

**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 Masonic Temple and World Theater Building

Other names/site number BF05-471

**2. Location**

Street & number 2318 Central Avenue Not for publication

City or town Kearney Vicinity

State Nebraska Code NE County Buffalo Code 019 Zip code 68847

**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.)

/s/ Michael J. Smith  
Signature of certifying official

October 1, 2009  
Date

Director, Nebraska State Historical Society  
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 certifying official/Title

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register. \_\_\_\_\_
- see continuation sheet. \_\_\_\_\_
- determined eligible for the National Register. \_\_\_\_\_
- see continuation sheet. \_\_\_\_\_
- determined not eligible for the National Register. \_\_\_\_\_
- removed from the National Register. \_\_\_\_\_
- other, (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

**Masonic Temple & Theatre Building**

Name of Property

**Buffalo, Nebraska**

County and State

**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.)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Recreation and Culture – Theater

Social – Meeting Hall

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Recreation and Culture – Theater

Social – Meeting Hall

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Revivals –

Classical Revival (Neoclassical Revival)

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Foundation Concrete

Walls Brick Veneer

Roof Asphalt

Other

**Narrative Description**

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

**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 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.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Entertainment \_\_\_\_\_

Social History \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1927 – 1959

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1927

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

NA

**Cultural Affiliation**

NA

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

James T. Allen

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(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 for additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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## 10. Geographical Data

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### Acreage of property \_\_\_\_\_

UTM References (place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet).

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1.	14	493593	4504662	3.			
2.				4.			

[ ] See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

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

### Boundary Justification

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

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## 11. Form Prepared By

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name/title Patrick Haynes / Historic Buildings Survey Coordinator  
organization Nebraska State Historical Society date \_\_\_\_\_  
street & number 1420 P Street / P.O. Box 82554 telephone 402/471-4770  
city or town Lincoln state NE zip code 68501-2554

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## Additional Documentation

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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.)

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## Property Owner

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

name/title Masonic Temple Association  
street & number 2318 1/2 Central Avenue telephone 308-233-7325  
city or town Kearney state NE zip code 68847

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determined 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, (15 USC 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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Continuation Sheet

**Masonic Temple & Theatre Building**

Name of Property

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*Narrative Description*

The Masonic Temple and World Theater Building is located in the Central Business District (CBD) in the city of Kearney, Buffalo County, Nebraska. The population of Kearney was estimated to be 30,417 in 2008.<sup>1</sup> The CBD is aligned north-south on Central Avenue between 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the railroad. Numerous historic and non-historic commercial and civic buildings contribute to the CBD. The brick paved Central Avenue is separated from the concrete sidewalks by small planting strips.

The Masonic Temple and World Theater building is located on the northern edge of the CBD, on the southwest corner of the intersection of Central Avenue and 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The front (east) façade of the building faces Central Avenue, while the north façade faces 24<sup>th</sup> Avenue. A small alley along the west façade parallels Central Avenue and provides access to the rear of the building. The Masonic Temple and World Theater abuts a two story commercial building to the south.

The stripped neoclassical style, four story building is structurally constructed of concrete, brick, and steel with a light buff brick veneer and marble trim. The eastern and northern façades are veneered with the light buff brick in a common bond, while the western and southern façades are veneered with a red brick.

The main façade faces east with four separate entrances. The theater entrance is recessed with a series of non-historic glass and aluminum doors. The walls of the recessed area are tiled with small square light blue tiles and a space is devoted on each side for posting movie advertisements. Two small commercial storefronts flank the theater entrance. Both commercial spaces possess large glass windows and single doors. The southern most entrance is a non-historic double door for access to upper floors by a stairwell and elevator. This entrance is decorated with neoclassical elements and the words "MASONIC TEMPLE" carved above the door in marble. The entire first floor level façade has recessed and raised brick banding. The theater entrance has a historic awning-style marquee with "WORLD" accented in neon, extending over the sidewalk. A decorative band of marble separates the first floor level from the upper floors. The main shaft of the front facade is defined by five window bays with each window bay consisting of paired 1-over-1 double-hung windows. All upper story windows are original. Pilasters extend from the bottom of the second floor to the top of the fourth floor. Separating the second and third floor windows are decorative marble panels with Masonic emblems. The third and fourth floors are separated by panels constructed of dark red bricks. From the third floor central bay window hangs a small Masonic sign, signifying the purpose of the upper two stories.

The first story of the northern façade is rusticated with a marble band demarcating the change in floor levels. Windows on the far eastern side to the façade provide light into the first floor level commercial bay and the second floor level office space. The other openings on these two levels are for theater emergency doors and window openings that are currently boarded up. The majority of the façade is solid brickwork which correlates

<sup>1</sup> Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau, Subcounty Estimates File, Released July 1, 2009.

