

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

NR LISTED
NOV 18 1999
AHPP

1. Name of Property

Historic Name: New Theatre

Other Name/Site Number: SB0016

2. Location

Street & Number: 9 North 10th Street

City/Town: Fort Smith

Not for Publication: N/A
Vicinity: N/A

State: AR County: Sebastian

Code: AR131 Zip Code: 72901

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: private

Category of Property: building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

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

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic: RECREATION AND CULTURE

Sub: theater

Current: WORK IN PROGRESS

Sub:

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

Beaux Arts

Materials: foundation BRICK
walls TERRA COTTA

roof ASPHALT
other

Describe present and historic physical appearance:

SUMMARY

Located at 9 North 10th Street in Fort Smith, the New Theatre was modeled after the New Amsterdam Theater in New York City. Built in 1911 the two-story building is an excellent example of a small-scale Classical Beaus-Arts theater building. Typical of the Beaux-Arts style, exterior detailing on the 10th Street elevation includes glazed terra cotta brick, large rusticated terra cotta bricks, ornate trim, scroll brackets, and elaborately bordered cartouches. Particularly noticeable is a decorative grotesque depicting the Roman god Neptune that serves as the keystone for a large segmental arch. A 1922 secondary entrance facing Garrison Avenue was separated from the building and is now under separate ownership. This entrance is not including in the nomination.

ELABORATION

The ornate, cream-colored glazed terra cotta exterior entry is an outstanding example of decorative architectural features popular during the early 1900s. The arch over the door was originally glass and is still watched over by a fierce terra cotta grotesque with open mouth. Over the grotesque and surrounded by elaborate terra cotta trim is the name of the original owner "SPARKS." The parapet is

raised in a slight gable decorated by a variety of cornice moldings with the date of construction "1911" surrounded by a rectangle of trim. On either side of the cornice are two elaborately ornamented cartouches (or shields).

The exterior building has undergone some alteration. The 1922 Garrison Avenue secondary entrance no longer leads to the theater. The entry is still present, but the opening into the theater is infilled. The major entry is the 10th street entrance. The original doors and glass were removed, and now the doorway area is secured with modern glass and metal framed doors and windows. An awning was once suspended by chains. This awning was removed at an unknown date; however, the original chains and floral anchors remain. The original terra cotta grotesque and decorative work is still in existence with minor damage. The rest of the exterior of the structure is in original condition.

Inside the building is a long barrel vaulted corridor that leads into the theater proper. This corridor is decorated by ornate plaster adornments, as well as huge circular light fixtures covered with a leaf and flower motif. A "colored entrance", that was little more than a steep flight of stairs to the upper balcony is located to the side of this grand entry.

The theater property has two balconies that curve in a dramatic fashion intercepting the angled wall of the private boxes. The gently curving ceiling is approximately thirty-five feet from the sloping theater floor. Although the private boxes have been enclosed, the structures are still in existence as are the doors that were used to enter the boxes.

A magnificent brick proscenium arch spans the width of the stage area and separates the audience area from the seventy-foot tall flies (the area directly over the stage of a theater, containing overhead lights, drop curtains, an equipment for raising and lowering sets.) Large wing areas exist off of both sides of the stage. Many of the original pulleys, doors and seats have been stored in the building.

The interior Beaux-Arts era décor was streamlined with a covering of wire mesh and plaster, the wooden stage was removed and replaced with seating, a projection booth was added. The side boxes were enclosed to accommodate temperature control ductwork. The dressing rooms, located below the old stage were infilled and capped with concrete. However, the New Theatre remains the best example of a Beaux-Arts theater building in the city of Fort Smith.

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8. Statement of Significance
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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: local.

Applicable National Register Criteria: C

New Theatre
Name of Property

Sebastian County, AR
County and State

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

Areas of Significance: Architecture

Period(s) of Significance: 1911 c. 1940

Significant Dates: 1911 c. 1940

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: The Boller Brothers of Kansas City--Architects
Klaw and Erianger--Builders

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above:

SUMMARY

Built in 1911, New Theatre is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C with local significance. Typical of the Beaux-Arts style, exterior detailing of the New Theatre includes glazed terra cotta brick, ornate trim, scroll brackets, and elaborately bordered cartouches. Particularly noticeable is a decorative grotesque depicting the Roman god Neptune that serves as the keystone for the large segmental arch. The interior corridor is decorated by ornate plaster adornments, as well as, huge circular light fixtures covered with a leaf and flower motif.

