

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PH0675636

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED APR 18 1979

DATE ENTERED

29

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Saenger Theatre

AND/OR COMMON

Saenger Center

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Corner of Forrest and Front streets

___ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Hattiesburg

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Fifth

STATE

Mississippi

CODE

28

COUNTY

Forrest

CODE

35

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

___ DISTRICT

☒ BUILDING(S)

___ STRUCTURE

___ SITE

___ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

☒ PUBLIC

___ PRIVATE

___ BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

___ IN PROCESS

___ BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

☒ OCCUPIED

___ UNOCCUPIED

☒ WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

☒ YES: RESTRICTED

___ YES: UNRESTRICTED

___ NO

PRESENT USE

___ AGRICULTURE

___ COMMERCIAL

☒ EDUCATIONAL

☒ ENTERTAINMENT

___ GOVERNMENT

___ INDUSTRIAL

___ MILITARY

☒ MUSEUM

___ PARK

___ PRIVATE RESIDENCE

___ RELIGIOUS

___ SCIENTIFIC

___ TRANSPORTATION

___ OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

City of Hattiesburg

STREET & NUMBER

City Hall, Forrest Street

CITY, TOWN

Hattiesburg

___ VICINITY OF

STATE

Mississippi 39401

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Office of the Chancery Clerk
Forrest County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

North Main Street (P. O. Box 607)

CITY, TOWN

Hattiesburg

STATE

Mississippi 39401

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Statewide Survey of Historic Sites

DATE

1976

___ FEDERAL ☒ STATE ___ COUNTY ___ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Mississippi Department of Archives and History

CITY, TOWN

Jackson

STATE

Mississippi 39205

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

☐ EXCELLENT
☒ GOOD
☐ FAIR

☐ DETERIORATED
☐ RUINS
☐ UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

☐ UNALTERED
☒ ALTERED

CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE
☐ MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Saenger Theatre is located in downtown Hattiesburg, facing City Hall southwest across Forrest Street. The building encompasses a major theatre auditorium seating 1100 on a ground floor and two balconies, as well as five former shop areas recently renovated and now utilize as an art gallery, an area museum, and a newsstand. The exterior of the building, constructed of locally made buff-colored brick, is virtually unaltered. The main (southwest) facade features intricate brick detailing, colored glazed terra-cotta tiles, and decorative cast-stone friezework and trim. Two large brick pilasters are surmounted by two cast-stone urns which were originally matched by two others on the extreme ends of the facade. The southwest and southeast facades feature the original pressed-tin canopy.

Entrance to the theatre is through glass doors, which replaced the original wood-and-beveled-glass doors removed in a 1954 modernization. (Efforts are being made to locate the originals which, if unavailable, will be accurately reproduced.) The outer vestibule, also altered in 1954, was largely restored in 1976 to its former appearance, including fine plaster cornices and dentil molding and an original Art Deco chandelier. A pair of wood and glass doors original to the building lead from the vestibule to the corner shop space renovated by the Hattiesburg Civic Arts Council for use as an art gallery, display area, and council office.

The outer vestibule opens into the main lobby, which was slightly altered in the 1950s. The large two-story room features a vaulted ceiling and plaster pilasters surmounted by a heavy plaster cornice, giving the space an imposing grandeur. Two Art Deco chandeliers and a terra-cotta wall fountain are other notable elements. Staircases at either side lead to the balconies, and directly ahead are three openings with shorter staircases which give access to the upper lobby, now used as an additional exhibit gallery.

The auditorium is entered from the upper lobby through two sets of double doors and two open passages. Although the auditorium is basically unaltered, the walls were covered in the 1950s with floor-to-ceiling curtains, obscuring the pilasters and engaged columns around the proscenium and the openings and grills around the two organ lofts and along the walls. The organ lofts feature wrought-iron and cast-plaster grills in an Art Deco design, directing attention toward the proscenium and stage. The design of the original chandelier matches that of the two in the main lobby, but it is larger. Plans for restoration of the room include removing the drapes, repairing and repainting the plaster work, and repainting an existing stenciled design around the edges of the ceiling. The auditorium and its auxiliary spaces incorporate complete legitimate performing facilities, including orchestra pit, large stage, and three floors of dressing rooms.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES 1928-29

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Emil Weil, New Orleans

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Saenger Theatre is the only surviving local example of the great Art Deco movie palaces of the 1920s and '30s and one of only four existing Art Deco buildings in the Hattiesburg area. The most notable motion picture theatre ever built in the vicinity, the building was designed by architect Emil Weil of New Orleans, whose original plans have been obtained from prior owners by the City of Hattiesburg and have provided the basis for restoration.

