

VLR-10/21/92 WRHP-12/17/92

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 Come, to 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 an 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 LINCOLN THEATRE

other names/site number DAR File No. 119-09

2. Location

street & number 117 East Main Street N/A not for publication

city or town Marion N/A vicinity

state Virginia code VA county Smyth code 173 zip code 24354

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 nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Walter C. Miller Nov 10, 1997
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
Director, Virginia Department of Historic Resources
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 the 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 the Keeper

Date of Action

Lincoln Theatre
Name of Property

Smyth County, VA
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.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture: Theatre

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Vacant/not in use

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: Mayan Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

walls brick

roof asphalt

other

Narrative Description

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

Lincoln Theatre
Name of Property

Smyth County, VA
County and State

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 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.)

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 # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture _____

Art _____

Period of Significance

1929 _____

Significant Dates

1929 _____

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A _____

Cultural Affiliation

N/A _____

Architect/Builder

Eubank & Caldwell (architect); _____

Novelty Scenic Studios (interior _____

design).

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Smyth-Bland Regional Library _____

Lincoln Theatre
Name of Property

Smyth County, VA
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .2 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	17	453700	4076320
Zone	Easting	Northing	
2			

3			
Zone	Easting	Northing	
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.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Mack H. Sturgill
organization Lincoln Theatre Foundation, Inc. date 25 September 1992
street & number Route 3 Box 263 telephone 703-783-8369
city or town Marion state VA zip code 24354

Additional Documentation

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)

Property Owner

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

name Lincoln Theatre Foundation, Inc.
street & number Post Office Box 664 telephone 703-783-5991
city or town Marion state VA zip code 24354

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. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 1SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

The Lincoln Theatre, located on Main Street in the heart of downtown Marion, Virginia, is a rare surviving example of an ornate moving picture palace that first opened to the public in 1929 and closed in 1977. The three-story brick cinema still retains its original integrity, with most of its decorative features intact. The theatre building has no facade and is not visible from Main Street because it is located behind the Royal Oak Apartment House. These adjacent buildings are separate and distinct structures that share an interior wall and main entrance. An unusual cooperative arrangement, made when the buildings were conceived, allows access to the theatre via a broad arcade on the ground floor of the apartment house. The theatre, except for eight attached garages, occupies all the one-fifth-acre lot on which it was built. There is nothing of architectural interest in the exterior brick walls, but the interior of the theatre, designed to suggest an ancient Mayan temple, is most remarkable and unique in this section of Virginia. Three-dimensional appliques and stencilled Mayan designs and glyphs cover the walls, the proscenium arch, the columns, and the ceiling of the theatre. Even more outstanding are six large paintings, depicting scenes from American and local history, which are located on each side of the auditorium and framed in a unique manner. Conceived and designed as an elaborate theatre set by the Novelty Scenic Studios of New York City, the interior walls and decorations are constructed of composite fiberboard, which was painted and textured to resemble plaster and stone blocks.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

The Lincoln Theatre, located in the heart of downtown Marion, Virginia, is a rare surviving example of an ornate moving picture palace, which opened to the public in 1929. The three-story cinema still retains its original integrity and decorations. The cost of building, decorating, and furnishing the Lincoln Theatre amounted to \$150,000. The theatre building itself, a rectangle measuring 76' x 88', is not visible from Main Street, as it is located behind the Royal Oak Apartment House with which it shares an interior wall and main entry. An unusual cooperative arrangement,

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made at the time the theatre was conceived, allows access to the theatre from the street via a broad arcade on the ground floor of the apartment house complex. An easement on the property grants the theatre rights for a marquee, a ticket booth, and display cases for advertisements on Main Street.²

Three double doors, immediately behind the site of the ticket booth, give access to a fifty-foot-long inclined concourse, with stores on each side. This passageway leads up to two double doors that open into the fifty-foot-long theatre lobby, where the entrance to the orchestra seats and a stairway to the mezzanine are located.