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with the space on the interior where the auditorium is located. The upper two stories possess the same pattern of decorative panels as seen on the front façade. The rear western façade is constructed of red brick with no decorative patterns applied to the brickwork other than the common bond. A large door provides access to the storage rooms and utility rooms at the rear of the theater. The southern façade is also constructed of red brick with two doors providing access to basement level storage and utility rooms. A non-historic fire escape extends from the fourth floor level. Windows are also to be found on the third and fourth floors of the southern façade.

*Interior*

The theater foyer retains its original layout but not its original fabric. The interior was remodeled in the 1980's with the ticket booth being moved to the side. The original entrance to the auditorium was filled in with a concession stand. The new concession area was tiled during the remodeling. Drop ceilings and carpeting are found throughout the foyer and hallways. Men's and women's bathrooms flank the foyer as they did historically however they have been modernized. The foyer empties out in two semi-circular hallways wrapping around the auditorium. At the end of the southern hallway is the theater manager's office that has drop ceilings and wall-paneling. Two new entrances were created for the twinned auditorium space. Opposite the doors to the auditorium are stairwells to the balcony level. The auditorium was twinned in the 1980's in an attempt to increase revenue and compete with larger multiple screen theaters. The twinning was achieved by removing the seats along the middle of the auditorium and constructing a wall. The remaining seats in both theater spaces vary in age with seats from the 1960's interspersed with seats from the 1980's. The floors of the auditorium are concrete while the balcony floors are constructed with wood and concrete. The proscenium and stage were covered in order to create a screen for the new theater space. Having been covered by the screens, the proscenium and stage were preserved. The proscenium arch is decorated with a floral and rosette plasterwork. A rosette medallion pattern is repeated across the balcony wall. The balcony area has several rows of additional seating with the projector room located against the rear wall. Inside the projector room is an area for a toilet, intended for the use of employees working the projector. The original walls of the theater are constructed of plaster however panels of sound absorbing material are attached to the drywall and stud constructed wall which divides the historic auditorium space. The ceiling is constructed of plaster with large furred plaster beams that currently have noise absorbing panels attached, running north – south. These beams terminate along the north and south walls where decorative brackets join the beam with engaged columns, reiterating the Neoclassical style of the building. Behind the stage to the west is a large room for curtain controls and utilities. Also found in the backstage area is a small stairwell leading up to several dressing rooms. Beneath the stage in the basement are several rooms for storage, and historic heating and cooling equipment.

The second floor offices and third and fourth floor Masonic Lodge are accessed by the southern-most entrance on the ground floor. A non-historic door on the exterior leads through a vestibule to a historic wooden door with Masonic emblems on the handle. The lobby area floor is terrazzo, while the walls are made of plaster. Both the elevator and stairwell are accessible from this small lobby. The elevator shaft is part of the original construction

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for the building however, due to a shortage of funds, several years passed before an elevator was installed in the shaft.

The offices located on the second floor are accessed by the stairwell or elevator. Offices are aligned along the suites eastern side of the building parallel to the asbestos tiled hallway. A total of five small office suites compose the entirety of the office space available. Each office suite is carpeted with chair rails attached on the plaster walls. All doors are original but most of the transoms no longer function. A small terrazzo floored unisex bathroom is located on the west side of the hallway.

The third and fourth floors are designated for the purposes of the Masonic Lodge. On the third floor a carpeted hallway with drop ceiling leads around to the west side of the building. Off of this hallway is a ladies smoking lounge with an attached bathroom and a men's bathroom. Farther west down the hallway are a series of rooms used for storage and meetings. Another small hallway extends off and provides access to many of these auxiliary rooms. Historically, many of these rooms were used to store costumes for Masonic rituals. Leading from the small hallway to the east are two entrances to the lodge hall. The lodge room is accessed by entering a smaller room before finally entering the huge lodge space. Typical for Masonic Lodge rooms, it is designed and arranged as a large rectangle with platforms centrally positioned on each wall. Seating is provided along the walls with the center of the room reserved for the altar. The room is designed with Neoclassical elements such as pilasters. A projector, located in the balcony, is obscured from view by a decorative wooden panel. One of the most interesting features of this lodge is the design of the room itself. The windows and walls form a shell which is most clearly seen when opening a window to view the actual building envelope. Approximately four feet of space exists between the interior walls of the lodge room and the exterior walls of the building, which has been utilized for mechanical systems. The architectural reasons behind this room within a room design are unknown, however it is important to point out the lodge room is the only one in the building, designed in such a way.

The fourth floor has an oak floored hallway which leads north along storage rooms/offices before turning west at the coat check room. The hallway terminates at the banquet room located on the west side of the building. Ladies' and men's bathrooms are located on the south side of the hallway. A large linoleum floored kitchen, remodeled in the 1950's, is located to the south side of the hallway and is connected by another door to the banquet room. The banquet room is divided only by flooring material with maple flooring to south and carpet to the north. A non-historic door provides access to the fire escape.

