. Bendsen Co. of Decatur in 1950, both features utilize type 302 stainless steel. When polished, the two metals look nearly identical and are both non-magnetic.

³ The sign remnants indicate two original advertisements. The name of the agricultural warehouse owner has been made illegible by removing the stepped portions of the parapet. The advertisement below, separated from the top by a thin line, likely read "Smoke Greenback Tobacco," a brand of Marburg Brothers Tobacco Processing Co.

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The west (rear) elevation continues the concrete block addition. Aside from electrical panels and downspouts, the wall has two small boarded up openings at the first story, one each near the north and south corners of the façade. The openings are created by flat brick arches and steel lintels.

The south elevation is concealed as a shared party wall with an adjacent two-story building of matching height. The only visible portion is from the blind alleyway—part of the two-story concrete block addition near the west end of the elevation, extending beyond the original west (rear) façade of the building. The top of the concrete block wall is stepped and a small vented opening with a flat brick arch exists on the second story near the rear wall of the adjacent building.

Interior

The interior of the Zoe Theatre has a remarkable degree of integrity. Virtually no updating has occurred since the building was completed in 1950. The only loss of historic finishes, confined primarily to the ceiling, has occurred due to a damaged and leaky roof which was repaired in 2005.

The Zoe Theatre does not have a basement but the auditorium slopes down towards the stage (west), where the floor level is below ground. A two-story space exists in front of the building (east) with a lobby, candy stand, foyer and bathrooms on the first story and a tiered balcony, cry room, and projection booth on the second story.

First story

The first story consists of a lobby, candy stand, foyer, restrooms, and auditorium with a stage. The narrow lobby is located at the east end of the building and is accessible through the three glass entrance doors. The lobby is rectangular with the exception of the east edge which conforms to the angular plan of the storefront. The floor of the lobby is the same as in the exterior vestibule and it continues inside underneath the glass entrance doors—square and rectangular ceramic tiles in three shades of green, set in a block random pattern. The walls and ceiling are green Weldtex⁴; the walls have continuous vertical striations while the ceiling is of an alternating square pattern. Tall wainscoting of striped mahogany panels encircles the walls. A crown molding separates the ceiling from the walls and tops the wainscoting. All door openings are cased with wood trim. Two decorative fluorescent metal light fixtures hang from the ceiling. The lobby spans the width of the building and is flanked by two staircases—a straight-run exit stair to the north and an interior quarter-turn balcony stair to the south. In the northwest corner of the lobby is a small rectangular under-stair closet, accessed through a solid wood door. Near the northeast corner of the lobby are the entrance to the box office and a wooden door accessing the north exterior movie poster display case. The interior of the south display case can be similarly accessed at the southeast corner of the lobby. Each poster display case is encased with wood trim and illuminated by two recessed vertical fluorescent tubes, one on each side of the case. The small box office is enclosed by raised window openings with a wide stainless steel counter and wooden cabinets below. The wall and ceiling finish in the box office is Weldtex and a small decorative metal light fixture with a circular fluorescent tube hangs from the ceiling. In the southwest corner of the lobby are remains of an original candy stand. The stand itself is missing, its whereabouts unknown, but a flat canopy clad in green Weldtex with a decorative valance of alternating white and red fiberboard⁵ panels is suspended above where the candy stand stood. The northeast corner of the canopy is chamfered and above it sits a sign that reads “FRESH POPCORN,”⁶ executed in individual sans-serif acrylic channel letters of white faces with red sides, each letter bottom-mounted to a metal plate and placed above the edge of the canopy. In the southwest corner of the stand area is a small wooden door accessing another under-stair closet. In center of the west wall of the lobby are adjacent pairs of walnut doors leading to the foyer. Only the north door has a streamlined vertical aluminum pull handle on the lobby side while all four doors have matching push plates in the foyer.

The rectangular foyer, located immediately to the west of the lobby, is extremely narrow and flanked by two small restrooms—women’s to the north and men’s to the south. Each restroom is tucked under a stairway and contains a porcelain lavatory and toilet, with green painted walls and wainscoting of square ivory tiles and a black top border. In the west wall of the foyer is a long raised opening with a maroon and gold curtain between decorative top wooden valances, flanked to the north and south by door openings into the auditorium. As in the lobby, the foyer’s walls and ceiling are green Weldtex but the wainscoting is shorter and of fiberboard panels with faux brown leather finish. The floor in the foyer was originally carpeted but is now exposed concrete. Two recessed light fixtures and speakers are at each end of the

⁴ 3-ply plywood with a striated surface texture, part of the Weldwood product line and manufactured by the United States Plywood Corporation.

⁵ Processed wood separated into individual fibers and formed under pressure to create an insulating board. Produced under several trade names and available in many sizes, colors, and finishes. Fiberboard used in the Zoe Theatre is Nu-Wood, a product of the Wood Conversion Company.