Due to the location of the theatre, it has no facade. The exterior walls are constructed of solid masonry consisting of a maroon face brick laid in American bond: five courses of stretchers and a course of Flemish headers. The parapet walls, rising from a concrete foundation, are capped with terra cotta coping. The walls of the building, visible only from North Lane and Iron Street, have few architectural features worthy of note. On Iron Street, there is an entrance, where tickets were sold to Negro patrons, who sat in the balcony. This entry (and exit) is located in a recessed alcove beneath a stone lintel that has carved consoles in each corner and above which there are three six-over-six wooden sash windows in a bad state of repair located in dressing rooms, which were converted into small offices. The stage door, now covered with plywood, is located to the right of this entry, and is the only door into a small apartment, probably built for the caretaker. The other exit from the auditorium is at the end of the exterior theatre wall on Iron Street. The roof of the theatre, not visible from ground level, is a built-up slightly pitched roof, originally covered with insulation sealed with tar.

Except for eight attached garages, each 12' x 22', that are attached to the side of the theatre on North Lane, the theatre occupies virtually all of the one-fifth-acre lot on which it was built. "The site slopes down in both an easterly and a southerly direction. Full advantage of this site condition was taken with regard to access and egress: access to the stage is on-grade from Iron Street, egress from the balcony is almost on-grade at North Lane."³

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The 65' x 60' auditorium, while not large, gives the impression of immense space. The grandeur of the space is achieved through its almost forty-foot-high ceiling, which consists of three coves above the house, and the elaborately decorated interior, which was designed to suggest an ancient Mayan temple,

though without the elaborate plaster detail work reminiscent of Lamb and others of the period. And that, in brief, is part of this theatre's unique and unusual quality. The interior finishes would suggest that the design was executed by a scenic studio, rather than a firm specializing in fine art decorating. The construction is of a 'temporary' nature using materials common to scenic set building--a pressed wood compound, painted to appear as plaster or textured finishes. . . . And the result, which is quite unusual and charming, makes the Lincoln unique, in my experience.

The remarkable interior of the Lincoln Theatre was in fact designed and executed by the Novelty Scenic Studios of New York City.⁵ It is, in a sense, a huge stage set itself, built of common materials that create a most uncommon and dramatic space. Mr. Joe Lalonde directed the installation of the decorations, inspired by sculpture and architecture of the ancient Mayans of Yucatan and Central America.⁶ The wall and ceiling surfaces in the auditorium are constructed of a wood fiberboard with a thin plaster-like coating, that is painted and textured to resemble blocks of stone and other material.

Mayan motifs are found throughout the auditorium and lobby. Three-dimensional appliques and stencilling of Mayan designs, figures of gods, animals, mythological creatures, Mayan calligraphy, and curious glyphs are found on the walls, columns, pilasters, beams, ceiling, around the proscenium arch, and above the six large paintings in the auditorium. The larger designs at the top of the auditorium walls are painted a rich golden color, and the smaller figures and glyphs are frequently multicolored.

Six large paintings, the most outstanding architectural feature of the theatre, adorn the side walls of the auditorium, beginning

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about ten feet above the floor near the stage. These canvases, which resemble murals, depict significant scenes of American and Smyth County history. Delightfully incongruous in their Mayan temple setting, they were executed by an unknown artist expressly for the Lincoln. They depict these historic events:

- I. Columbus landing in the New World.
- II. Cornwallis surrendering to Washington at Yorktown.
- III. Daniel Boone with Indians on the Virginia frontier.
- IV. Smyth County's cattle industry.
- V. Robert E. Lee reviewing his troops.
- VI. The Industrial Age in Smyth County.

These paintings, executed on thin cotton canvas with water based paints and without a protective coat of varnish, are in a most fragile condition. Rose Orłowska, a conservator who examined the paintings, wrote:

This type of technique is very common for temporary theatrical decorations which are not meant to last for a long time. The structure of the paintings plus the state of the building they are located in caused the very poor condition which we now see. Two of the paintings which are mounted directly on plaster (#'s III & VI) need immediate attention.