ELABORATION

The New Theatre was built as a performing arts playhouse in 1911. The owner was a Mr. Sparks (Spark's Hospital of Fort Smith) and the first manager was Mr. C.A. Lick (of Weldon, Williams, and Lick) both founders of major commercial and charitable organizations still in existence in Fort Smith today. Mr. Sparks had visited the New Amsterdam Theater built in 1903 in New York City. He was so impressed with the structure that he employed the same builders, although he hired a different architect. The design of the entrances and the theater itself duplicates the New Amsterdam with Garrison and Tenth Streets as the entrances instead of Broadway and Forty-First Streets as in New York City. (Note: the New Amsterdam Theater was recently restored by Walt Disney, Co., and was named by Time Magazine as the Third Place "Best Design of 1997", December 29, 1997).

The New Theatre opened its doors on September 29, 1911 with Charles Klein's play "The Third Degree". The first night's performance tickets cost an astounding ten dollars each. All one thousand-two hundred seats were sold out that night for

the gala event. From 1911 until the 1940s, when the Malco took over, the New Theatre hosted vaudeville and minstrel shows as well as plays, concerts, and silent movies. The New Theatre featured the famed magician Harry Houdini and the beloved Shirley Temple in live performances. The theater had an orchestra to accompany the silent movies. Matinee goers were allowed to tie their horses outside the theater on 10th Street.

Throughout the first decades of the new century the New Theatre was one of the cultural and entertainment centers in Fort Smith. It boasted road shows from New York with companies of fifty people. Each level of seating had separate price and ads during the 1920s advertised a range from fifty cents to a dollar-fifty plus a war tax. Babies in arms were not permitted.

Even after the New Theatre was converted to the Malco it was a central gathering place for Fort Smith residents. From the early 1940s through the 1960s, the then Malco Theater operated strictly as movie theater. Located within blocks of the Temple Theater and the Joie Theater (now demolished) the Malco served a growing population of moviegoers. During the 1970s, the theater lost popularity and closed. The building stood empty as it passed through several owners. The building was broken into and became a place for vagrant and wild animals to sleep. Music Fort Smith, Inc. A non-profit organization purchased the building in 1995. Music Fort Smith is fortunate enough to possess the sheet music used by the New Orchestra for performances. The building is now secure and no further deterioration has occurred.

Typical of the Beaux-Arts style, exterior detailing New Theatre includes glazed terra cotta brick; large rusticated terra cotta bricks, ornate trim, scroll brackets, and elaborately bordered cartouches. Particularly noticeable is a decorative grotesque depicting the Roman god Neptune that serves as the keystone for a large segmental arch. The interior barrel-vaulted corridor is decorated by ornate plaster adornment, as well as huge circular light fixtures covered with a leaf and flower motif. For these reasons, the New Theatre is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C with local significance.

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9. Major Bibliographical References
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Kelly, N.J., *New Theatre*, *The Journal*, Fort Smith Historical Society, Inc., Vol. 11, No. 2, September 1978.

Oklahoma Educational Television Authority, Tulsa, Oklahoma, Telephone Interviews, June 1997.

Robinson, Les. Fayetteville, Arkansas, Telephone Interviews, June 1997.

Southwest American Newspaper, Ft. Smith, Arkansas, Dates: August 23, 1911, September 25, 1911, September 28, 1911, February 7, 1924.

New Theatre
Name of Property

Sebastian County, AR
County and State

Soren Noelle, (Architectural Historian) Letters dated March 28, 1997, and August 9, 1997.

Time Magazine, "best of Design of 1997", December 29, 1997.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property: less than one

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

A 15 370880 3916500 B _____

C _____ D _____

Verbal Boundary Description:

Parts of Lots 9 & 10, Block 20, Original City of Ft. Smith, Arkansas, described as follows: beginning at the common corner of Lots 8 & 9, said corner being on the southwesterly right of way of a 20 foot alley, thence along said right of way bearing South 37 degrees 12' est a distance of 88.5 feet, then South 52 degrees 48' East a distance of 140.0 feet to the northwesterly right of way line of North 10th Street; thence along said right of way bearing north 37 degrees 12' East a distance of 18.5 feet, more or less, to a point which is 22.2 feet south of the Northerly boundary line of lot 10, then North 52 degrees 48' West a distance of 67.6 feet; to the common line between lots 8 and 9; thence along said common line North 52 degrees 40' West a distance of 72.4 feet to the point of beginning.