⁶ The letter F is missing.

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foyer's ceiling, while an aluminum fixture that once held a painted glass or Lucite exit sign (matching the one found on the second story balcony), hangs above the doors to/from the lobby on the east wall.

The auditorium is accessed through the foyer to the east. The eastern part of the auditorium is under the second story balcony. Thereafter, it opens up into a two-story space. The concrete floor slopes down toward the stage, located at the west end of the space. Three rows of seating, separated by two aisles, begin immediately at the east end of the auditorium. The aisles were originally carpeted in a decorative gold, green and red floral pattern, as found remaining in the balcony and staircases. The remainder of the auditorium floor was exposed concrete. The center row is six-seats wide, while the side rows are four-seats wide. Several seating rows in the front (west) of the auditorium have been demounted but are still in the space, placed against the side walls and the stage. The seats are green and ivory metal with wooden armrests, and have maroon plastic upholstery and fabric back rests. Decorative streamline motifs are found on the aisle-side panels of the seats. The walls and ceiling of the auditorium, including the open second story balcony, are finished in several colors and textures of fiberboard. A wainscoting of faux brown leather is topped by a symmetrical arrangement of three horizontal panels of tan, all joints concealed with narrow green moldings, at the top and bottom of the wall, with a center tan panel flanked by narrower cream panels outlined in red trim. The solid railing of the balcony is similarly covered with a horizontal center panel of cream fiberboard and tan panels above and below. On the north and south walls, the horizontal panels are divided into three sections (fourth at the east end of the balcony), by continuous vertical panels of cream fiberboard with red trim, each with two vertical abstract floral motifs in tan with painted thin blue lines. The floral patterns are in relief, placed one above the other. Tiered and curved soffits (concealing HVAC ductwork) in cream and tan fiberboard span the length of north and south walls and also underneath the balcony along the east wall of the auditorium. The ceiling of the auditorium as well as under the balcony was mostly in cream fiberboard and has been nearly completely destroyed by water damage.

Near the stage, the paneled walls curve inward towards it and their design is dramatically altered with angled panels of cream fiberboard and red trim, each containing a relieved curved undulating tan shape pointing towards the stage. The stage side of the curving wing walls is cut away in two rounded profiles, behind which is cove lighting of blue and gold neon. Two cased openings, one on either side of the stage, are also cut into the wing walls, with aluminum and Lucite exit signs above. The raised stage can be reached through the openings via short flights of curved wooden stairs. The northern stair also leads directly to a double-door exit near the northwest corner of the auditorium. The doors have an unglazed five-panel design and lead out to the alleyway behind the building. The movie screen has been punctured and ripped but sections of the original decorative gold curtain fabric of the proscenium arch still survive. Additional fabric originally hung from the ceiling behind the curved wing walls flanking the stage and in the exit door openings, entirely concealing the brick and concrete block walls that are now left visible. Behind the screen and against the west exterior wall in the auditorium are two large vertical HVAC ducts. Also behind the screen and near the north end of the stage is a trap door leading to a small area under the stage which contains various mechanical equipment. The stage itself has a front of faux brown leather fiberboard base with two horizontal strips of stained oak separated by half-round cream-painted moldings above. The stage floor is wood.

Second story

The second story consists of a tiered balcony, cry room, and projection room, all located at the east end of the building and accessible by an interior quarter-turn staircase from the lobby against the south wall of the building and a straight-run exit staircase against the north wall.

The narrow quarter-turn staircase to the balcony level begins in the southeast corner of the lobby. One step leads to a landing above which the stair turns ninety degrees and runs straight up against the south wall of the building. It is enclosed on both sides with walls clad in faux brown leather fiberboard. A wooden railing is mounted to the south wall. The stairs themselves are wood with an original carpet runner with a gold, green and red floral pattern.

The top of the staircase opens up to a continuous north-south aisle that separates four lower tiers of seating from upper rows—two center rows in front of the projection booth and four rows in the southeast corner in front of the cry room. Two small cross aisles divide the seating into sections that match the configuration in the auditorium—six center seats are flanked by four-seat wide sections. The theatre seats are also identical. The floor of the balcony is wood with carpeted aisles. The ceiling, north and south walls continue the fiberboard design of the auditorium, while the east wall has fiberboard paneling at the north and south corners and painted plaster on the walls of the projection booth.

The south balcony aisle steps up towards the east (front of the building) and leads into a small cry room in the southeast corner of the second story and projection room in the center. The cry room has a large glass window, framed with stained

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wooden trim, facing west towards the movie screen. The interior of the small rectangular space is accessed through a six-panel wood door. The walls are green Weldtex with faux brown leather fiberboard wainscoting and tan fiberboard ceiling. A wooden speaker is centered above the window. At the end of the aisle and to the north is the projection room, with a concrete floor and painted plaster walls. In the northeast corner of the room is a small restroom with a toilet. In the southeast corner of the room and at floor level is the access panel onto the marquee. Much of the original projection equipment is still in the room.