These large 14' x 20' paintings are framed by an intricate cut-out Mayan design that forms a gilded stepped pyramid at the top. Within the frame hangs a maroon velvet drape, opened like a theatre curtain to present these national and local scenes to the viewer in a theatrical manner. The bottom frames of four of these canvases feature a sturdy stone-like beam covered with Mayan calligraphy. An elaborate, three-dimensional Mayan design frames the bottom of the two paintings above the exits on each side of the stage.

Originally the theatre could seat 750 patrons in the orchestra and mezzanine. "This capacity...is another feature which enhances the potential and charm of this theatre--the ambiance is very attractive, and the intimacy immediate and comfortable."⁸ Currently there are only 453 seats in place in the auditorium, which is divided into three sections by two center aisles. The balcony, 17' x 62', contained 147 seats, that were reserved for

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Negro patrons when the theatre first opened, but later the four front rows were designated for white people, and only the back row, behind a wooden railing, was for blacks.⁹ Another exit from the balcony is located on North Street, west of the row of garages.

The upper levels of the Lincoln Theatre occupy considerably less space than the first floor. They wrap the auditorium on the south and west sides. Above the lobby, a wide corridor leads to the balcony. Dressing rooms with toilets are stacked on three levels in the southeast corner of the building adjacent to the stair. This level is completely devoid of ornament. The third floor, except for three small dressing rooms, is dedicated to the projection room, and access to it. The electrical service entrance for the building and the lighting dimmer board are located on this level. Two 16mm projectors, not used since 1977, are still in place there.

The concrete floor of the auditorium is raked down to the stage, in front of which there is space for an orchestra pit. On each side of the stage there is an exit, above which an elaborate Mayan cutout design frames the bottom part of the painting above it. The proscenium arch is of pleasing proportions, 32' x 28', and the molding around it is almost completely covered with Mayan glyphs and designs, some of which, unfortunately, have disappeared. Although a maroon front curtain and a tattered large screen are still in place, they will, in time, be replaced. Consistent with its original function as a moving picture palace, the theatre has a shallow stage, thirteen feet deep from the proscenium arch. A ten-foot-wide apron and footlights were added, at an unknown date, in front of the original stage. The backstage area is quite small. To the right of the stage area, off stage left, there is what appears to be a small apartment, built at an unknown date, which can only be entered through the original stage door on Iron Street. It may have been for the theatre custodian.

The view of the auditorium and balcony from the stage is impressive, if not magnificent, even in its present state of deterioration. The balcony is supported by two square columns at the rear of the auditorium, where there is a broad area (once covered with a wine and gold carpet) used by patrons to enter the theatre, or the rest room area opposite the entry. Three recessed lights, with appropriate Mayan design on the ceiling, illuminated