New Theatre
Name of Property

Sebastian County, AR
County and State

Boundary Justification:

This boundary contains all of the property historically associated with the New Theatre except for the 1922 secondary entrance facing Garrison Avenue that was separated from the building and is now under separate ownership.

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11. Form Prepared By
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Name/Title: Amy Bennett/Survey Historian

Organization: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program Date: 9/28/99

Street & Number: 1500 Tower Bldg., 323 Center St. Telephone: (501) 324-9880

City or Town: Little Rock State: AR ZIP: 72201



New Theatre

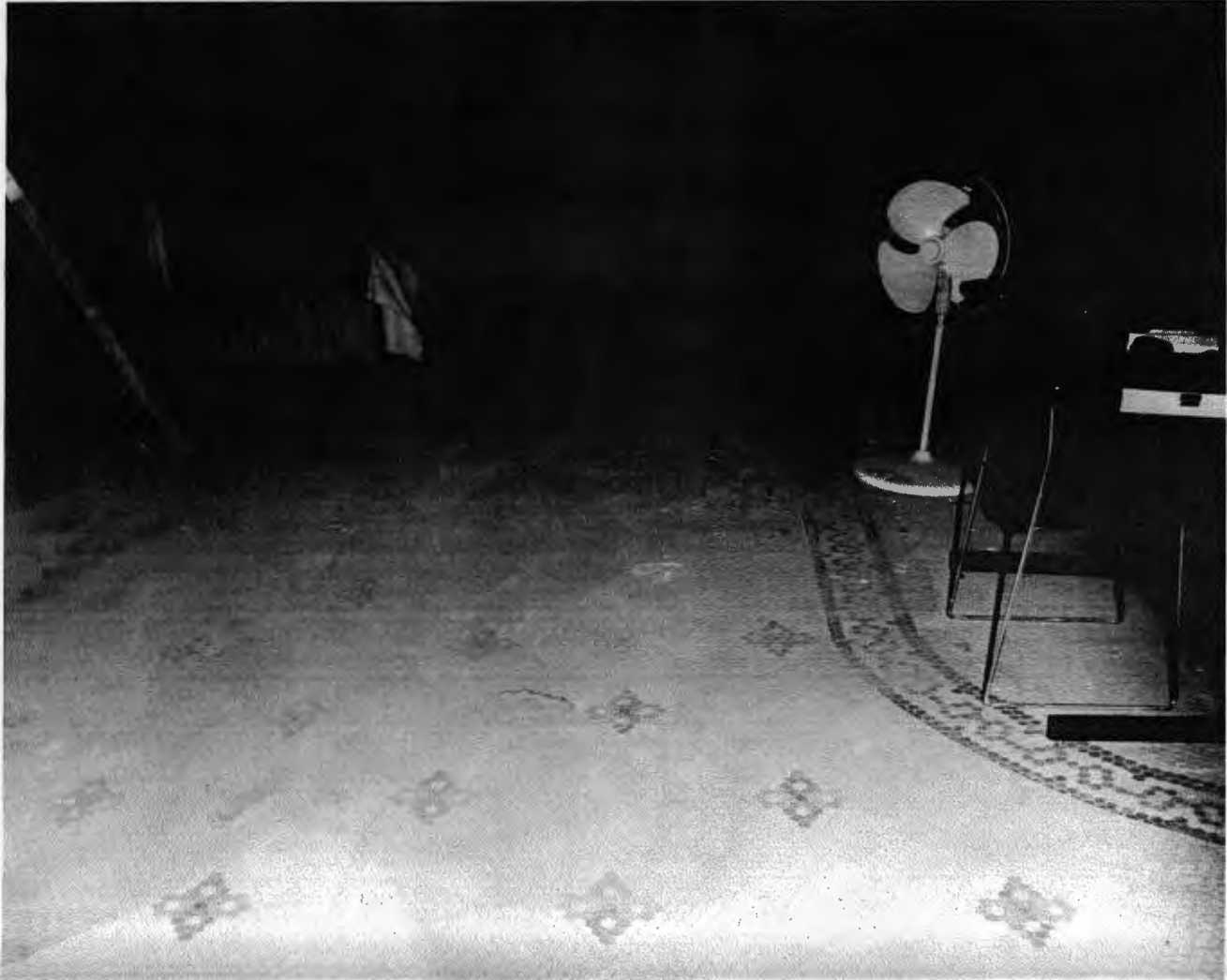
Sebastian County, AR

Holly Hope

September 1998

AHPP

Interior view of hall looking Southeast



New Theatre

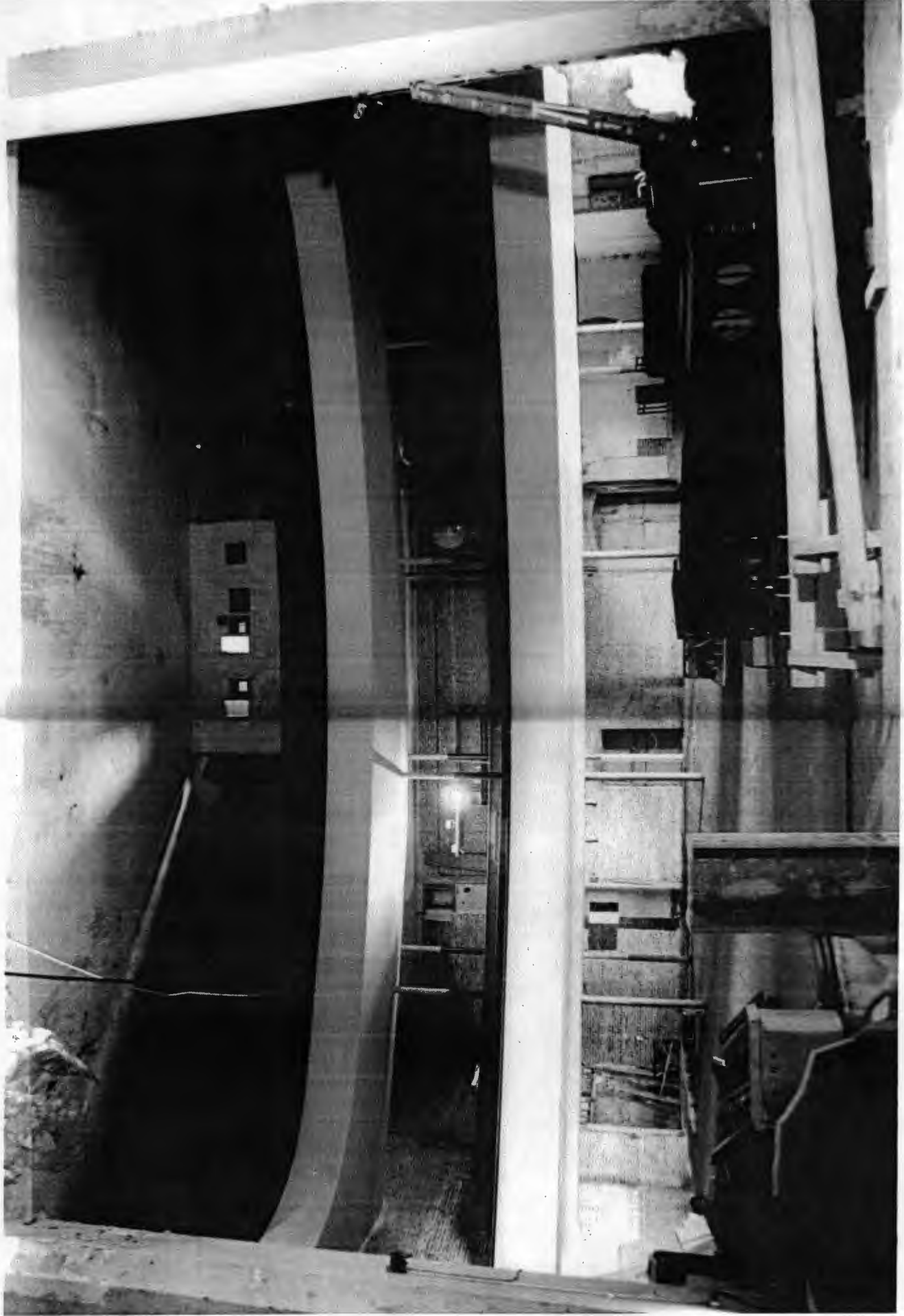
Sebastian County, AR

Holly Hope

September 1998

AHPP

Interior view of hall floor looking northwest



New Theatre
Sebastian County, AR
Holly Hope
September 1998
AHP
Interior view of auditorium looking southwest