The north balcony aisle leads to a windowless room in the northeast corner of the second story. Accessed through a four-panel wood door, the room has three continuous wooden tiers and fiberboard finishes matching those of the balcony and auditorium. This space, originally open to the rest of the balcony and providing additional rows of seating, was enclosed at a later date with a wall of random rectangular pieces of tan fiberboard.

At the north end of the main balcony aisle is a wall-mounted aluminum and Lucite exit sign for a straight-run exit stairway against the north wall of the building. The finishes match those of the south staircase. An additional handrail is attached to the south stairwell wall.

Integrity

The Zoe Theatre retains a high level of integrity with very minor alterations that have occurred since the theatre's completion in 1950. The theatre closed in 1987 and has sat vacant ever since. Exterior changes include alteration or replacement of the northern exit stair door, boarded up window of the northern movie poster display case, and missing Lucite pull bars on one of the glass entrance doors. A large portion of the marquee and sign neon tubing is also broken or missing, although some pieces, including the silhouette lettering from the north face of the sign, do survive and are stored inside the building. The largest loss of integrity is due to missing structural glass panels from sections of the storefront and delamination of two red squares on the upper façade. Many of these are surviving and are stored inside the building awaiting future restoration. At an unknown date there was a replacement of four structural glass panels between the south movie poster display case and the entrance. The panels used do not match the ivory color of the original glass. Instead, they appear to be Alamo Tan.⁷ The wooden access panel above the canopy was either disguised with structural glass or another material, or installed at a later date. On the west (rear) elevation, two small openings have been boarded up. A pair of five-panel wood exit doors near the northwest corner of the building has also been covered with plywood.

A majority of interior integrity losses are due to roof water leaks which were remedied in 2005. The leaks have destroyed the fiberboard ceiling of the auditorium and caused isolated damage to fiberboard wall panels throughout the building. The deteriorated fiberboard ceiling is also responsible for majority of the debris strewn everywhere across the auditorium. Additional interior changes include the removal of the candy stand in the lobby and a missing sign letter above the surviving canopy; removal of carpeting in the auditorium aisles; several missing Lucite exit signs; damaged movie screen in the auditorium and removal of decorative fabric behind curved wing walls flanking the stage; and removal of several rows of seating at the front of the auditorium (the seats are still in the space just demounted from their original locations). On the second story balcony, the northeast corner above the exit staircase was enclosed at an unknown date to create a windowless room. Despite these changes and conditions, the Zoe Theatre retains nearly all character-defining elements including spatial configuration, materials and finishes.

⁷ Alamo Tan is a structural glass color of the Vitrolite brand, manufactured by Libbey-Owens-Ford from Toledo, Ohio. The red structural glass panels used on the Zoe Theatre are Vitrolite.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1950

Significant Dates

1950

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Dell, Ted; Designer

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Period of Significance (justification)

The Period of Significance for the Zoe Theatre is 1950, the year when modernization of the building was completed.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

Zoe Theatre in Pittsfield, Illinois, is locally significant under National Register Criterion C as an excellent example of a building constructed in the Art Moderne style with Modernist influences. The principal characteristic of the Art Moderne style exhibited by the Zoe Theatre is the exterior façade of pigmented structural glass. The building's Modernist features include the visual front entrance underneath the canopy, and the interior finishes of NuWood and Weldtex. The Zoe Theatre is the only architectural example of this kind in Pittsfield. The building is located within the Pittsfield Historic District, listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1978, and because of its age is a non-contributing resource. The period of significance is 1950, the year the construction of the theatre was completed.

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

The City of Pittsfield is located near the geographic center of Pike County, Illinois, and lies approximately 70 miles west of Springfield and 80 miles northwest of St. Louis, Missouri. The city was established in 1833 expressly for the purpose of being the new county seat. The city was named after Pittsfield, Massachusetts, and was home to John Hay, Abraham Lincoln's personal secretary, ambassador to England under President William McKinley, later Secretary of State for Theodore Roosevelt, and creator of the Open Door Policy in China. As county seat, the town was one of the various places in central Illinois where Abraham Lincoln practiced law as part of the circuit court, working on 34 cases between 1839 and 1852.⁸ Aside from being a center of government activity, Pittsfield's prosperity was closely linked to the rich agricultural business of Pike County, which led to the development of the city's large central commercial district. The district, with an impressive collection of primarily nineteenth-century buildings, including the imposing Pike County Courthouse (1894-95), was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1978.⁹

The same year that the current courthouse was constructed saw completion of the K.P. Opera House at 120 South Madison Street. The opera house was converted to a movie house in the early 1900s, and was purchased in the 1920s by Clark Armentrout who refurbished the theatre by adding air conditioning and other amenities, and renamed it the Clark Theatre.¹⁰ The Clark Theatre entertained movie goers until 1950, when Armentrout renovated an existing auto parts store at 209 North Madison into a modern movie theatre, and named it Zoe after his granddaughter.¹¹