The theatre was built as part of the Saenger brothers' chain of movie palaces throughout the Southeast. In the early 1930s E. V. Richards and Paramount Pictures acquired the building from the Saengers, and in 1950 Paramount became the sole owner. In the 1960s American Broadcasting Corporation acquired Paramount and operated the theatre under the name of ABC Interstate Theatres until 1974, when a new theatre was built and the older structure was donated to the City of Hattiesburg.

The Saenger has been a local landmark since its construction, serving as the setting for vaudeville and opera productions, carnival balls, recitals, lectures, and other events in the cultural life of the area, as well as functioning as a movie theatre. During World War II, troops from nearby Camp Shelby spent Saturday afternoons at the Saenger. The building underwent minor non-structural renovations in 1954 and 1964, but the effects of these modernizations were largely removed during a careful and painstaking partial restoration in 1976. The master plasterer who had installed the original plasterwork in 1928-29 was retained to restore the plasterwork.

The City of Hattiesburg now uses the Saenger as a civic theatre and auditorium, donating and renting it to groups such as the Hattiesburg Civic Light Opera, local charity organizations, and road shows of every variety. When the theatre is completely restored and combined with the art gallery and museum in the shop spaces, it is anticipated that it will become an area-wide cultural center.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Bicknell, Ben, division manager, ABC Interstate Theatres, Inc. Interviewed by Michelle F. Heidelberg, art historian, Hattiesburg, Miss., 1975-76.

Bethea, Mrs. C. R., manager, Saenger Theatre, 1937-74. Interviewed by Michelle F. Heidelberg, art historian, at Hattiesburg, Miss., February, 1979.

Hattiesburg American, Nov. 29, 1929.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Less than one acre

QUADRANGLE NAME Hattiesburg, Miss.

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A 1, 6 2, 8, 2, 0, 6, 0 3, 4, 6, 7, 7, 0

B

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C

D

E

F

G

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Bounded by Forrest Street on the southwest, West Front Street on the southeast, a public alley on the northwest and a contiguous structure on the northeast. The southwest (front) facade measures 91 feet 6 inches on Forrest Street and the southeast (side) facade measures

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

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Michelle F. Heidelberg, Art Historian

ORGANIZATION

Private Consultant

DATE

February 19, 1979

STREET & NUMBER

812 Adeline Street

TELEPHONE

601-544-7306

CITY OR TOWN

Hattiesburg

STATE

Mississippi 39401

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL X

As the designated State Historic Preservation 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.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

Elmer B. Hilliard

TITLE

State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

April 6, 1979

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE 5-29-79

ATTEST: Charles B. Hilliard

DATE 5/29/79

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9 & 10 PAGE 1

9 - MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Weil, Emil. Original plans for Saenger Theatre, City Hall, Hattiesburg, Miss.

10 - GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

162 feet 8 inches on West Front Street, being part of lot 6, block 162, O. H. Crittendon Survey, being also lot 6, block 162 of the D. H. McKinnis First Survey City of Hattiesburg. See also attached photocopy of plat map from city engineer's office, on which nominated property is shown in red.



SAENGER THEATRE

Hattiesburg, Forrest County, Mississippi

Francis Farmer

February 9, 1979

1402 Mamie St. - Hattiesburg, Miss. 39401

Southwest (main) and southeast (side) facades,
looking north.

Photo 2 of 3

APR 18 1979

MAY 29 1979



SAENGER THEATRE

Hattiesburg, Forrest County, Mississippi

Francis Farmer

February 9, 1979

1402 Mamie St. - Hattiesburg, Miss. 39401

Southwest (main) facade, looking northeast.

Photo 1 of 3

APR 18 1979

MAY 29 1979



SAENGER THEATRE

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Main lobby taken from west staircase to balconies, looking southeast. Outer vestibule and front doors to right; upper loggia and main auditorium to left.

Photo 3 of 3

APR 18 1979

MAY 29 1979