New Theatre
Sebastian County, AR

Holly Hope

September 1998

AHPP

View of southeast facade looking northwest



New Theatre

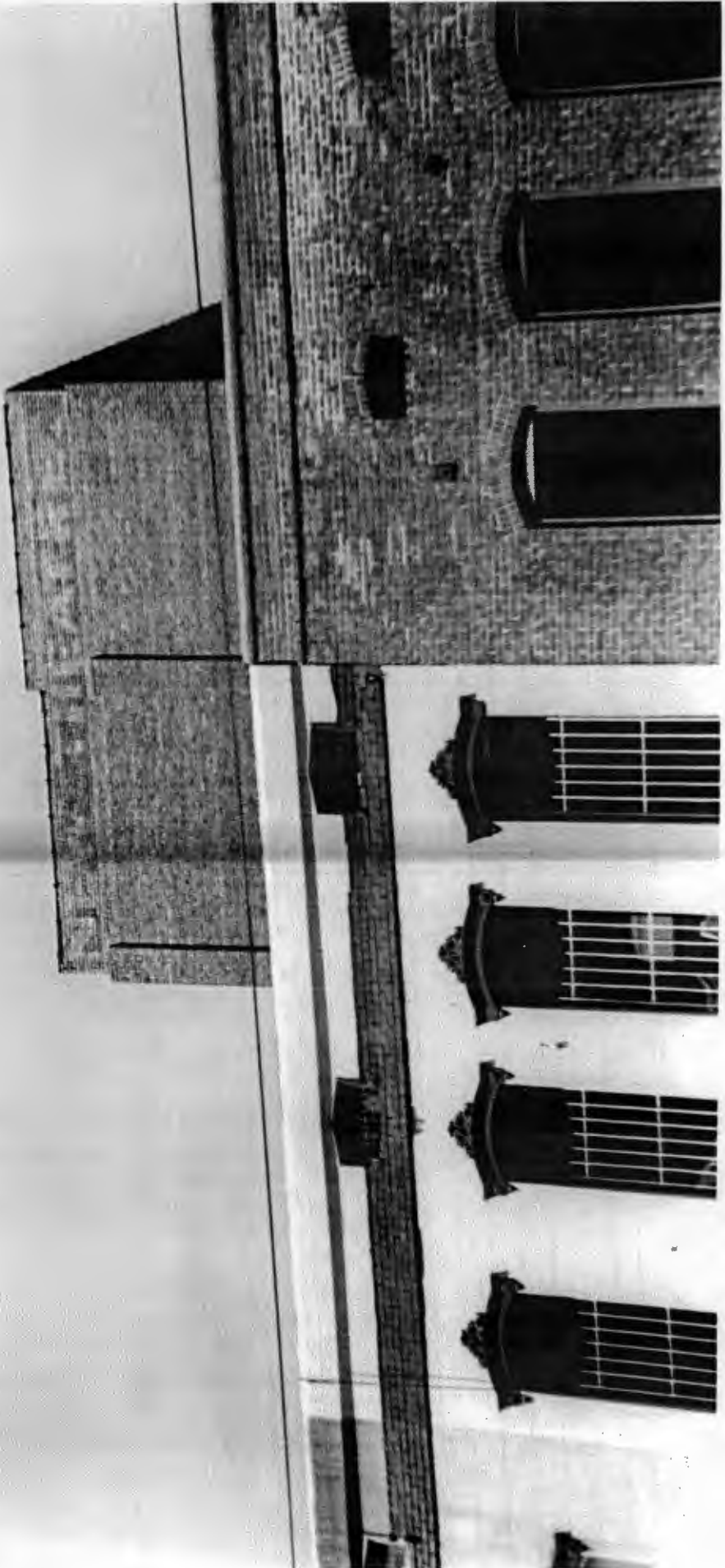
Sebastian County, AR

Holly Hope

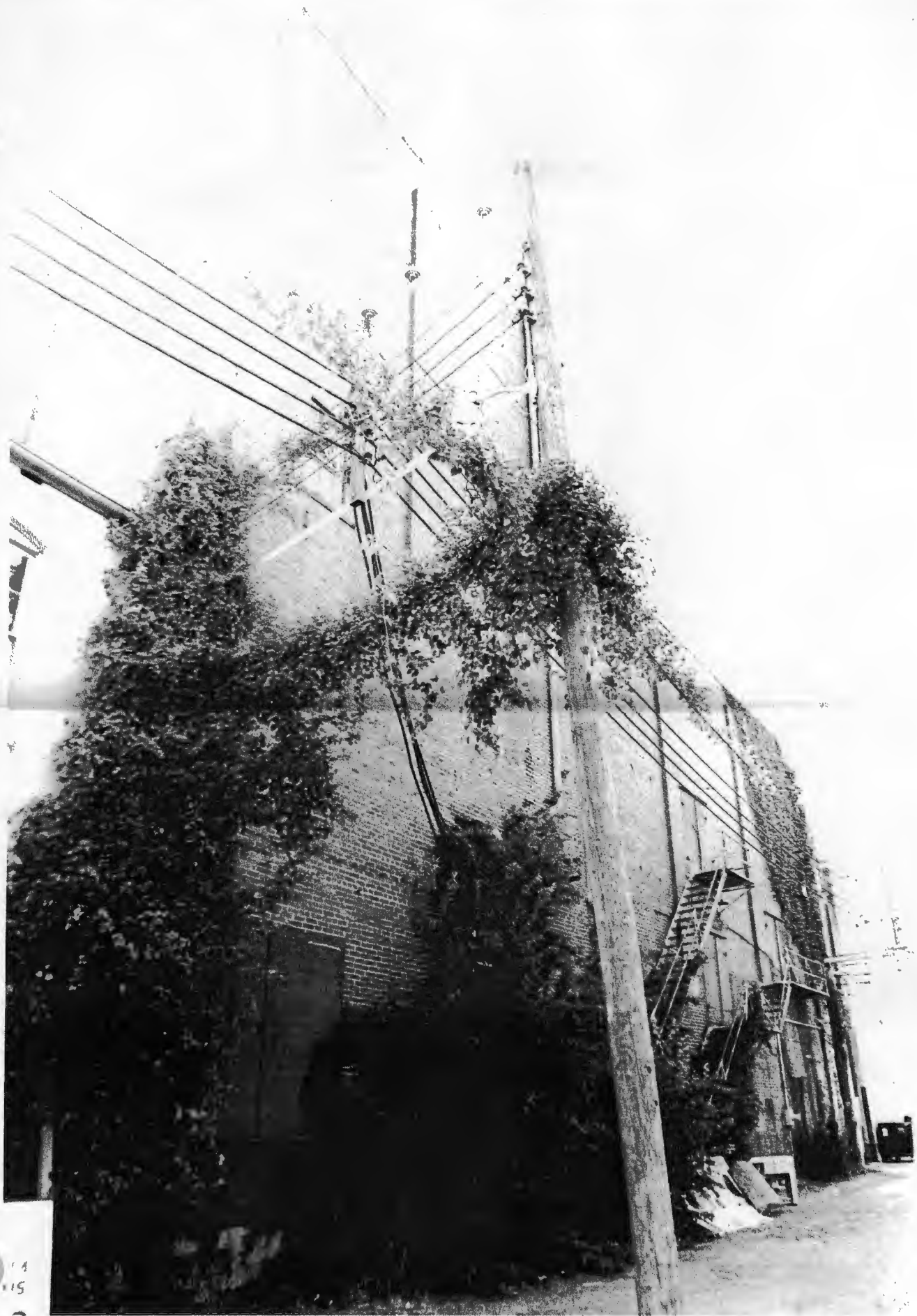
September 1948

AHPP

Closeup of grotesque southeast facade
looking northwest



New Theatre
Sebastian County, AR
Hilly Hope
September 1998
ATPP
View of Flies, looking northwest



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NEW THEATRE
Sebastian County, AR

Holly Hope

September 1998

AHPP

View of rear elevation looking south