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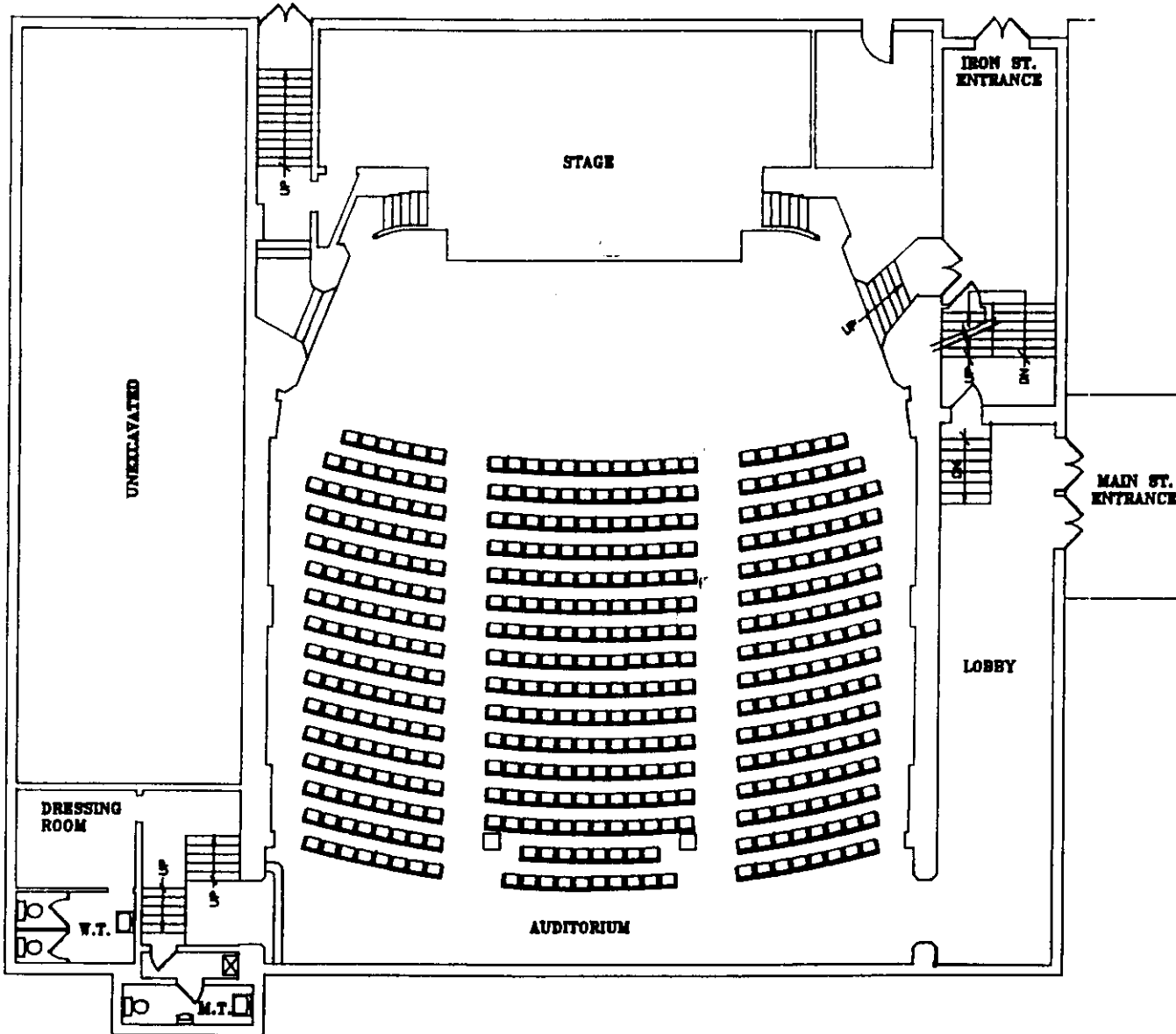
this wide aisle at the back of the auditorium. The front of the balcony, which contains three niches for stage lights, is decorated with an intricate, stencilled, arabesque design.

Over the years, there has been a tremendous amount of accelerated aging and deterioration of the theatre due to basic neglect. A leaking roof has caused water damage to some of the walls and to the large paintings, and caused the collapse of the entire fiberboard ceiling before a modified bitumen single-ply membrane roof was installed. The ceiling and its Mayan decorations will be replaced, and the paintings will be restored or reproduced. In certain areas of the building attempts to redecorate the theatre with cheap paneling and paint have changed the original color scheme of the walls and some of the Mayan glyphs and decorations. These features will be restored to their original color and condition during the proposed restoration. Already, to accent the location of the theatre, a \$10,000 replica of a marquee has been erected above the Main Street entrance, and there are plans to reconstruct the colorful, four-sided ticket booth that once stood under the marquee near the sidewalk. As the garages are in extremely bad repair, and as they have no aesthetic connection with the theatre, they will be razed to make way for a three-story tower that will house offices, accessible restrooms, the greenroom, and rooms for classes, meetings, and exhibits.