The first-run Zoe Theatre opened September 17, 1950, with a showing of "A Life of Her Own" starring Lana Turner and Ray Milland.¹² The 351-seat theatre was touted as "very modern throughout [with] the latest and best equipment."¹³ Designed and supervised by Ted Dell—local designer and Armentrout's former manager of the Clark Theatre¹⁴—the Zoe Theatre featured an attractive array of modern interior finishes: green Weldtex walls and ceiling in the lobby and foyer; wainscoting of striped mahogany in the lobby and faux brown leather Nu-Wood in the foyer and auditorium; cream and tan Nu-Wood paneling outlined in green and red trim, with decorative shapes and designs for the walls and ceiling of the auditorium; green mosaic tiles in the lobby and gold, green and red aisle carpeting; green metal seats with maroon upholstery; and shimmering golden fabric curtains of the proscenium arch. Armentrout also provided a small candy stand

⁸ "Pittsfield, Illinois," Wikipedia, last modified April 28, 2012, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pittsfield,_Illinois.

⁹ *National Register of Historic Places Nomination for the Pittsfield Historic District, Pike, Illinois*, Robert Wagner, (Springfield, Illinois: Illinois Department of Conservation, 1978), 5-7.

¹⁰ Bill Beard, "Going South: The South Side of Pittsfield's Square has an Interesting History," *Pike History* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 2010): 4-5.

¹¹ "Zoe Theatre Opens To Large Crowd Sun," *Pike County Democrat-Times*, September 20, 1950, 52.

¹² "Grand Opening, New Zoe Theatre," *Pike County Democrat-Times*, September 13, 1950.

¹³ "Zoe Theatre Opens To Large Crowd Sun."

¹⁴ Warren Winston, Pike County Historical Society, telephone interview by Darius Bryjka, July 26, 2012.

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in the lobby and added a new feature for Pittsfield movie goers—a special cry room for babies was placed in the corner of the balcony, with a visual glass front to allow mothers viewing of the movies without disturbing the audience. The theatre was air-conditioned and was one of only three movie houses in the county to have that feature (all three operated by Armentrout).¹⁵ The exterior of the building was equally modern and sleek with full glass entrance doors, polished aluminum trim and box office, and a large gleaming stainless steel marquee and porcelain enamel sign, illuminated with bands of cascading neon (red and green) and chase incandescent bulbs, and manufactured by C. Bendsen Company from Decatur, Illinois, one of the leading marquee and neon sign manufacturers in the Midwest. Ironically, the feature that was to exemplify Zoe's modernity was not yet installed on the opening date,¹⁶ but a few weeks later a colorful, highly-polished and opaque glass was affixed over the entire main façade of the building. The material, known as structural glass, featured a symmetrical design of repetitive square motifs framing the upper story of the building and reinforcing the symmetrical design of the marquee, sign, and the façade, itself a near perfect square. To accomplish the smooth and modern aesthetic, Zoe's designer Ted Dell utilized both available brands of structural glass: ivory and beige panels are Carrara Structural Glass by Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, while the red bulkheads and small squares in relief are Vitrolite by Libbey-Owens-Ford Glass Company of Toledo, Ohio.¹⁷

When completed in 1950, the building's design was sufficiently modern to be profiled among thirty-six other theatres in an annual review of theatre construction that appeared in the ninth edition of the *Theatre Catalog* (Figs. 1-3). The Annual Merit Award, consisting of a large bronze plaque and symbolizing the theatre industry's only "Seal of Approval," was bestowed upon the winning American and international structures, whose selection was based on "functional plan[ning], showmanship, design and construction excellence."¹⁸ The Zoe Theatre was one of only two Illinois theatres (the other being Holiday Theatre in Park Forest) to receive the award in 1951.

Architecture of the Zoe Theatre/Architectural Context

The Zoe Theatre is a remarkably intact local example of the Art Moderne style with Modernist influences. The historic integrity of the building is self-evident despite a lack of surviving blueprints and specifications.

The Art Moderne architectural style (1930-1945) is characterized by asymmetrical massing, soft or rounded corners, flat roofs, emphasis on horizontality (versus verticality of the preceding Art Deco style) and smooth wall finishes without surface ornamentation. The distinctive appearance of buildings constructed in this style was inspired by streamlined industrial design for ships, airplanes, trains, and automobiles, and was often achieved by curved window glass wrapping around building corners and glossy colorful, mirror-like finishes. Materials most commonly employed in this style were cement or concrete, smooth stucco, and pigmented structural glass for wall surfaces, glass block for windows, and aluminum and stainless steel trim. The smooth and reflective surfaces of Art Moderne facades were often paired with metal and neon signs to provide the ultimate in sleek and modern appearance. Although utilized for new building construction, including a relatively small number of residences, Art Moderne was particularly popular for striking commercial storefront modernization. Its smooth and slick aesthetic became an expected and familiar feature within new and expanding downtown commercial districts in the 1930s. More mainstream than its Modernistic precursor, Art Deco, Art Moderne introduced countless Americans to their first taste of "the modern." The style began to lose popularity in the mid-1940s and although it was still occasionally utilized in the early 1950s, it was eventually eclipsed by Modernism. Art Moderne is also often referred to as Streamline Moderne or Depression Modern.

