1. Name
   COMMON: Astro Theater
   AND/OR HISTORIC: Riviera Theater

2. Location
   STREET AND NUMBER: 2001 Farnam Street
   CITY OR TOWN: Omaha
   STATE: Nebraska
   CODE: 31
   COUNTY: Douglas
   CODE: 055

3. Classification
   CATEGORY (Check One):
   District
   Site
   Structure
   Object
   Building
   Structure
   Object
   Tourism

   OWNERSHIP:
   Public
   Private
   Both
   Public Acquisition:
   In Process
   Being Considered
   Preservation Work in Progress
   Occupied
   Unoccupied
   Preservation Work Unoccupied
   Yes:
   Restricted
   Unrestricted
   No

   PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate):
   Agricultural
   Government
   Park
   Transportation
   Comments
   Commercial
   Industrial
   Private Residence
   Other (Specify)
   Educational
   Military
   Religious
   Owner's Name:
   Creighton University
   Street and Number:
   2500 California Street
   City or Town:
   Omaha
   State:
   Nebraska
   Code: 31
   County:
   Douglas

5. Location of Legal Description
   COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC:
   Register of Deeds, Douglas County Courthouse
   STREET AND NUMBER:
   18th & Farnam Streets
   CITY OR TOWN:
   Omaha
   State:
   Nebraska
   Code: 31
   County:
   Douglas

6. Representation in Existing Surveys
   TITLE OF SURVEY:
   Historic Preservation in Nebraska
   DATE OF SURVEY: 1971
   DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:
   Nebraska State Historical Society
   STREET AND NUMBER:
   1500 "R" Street
   CITY OR TOWN:
   Lincoln
   State:
   Nebraska
   Code: 31
   ENTRY NUMBER: 10-300
   DATE: July 1990

This nomination is located in the Second Congressional District.
Opened in 1926 as the Riviera, the 2,776 seat theater was noted for its lavish stage shows, combined with movies. It was one of the highly elegant entertainment facilities of the time. In the lobby there were rosebuds afloat in water fountains and goldfish swimming in the aquarium. In the theater portion, the vaulted ceiling had an artificial sky effect. Recessed lighting behind small holes sparkled like stars. Artificial clouds and doves hanging from the ceiling further enhanced the effect.

The orchestra pit was on an elevator. It emerged from below the stage with the whole orchestra for the stage show and would recede when the movie was about to start. The organ was imposing and superb.

In 1929 the building was sold, becoming the Paramount Theater. During the years of depression, there were no more stage shows. The lower lobby was converted into a miniature golf course to attract customers. In the 1960's there were extensive interior remodeling and all the gingerbread trimmings were removed.

The building is of steel-frame structure and rectangular in shape. The Farnam and Twentieth Street sides are faced with glazed bricks arranged in diamond patterns. On the other two sides, common bricks are used. The entrance, located on the northeast corner, is further defined by the metal marquee. The focal point is the copper dome topping the tower directly above. The structural ribs of the dome arranged in geometric patterns are exposed. The tower has balustrades, cornice, and ornate glazed terra-cotta tile copings. On the two exposed sides of the tower are two semi-circular balconies enclosed by glazed-tile screens of elaborate Moorish detail. Below there are also five Romanesque windows on
each side with glazed-tile balconies. A smaller dome of the same pattern is atop the north and east facades.

The most outstanding features of the building are the free-standing columns supporting griffons, three each on the north and east sides. The griffons are of a Greek version while the Corinthian columns have shafts of Islamic ornamentation. It is an extraordinary combination of Classic and Moorish features.

In the lobby, similar columns support the second floor. The center of the lobby is open to the second-floor lobby, thus visually connecting both levels. The doorways are segment arched and the walls are tapestried. The second-floor lobby walls are glazed tile and the ceiling is stucco. After so many remodelings, all the original gingerbread wood trimmings in the theater proper are removed. There are some sculptured terra-cotta plaques on the ceiling below the balcony level and ornate pediments above the arched doorways. The interior is mainly of modern design.
Architectural styles of eastern origin were never popular in the United States. Interest in Egyptian architecture reached a high point in the 1830's, and only a handful of buildings were erected in that style, mostly on the east coast and in the Southern states. Islamic styles had an even smaller influence. Its features were only occasionally executed in the few Mohammedan mosques built in this country. Moorish ornaments, noted for the intricate geometrical or floral surface decorations in painted stucco, mosaic, glazed tiles, or shallow relief carving, were sometimes used in buildings. The Riviera Theater is one of a few buildings in this part of the country possessing such a unique combination of both Moorish and Classical styles.

Opened in 1926, the Riviera Theater was one of the most elegant entertainment facilities of the time. After television was introduced the cinema industry in the Omaha area declined and many theaters had also cut into the downtown theater business appreciably. Still standing today, the Astro Theater is a reminder of that glamorous motion picture era.
9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Files, Nebraska State Historical Society.


Pegler, Martin. Dictionary of Interior Design.

Giedion, S. Space, Time and Architecture.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

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APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 5.5 acres

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE: CODE COUNTY: CODE
STATE: CODE COUNTY: CODE
STATE: CODE COUNTY: CODE
STATE: CODE COUNTY: CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:
Persijs Kolberg, Curator of Historic Sites

ORGANIZATION:
Nebraska State Historical Society

STREET AND NUMBER:
1500 "R" Street

CITY OR TOWN:
Lincoln

STATE: Nebraska

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

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

National [ ] State [x] Local [ ]

Name ____________________________

Title Director, Nebraska State Historical Society

Date ____________________________

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

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

Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date ____________________________

ATTEST:

Keeper of The National Register

Date ____________________________
Photo 1 — view of northeast elevation looking southwest.  
Nebraska State Historical Society, 1971 (NSHS H673.5-1977)
Photo 2 — view of griffin sculpture on Corinthian column. Nebraska State Historical Society, 1971 (NSHS H673.5-1982)
Photo 3 — view of lobby looking south.
Nebraska State Historical Society, 1971 (NSHS H673.5-1979)
Photo 4 — view of east site looking west.
Nebraska State Historical Society, 1971 (NSHS H673.5-1978)
Photo 5 — view of copper dome on top of northeast tower looking southwest. Nebraska State Historical Society, 1971 (NSHS H673.5-1980)