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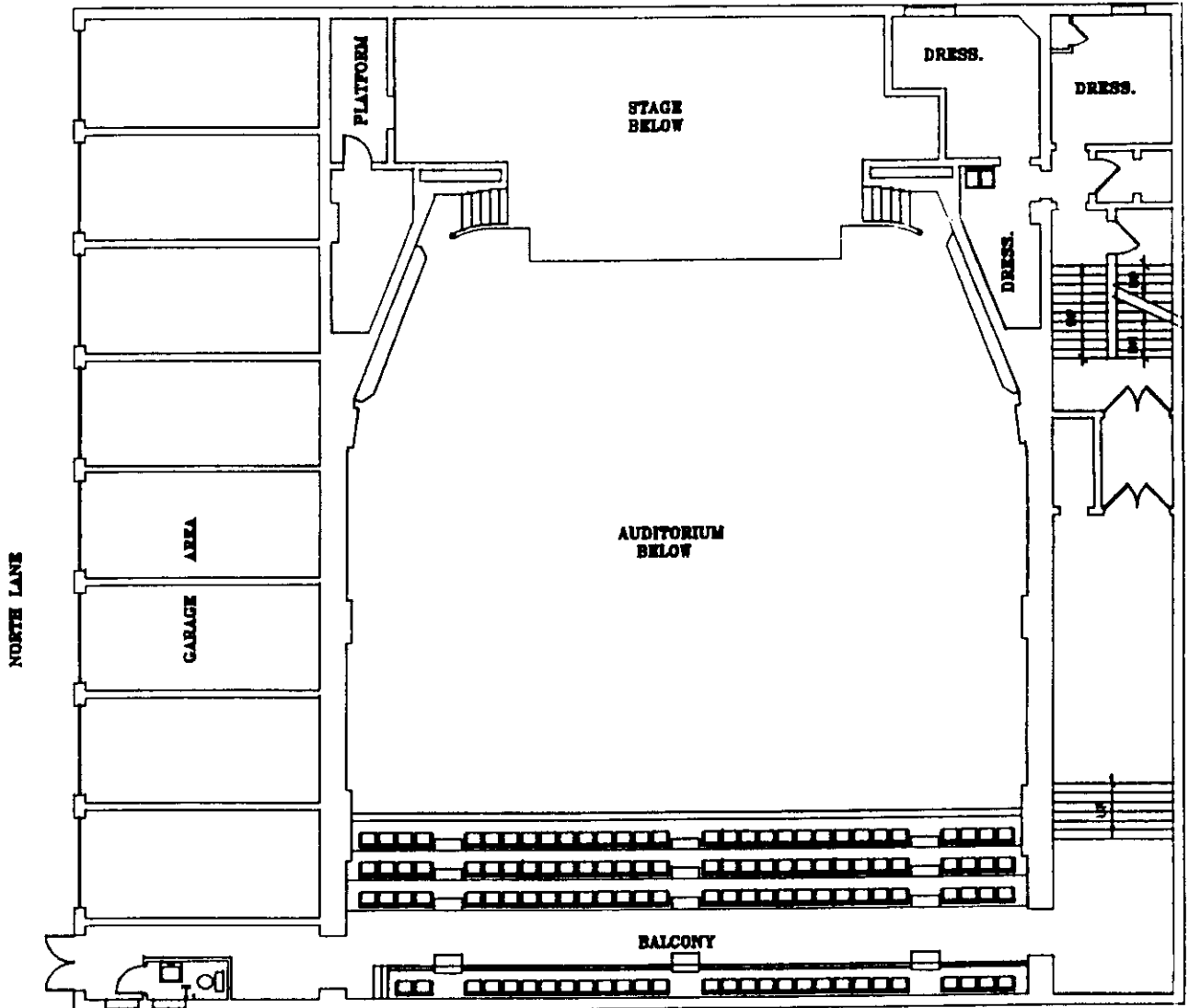
FIRST FLOOR PLAN
1/16" = 1'-0"