The Zoe Theatre's principal feature of the Art Moderne architectural style is the building façade, characterized by simplicity where visual interest is created more through the manipulation of basic composition façade components rather than through additive decorative effects. This modern minimalism is very appropriate for a late expression of the style and distinguishes the building from earlier Art Moderne storefronts, including those clad in structural glass, which featured somewhat more exuberant designs and detailing. The curved wall surface, a ubiquitous formal element of the streamlined storefront, is noticeably absent from the façade of the Zoe Theatre, instead giving way to an exercise in austere symmetry, emphasized by its planar, poster-like, two-dimensional execution.

¹⁵ "Zoe Theatre Opens To Large Crowd Sun"; *Theatre Catalog* 9, edited by Andrew W. Shearer (Philadelphia: Jay Emanuel Publications, 1951), 83.

¹⁶ "Zoe Theatre Opens To Large Crowd Sun."

¹⁷ Vitrolite and Carrara Glass are easily distinguished by the secondary side of the material. Vitrolite has a pattern of narrow parallel ribs (for mastic adhesion) while Carrara has a flat unpolished surface. Furthermore, Carrara Glass was not available in red.

¹⁸ *Theatre Catalog* 9, 16.

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Despite a near absence of asymmetry, the use of structural glass for the façade of the Zoe Theatre indicates a strong Art Moderne influence. Like the style itself, structural glass continued to be used after World War II, but it was slowly being supplanted by materials that offered more texture and three-dimensional quality. The sleek flatness associated with Art Moderne was made possible on the Zoe Theatre thanks to a nearly seamless abutment of structural glass panels. Although metal division strips, necessary to support the glass panels above the sidewalk, are used on the façade of the Zoe Theatre, their exposed profile is minimized and contrast against lightly-colored ivory glass rendered nearly invisible. The choices of light structural glass color and division strips of nominal profile thickness create a seamless appearance of sweeping color very indicative of the Art Moderne aesthetic.

The theatre's Art Moderne structural glass facade is emphasized by an unusual geometric pattern of squares within larger squares of contrasting color, bordering the sign/marquee. The unique design is further enhanced by use of relief—the smallest red squares are affixed over the larger squares beneath. Although inlaid or etched/sandblasted glass were preferred methods for mixing shapes and colors, laminated structural glass was one of several decorative techniques promoted in trade literature by structural glass manufacturers during the 1930s and 1940s.¹⁹ Use of multiple colors of structural glass (rarely exceeding three) is also indicative of the Art Moderne style. The distinct three-color combination of the Zoe Theatre's façade was made possible by utilizing tones of both Carrara (ivory and beige) and Vitrolite (red).²⁰

The straightforward, almost cubist composition of Zoe's structural glass provided an ideal background for a large neon-illuminated sign and flat semicircular marquee/canopy, executed in equally sleek polished stainless steel and porcelain enamel. The neon sign was designed and placed to reinforce the symmetrical composition of the façade as well as to take advantage of the polished and shiny surface of structural glass. The two-sided pylon-like sign is placed right against the face of the glass, providing a glowing appearance to the façade upon illumination (Figs. 1, 6). Although some design elements and materials of the sign and canopy are equally appropriate for both the Art Moderne and modern architectural styles, the pylon-like sign topped by an offset quarter-round element in polished stainless steel clearly resembles the towers of the Pan-Pacific Auditorium (1935), an iconic Art Moderne building in Los Angeles (Fig. 4).²¹ This design element, whether or not a conscious reference to the Pan-Pacific Auditorium, continued to be utilized for commercial building signs well into the 1950s.

While the interior of the theatre is more reflective of postwar Modernist commercial architecture, several features resemble earlier architectural fashions. The lobby light fixtures with a zigzag motif and theatre seats with curvilinear three-line motifs on the aisle-side panels are popular Art Moderne motifs, while the vertical push plates of lobby doors resemble even earlier Art Deco designs.