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*History*

The corner lot where the Masonic Temple & World Theater is located has served as an important center for entertainment and social events for nearly a century. The lots where the Masonic Temple & World Theater sits were sold to the Masonic Temple Association by Enoch Eck. After purchasing the lots in 1926, the Masonic Temple Association decided to construct a new building.<sup>2</sup>

Architect, James T. Allen (1889-1957), of Omaha, was chosen to design the Masonic Temple & World Theater building. Allen first established himself as an independent professional architect in 1914, with an office in the Brandeis Theater building in Omaha. Working in a variety of styles, Allen designed numerous types of buildings, such as the c.1916 Ford Hospital, Omaha (NRHP-1986), c.1928 Ambassador Apartments, Omaha (NRHP-2005), and the nonextant c.1928 Daily Record Building, Omaha. Prior to constructing the Masonic Temple & World Theater in Kearney, Allen gained experience in theater design with the c.1923 Roseland Theater, Omaha (NRHP-1989).

Construction on the Masonic Temple & World Theater Building finished in the fall of 1927, with the official grand opening of the theater taking place on November 14, 1927. Upon opening, the theater could seat 980 persons distributed throughout the auditorium and balcony.<sup>3</sup>

The World Theater installed many of the new technologies in order to gain more customers. Nationwide, air conditioning was a luxury to most people at the time, and became an important part of the attraction of going to the theater. In the early years of operation, the World Theater capitalized on being air-conditioned, in an attempt to gain more theater customers. Throughout the 1930's, in Kearney Daily Hub newspaper advertisements "Always Cool" was added to the "World" graphic, which was covered in icicles. Other local theaters such as the Fort Theater (NRHP-2006) later mimicked the advertising of the World Theater, in an effort to compete for customers wishing to keep cool.

The thirty-two foot wide stage of the World, allowed for both movies and stage performances. The design of the theater reflects a period when vaudeville stage performances and talking movies graced a stage designed to accommodate both. The World used Vitaphone, the latest technology for theaters that provided audio tracks to movies by playing phonograph discs. In terms of stage performances, the theater hosted vaudeville and amateur talent shows such as the August 15, 1934 Amateur Nite, which featured songs, dances, and accompaniment from the Guy Hite's Stage Band.<sup>4</sup> Another example of entertainment can be seen just two weeks later as Hollywood and radio stars, The Purple Sage Riders, The Lonesome Cowboy, and The Arizona Wranglers

<sup>2</sup> Howell, Alice. "More on Brickyards" Buffalo Tales 16.6 (1993); Nielsen, Margaret. "Roots of Buffalo County-The Scandanavians Pt.II" Buffalo Tales 7.2 (1984) <<http://bchs.us/BTales>> accessed 30 July 2009.

<sup>3</sup> *Kearney Daily Hub* 24 October 1938.

<sup>4</sup> *Kearney Daily Hub* 15 August 1934 pg 6.

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appeared on stage to perform cowboy songs at the World Theater. The singing cowboys were accompanied by a trick roper The Arizona Kid, and Texas Tommy and his wonder horse Baby Doll.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the 1930s into the 1940s these kinds of performances were commonly a part of the entertainment program at the World Theater. The theater also sponsored philanthropic activities, such as the July 11, 1934 fruit jar drive. People were asked to donate at least two fruit jars in exchange for the free showing of *Sunset Pass*, *Uncle Jake*, and *Popeye the Sailor*. The fruit jars were needed by the local Federal Emergency Relief Administration office that oversaw a garden and required jars for the canning of food for the winter.<sup>6</sup> Needy families in the community were the beneficiaries of the canned produce.

Although the World Theater sponsored shows that were popular with young crowds, they also put on shows of a more mature nature. Popular during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, bathing revues were a regular event in the summertime. Without a beach or large pool area available to them, the people of Kearney, Nebraska would occasionally hold bathing revues on stage at the World Theater, such as the one held on June 15, 1934.<sup>7</sup>

On the screen, the theater experimented with midnight showings limited only to adults. The movie *The Burning Question*, better known as *Reefer Madness*, was shown for the first time in Nebraska at the World, according to a January 23, 1941 theater advertisement.<sup>8</sup> This movie exemplifies the late night show and the theater's attempt to keep such controversial and risqué productions out of sight of the youth.

The other major component of the building is the Masonic Temple and office spaces. The second floor office space has been leased to numerous businesses over the years. In 1938 for instance office space was leased by the Public Works Administration while a new city hall building was being constructed.<sup>9</sup>

The Masonic Temple Association has managed the Masonic Temple space located on the third story, since the building's completion. The temple operates in the same fashion as it was originally designed, as a meeting space for the various Masonic groups in Kearney. The lodge space and associated dressing rooms were designed for performances of rituals which the membership could view in the center of the room. Besides being the location of Masonic rituals, the lodge serves other purposes. Most notably as a meeting place for community social events held in the fourth floor banquet room.