Wm. Huber

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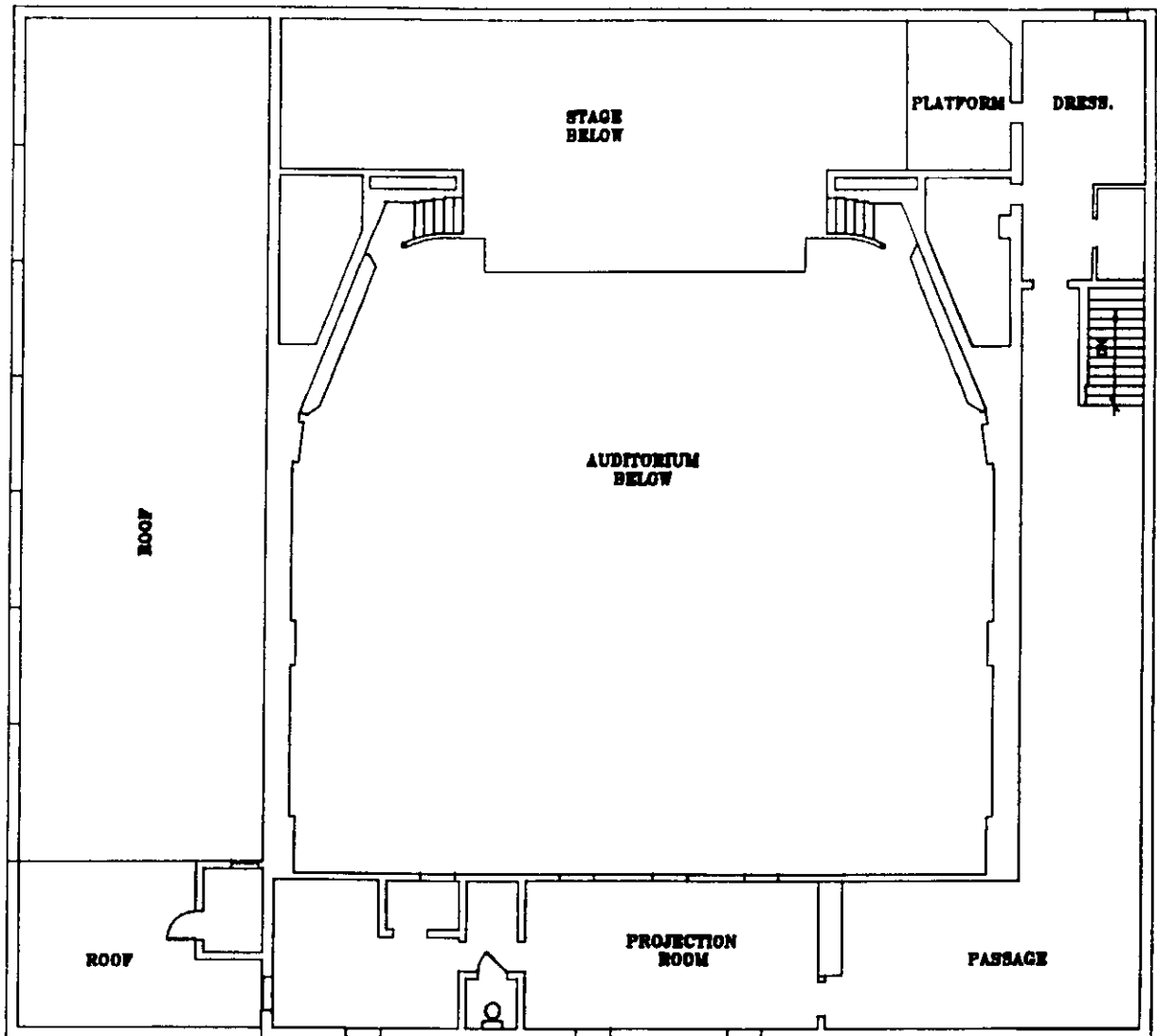
SECOND FLOOR PLAN
1/16" = 1'-0"