A secondary design influence in the Zoe Theatre is Modernism, whose many variants eclipsed Art Moderne after World War II and had differing manifestations in residential versus commercial architecture. Derived from facets of European modernism of the 1910s and 1920s, the style did not fully mature into a distinct American expression until the 1950s. Similarly to the preceding Art Deco and Art Moderne, Modernism rejected the use of historic references, but it furthered the focus on volume and three-dimensionality as primary design considerations. Modern commercial buildings from this era tend to be simpler and more restrained in appearance, lacking the sleekness associated with streamlining of the preceding decades. Smooth monolithic surfaces such as structural glass were supplanted by textured materials including porcelain enamel, plastic laminates, ceramic panels, aluminum, terra cotta, brick, and stone. At the same time, the open or visual front design concept sought to maximize storefront transparency and reduce the emphasis on the wall and graphics framing the display window.²²

¹⁹ PPG and LOF each had different methods of achieving the relief effect although both referred to it as "lamination." PPG used lamination "by heat and pressure at the factory, assuring a permanent joint, and this laminated Carrara [was] then handled and set like a single slab" (*Carrara Structural Glass*, 2). LOF, in turn, recommended cementing Vitrolite pieces to achieve the same effect (*How to Plan and Construct Modern Storefronts of Extrudalite and Libbey-Owens-Ford Glass Products*, 38). Due to the use of structural glass from both companies, it is unlikely that the relief effect on the Zoe Theatre façade was accomplished by factory lamination. It appears that the red Vitrolite was adhered to beige Carrara Glass with adhesive, mastic, or cement.

²⁰ It is possible that beige Carrara is actually peach Vitrolite but without examination of the panels' secondary side this is impossible to verify. Either instance has the same impact on potential significance.

²¹ The building was completely destroyed by fire on May 24, 1989.

²² Mike Jackson, FAIA, "Storefronts of Tomorrow: American Storefront Design from 1940 to 1970," in *Preserving the Recent Past 2*, edited by Deborah Slaton and William G. Foulks (Washington, DC: Historic Preservation Education Foundation, National Park Service, Association for Preservation Technology International, 2000), 58.

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The Zoe Theatre's modern features are not an expression of strict Modernism, such as the works of Mies van Der Rohe, or a functionalist approach to Modernism, as in the buildings of Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill. Possibly because Ted Dell was not an architect and due to the entertainment-based function of the building, the Zoe Theatre sought a more approachable and popularly accessible form of Modernism, confirmed by the presence of stylishly applied ornamentation and use of modern materials and finishes.

Although theatres required dark interiors and provided limited opportunities for utilization of "open fronts," the Zoe Theatre nonetheless features an asymmetrical, angled and transparent storefront, a very characteristic element of Modernist commercial structures in the postwar period. PPG's Herculite Tempered Polished Plate Glass Doors and Door Frame (with Pittco Checking Floor Hinges) with tubular Lucite pull bars provided a full view of the lobby, while polished aluminum framing and angular box office enhanced the already lustrous and gleaming façade. Despite the fact that the marquee and sign materials were already associated with the preceding architectural styles, several design features are more emblematic of popular Modernism. The gravity-defying illusion of the canopy being suspended from the attraction sign is clearly a postwar design expression (although unfortunately not very visible), while the flat semicircular canopy is also evocative of modern commercial architecture. The overall effect of the theatre's exterior is appropriate for its location, circumstances and time period—without the involvement of an architect the design hangs on to the vocabulary of Art Moderne while utilizing Modernist touches in order to make the building appear sufficiently contemporary.

While the exterior of the Zoe Theatre is principally an Art Moderne expression, the interior sought to convey modernity through features such as a cry room with a visual glass front and, most effectively, by employment of new materials for interior wall finishes (Figs. 2-3). Weldtex, a three-ply plywood with a striated surface texture and part of the Weldwood product line manufactured by the United States Plywood Corporation (USPC), was chosen for the walls and ceiling of the lobby and foyer. The striped mahogany wainscoting panels in the lobby appear to be veneered plywood, likely Architectural Weldwood by USPC, whose single flitch veneers ensured perfect matching upon installation.²³ The auditorium was clad in fiberboard, processed wood separated into individual fibers and formed under pressure to create an insulating board. The material was produced under several trade names and available in many sizes, colors, and finishes, several of which can be found in the Zoe Theatre. Its use in theatres was particularly appropriate because of acoustical correction qualities. The specific brand of fiberboard used in the Zoe Theatre is Nu-Wood, a product of the Wood Conversion Company.²⁴ While fiberboard and plywood were already being mass manufactured at the beginning of the twentieth century, their production increased dramatically after World War II with the demand for housing, particularly as interior finishes.²⁵ The colorful finishes and designs utilized in the Zoe Theatre represent some of the newer postwar developments.

The Zoe Theatre is the best local example of the Art Moderne architectural style in Pittsfield. There are no buildings of similar design, scale, or age in or around Pittsfield to compare with the Zoe Theatre. While Pittsfield has five other extant examples of structural glass storefronts, these are limited to ground floor use and none has the Zoe Theatre's totality and quality of design (Fig. 5).