<sup>5</sup> *Kearney Daily Hub* 22 August 1934 pg 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Kearney Daily Hub* 11 July 1934 pg 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Kearney Daily Hub* 15 June 1934 pg 9.

<sup>8</sup> *Kearney Daily Hub* 23 January 1941 pg 5.

<sup>9</sup> *Kearney Daily Hub* 5 December 1938.

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*Statement of Significance*

The Masonic Temple and World Theater building is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under criterion A for its association with the social history and entertainment history of Kearney. The building has served as a theater and Masonic Temple since its construction in 1927. Through the years the building has served to entertain people of all ages in the theater while the Masonic Temple has served at the center of a fraternal organization. Despite the nationwide downturn of recruitment in fraternal organizations during the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this Masonic Lodge has maintained its numbers as the various branches have come together in their lodge space. Similarly the theater managed to survive until the 1990's serving as a local movie theater with few major subtractive alterations to the building. Overall, the building has maintained a high degree of integrity, and has remained in the same use as it was originally designed.

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Bibliography

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Bibliography

Howell, Alice. "More on Brickyards" *Buffalo Tales* 16.6 (1993) <<http://bchs.us/BTales>> accessed 30 July 2009.

Kearney Daily Hub 3 April 1926 – 15 November 1955. Moore, William. *Masonic Temples: Freemasonry, Ritual Architecture, and Masculine Archetypes*. Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 2006.

Naylor, David. *Great American Movie Theaters*. Washington, D.C.: The Preservation Press, 1987.

Nielsen, Margaret. "Roots of Buffalo County-The Scandanavians Pt.II" *Buffalo Tales* 7.2 (1984) <<http://bchs.us/BTales>> accessed 30 July 2009.

Sanborn Fire Company, *Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1949*.

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Geographic Data**

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Verbal Boundary Description

Lot 72 and the north half of Lot 73, Block 26 in the Original Town of Kearney Junction, now the City of Kearney, Buffalo County, Nebraska.

Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the Masonic Temple & Theatre Building, Kearney, Buffalo County, Nebraska.

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**Photographs**

**Photo 1 of 16.** East Façade, Aspect: W

**Photo 2 of 16.** North Façade, Aspect: SW

**Photo 3 of 16.** West Façade, Aspect: NE

**Photo 4 of 16.** South Façade, Aspect: NE

**Photo 5 of 16.** Interior, World Theater foyer, Aspect: W

**Photo 6 of 16.** Interior, World Theater foyer and stairs, Aspect: N

**Photo 7 of 16.** Interior, World Theater screen 1, Aspect: W

**Photo 8 of 16.** Interior, World Theater seating and balcony, Aspect: E

**Photo 9 of 16.** Interior, World Theater backstage room, Aspect: S

**Photo 10 of 16.** Interior, World Theater backstage rigging, Aspect: N

**Photo 11 of 16.** Interior, Historic door in vestibule to stairwell and elevator, Aspect: W

**Photo 12 of 16.** Interior, Second floor office hallway, Aspect: N

**Photo 13 of 16.** Interior, Third floor Masonic Lodge room, Aspect: E

**Photo 14 of 16.** Interior, Third floor Masonic Lodge room, Aspect: W

**Photo 15 of 16.** Interior, Fourth floor kitchen, Aspect: NW

**Photo 16 of 16.** Interior, Fourth floor banquet room, Aspect: SE

Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3



Photo 4



Photo 6



Photo 5



Photo 7

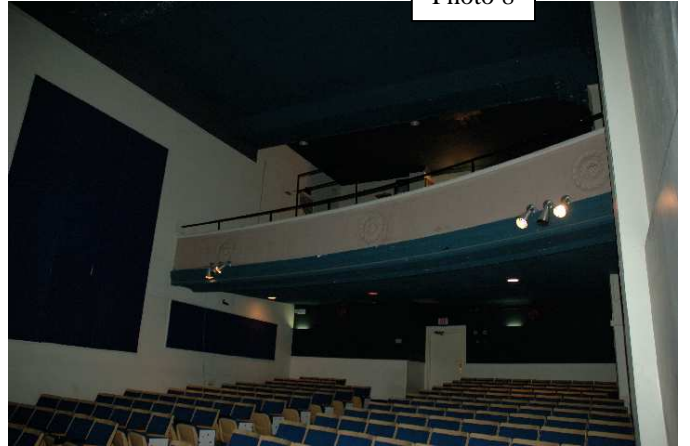


Photo 8



Photo 9



Photo 10



Photo 11



Photo 12



Photo 13



Photo 14



Photo 15



Photo 16