The Zoe Theatre in Pittsfield, Illinois, is an excellent local example of an eclectic building designed in the Art Moderne style with Modernist influences. Designed by local designer Ted Dell, the Zoe Theatre retains a high level of integrity and is the only architectural example of this kind in Pittsfield.

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

²³ From "Weldwood Plywood and Allied Products" in Sweet's Architectural Catalog (New York: F.W. Dodge Corporation, Sweet's Catalog Service, 1950).

²⁴ From the Wood Conversion Company brochure in Sweet's Architectural Catalog (New York: F.W. Dodge Corporation, Sweet's Catalog Service, 1950).

²⁵ Richa Wilson and Kathleen Snodgrass, *Early 20th-century Building Materials: Fiberboard and Plywood*, Tech Tip 0773-2308-MTDC (Missoula, MT: U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, Missoula Technology and Development Center, 2007), 2.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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"Zoe Theatre Opens To Large Crowd Sun." *Pike County Democrat-Times*, September 20, 1950.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: Zoe Preservation Society

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>15</u>	<u>688327</u>	<u>4386584</u>	3	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

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Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

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

Legal description of the property: Lot Five (5) of the sub-division of Lot Eight (8) in Block Four (4) in the Original Town, now City of Pittsfield, situated in the County of Pike in the State of Illinois.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

This nomination consists of the Zoe Theatre and the lot historically associated with the building.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Darius Bryjka
organization In Alliance LLC date September 11, 2012
street & number 1722 W. Homewood Ave. telephone 217-220-5542
city or town Springfield state Illinois zip code 62704
e-mail darius@inalliance.biz

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **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. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Zoe Theatre
City or Vicinity: Pittsfield
County: Pike
State: IL
Photographer: Darius Bryjka
Date Photographed: April 2012, September 2012
Location of Original Digital Files: #1 Old State Capitol Plaza
Number of Photographs: 21

Photo #1 (IL_Pike County_Zoe Theatre_0001)
East side of the 200 block of North Madison Street, camera facing northwest.

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Photo #2 (IL_Pike County_Zoe Theatre_0002)
East elevation, camera facing northwest.

Photo #3 (IL_Pike County_Zoe Theatre_0003)
East elevation, storefront, camera facing southwest.

Photo #4 (IL_Pike County_Zoe Theatre_0004)
East elevation, structural glass, camera facing west.

Photo #5 (IL_Pike County_Zoe Theatre_0005)
East elevation (left), north elevation (right) camera facing southwest.

Photo #6 (IL_Pike County_Zoe Theatre_0006)
North elevation (left), west elevation (right), camera facing southeast.

Photo #7 (IL_Pike County_Zoe Theatre_0007)
Lobby, camera facing south.

Photo #8 (IL_Pike County_Zoe Theatre_0008)
Lobby, camera facing north.

Photo #9 (IL_Pike County_Zoe Theatre_0009)
Foyer, camera facing north.

Photo #10 (IL_Pike County_Zoe Theatre_0010)
Foyer, women's restroom, camera facing north.

Photo #11 (IL_Pike County_Zoe Theatre_0011)
Auditorium, under balcony, camera facing east.

Photo #12 (IL_Pike County_Zoe Theatre_0012)
Auditorium, under balcony, camera facing north.

Photo #13 (IL_Pike County_Zoe Theatre_0013)
Auditorium, camera facing northeast.

Photo #14 (IL_Pike County_Zoe Theatre_0014)
Auditorium, camera facing south.

Photo #15 (IL_Pike County_Zoe Theatre_0015)
Auditorium, camera facing east.

Photo #16 (IL_Pike County_Zoe Theatre_0016)
Auditorium, camera facing west.

Photo #17 (IL_Pike County_Zoe Theatre_0017)
Main staircase, camera facing west.

Photo #18 (IL_Pike County_Zoe Theatre_0018)
Second floor balcony, camera facing north.

Photo #19 (IL_Pike County_Zoe Theatre_0019)
Second floor balcony, cry room, camera facing southeast.

Photo #20 (IL_Pike County_Zoe Theatre_0020)
Second floor balcony, camera facing southeast.

Photo #21 (IL_Pike County_Zoe Theatre_0021)
Second floor balcony, projection booth, camera facing northwest.

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Property Owner:

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

name City of Pittsfield
street & number 215 N. Monroe telephone 217-285-4484
city or town Pittsfield state IL zip code 62363

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

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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Figure 1: Historic nighttime view of the Zoe Theatre, Pittsfield, Illinois.

Figure 2: Historic view towards front of auditorium, Zoe Theatre, Pittsfield, Illinois.

Figure 3: Historic view towards back of auditorium, Zoe Theatre, Pittsfield, Illinois.

Figure 4: Pan-Pacific Auditorium, Los Angeles, California (1935).

Figure 5: Adjacent mid-1930s structural glass storefronts on Madison Street, Pittsfield, Illinois.

Figure 6: Nighttime view of the Zoe Theatre, Pittsfield, Illinois.

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Figure 1. Nighttime view of the Zoe Theatre. From *Theatre Catalog vol.9* (1951). Image courtesy of the Theatre Historical Society of America, Elmhurst, Illinois.

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Figure 2. Historic view towards front of auditorium. From *Theatre Catalog vol.9* (1951). Image courtesy of the Theatre Historical Society of America, Elmhurst, Illinois.

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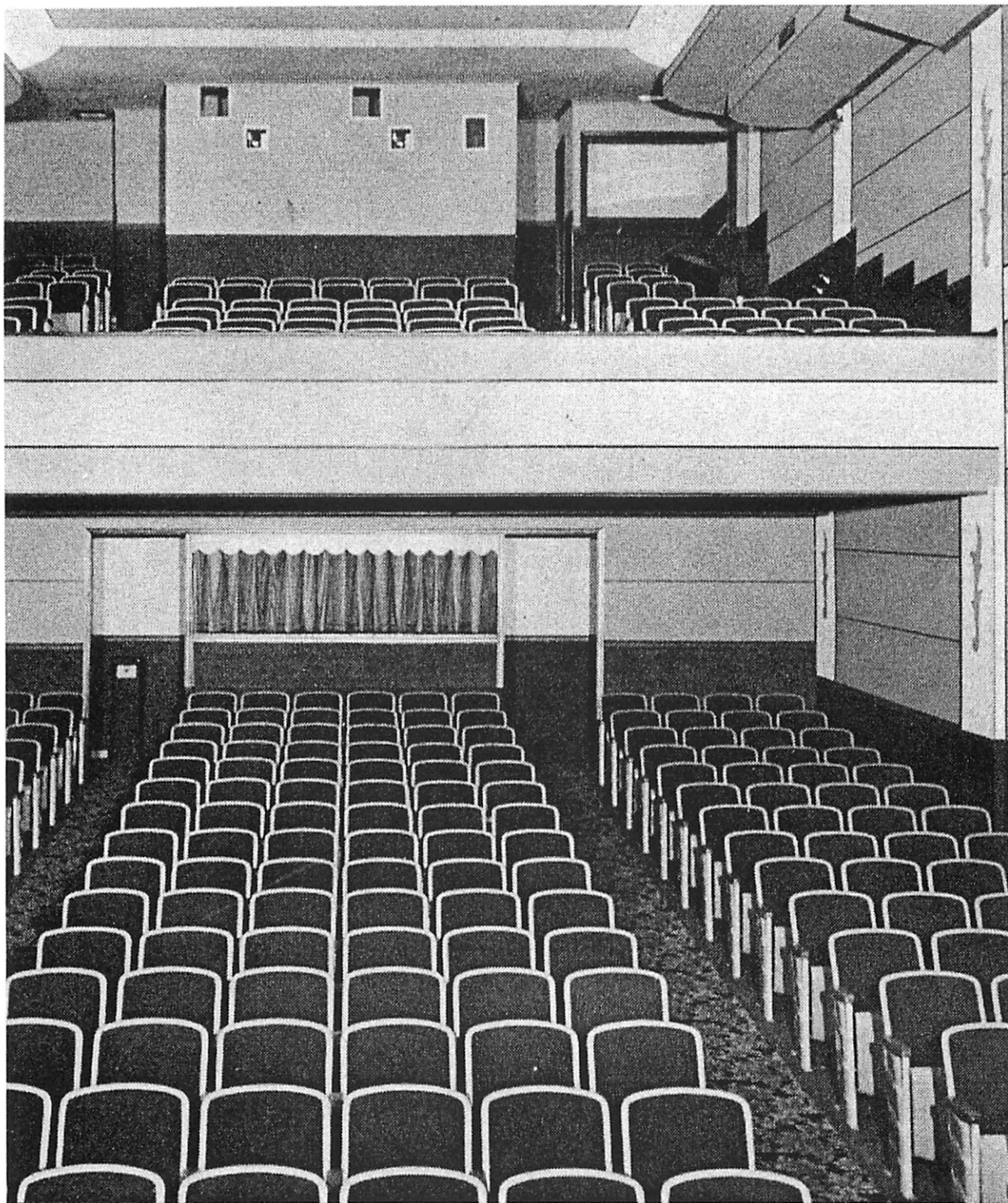


Figure 3. Historic view towards back of auditorium. From *Theatre Catalog vol.9* (1951). Image courtesy of the Theatre Historical Society of America, Elmhurst, Illinois.

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Figure 4. Pan-Pacific Auditorium. From *Los Angeles Times*, February 15, 1956.

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Figure 5. Adjacent mid-1930s structural glass storefronts on Madison Street, Pittsfield, Illinois.

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Figure 6. Nighttime view of the Zoe Theatre (n.d.). Image courtesy of the Zoe Preservation Society.