Wm. Huber

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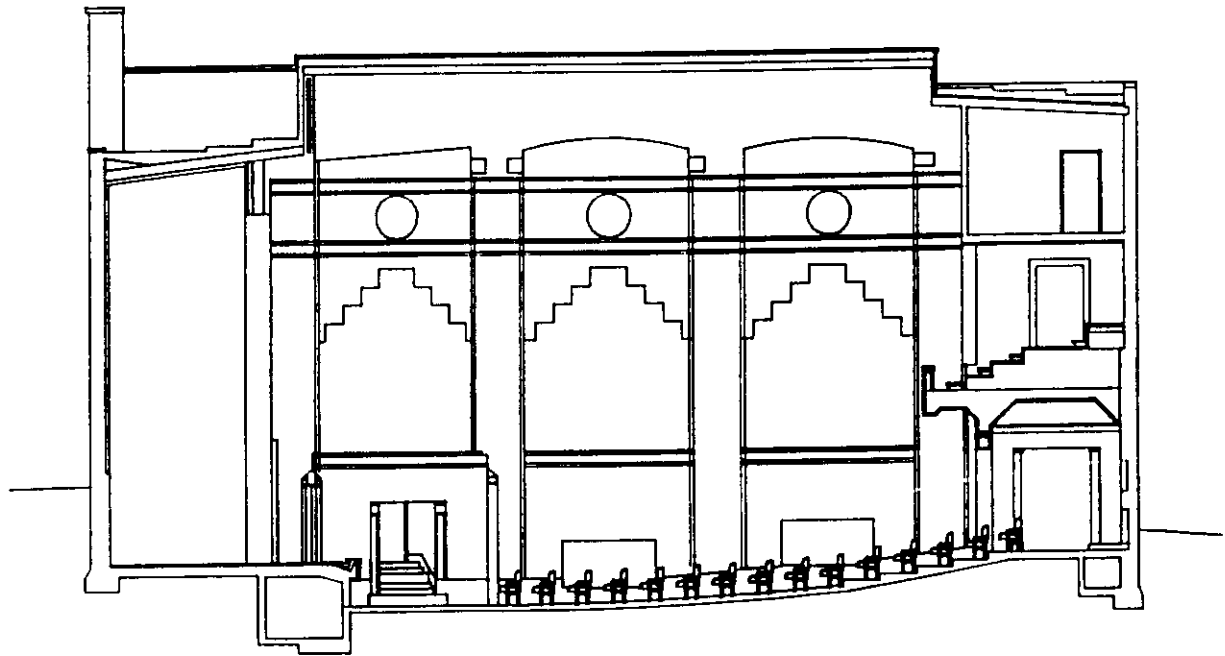
THIRD FLOOR PLAN
1/16" = 1'-0"

Wm. Huber

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Wm. Huber

LONGITUDINAL SECTION
1/23-7

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Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 11HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Lincoln Theatre, completed in 1929, is located in Marion, Virginia, the county seat of Smyth County. A small town in the mountains of Southwest Virginia, Marion has a population of about 9,000 today; in 1929, there were fewer than 4,000 inhabitants of the town. The governmental center of the county originally attracted lawyers, shopkeepers, hoteliers, merchants, and a few manufacturers. None of the early citizens of the village were noted for their philanthropy or their interest in the cultural environment of the town. Entertainment was limited to performances and recitals at Marion Female College, established in 1874, and the Seaver Opera House, where concerts and dramatic presentations took place, and at the Court Square Theatre in the courthouse. With the advent of the motion picture, two small, uncomfortable houses in Marion offered silent films until the Lincoln Theatre opened in 1929, just as the movies were beginning to talk, and the Great Depression was at hand.

Charles S. Wassum, prominent Marion businessman, first conceived the idea of building an elegant apartment house and a 1,200-seat motion picture theatre in his hometown. He envisioned these improvements as "a monument to the growth of Marion and to Marion's future."¹⁰

Wassum did build the Royal Oak Apartment House, an impressive four-story brick and stone structure on Main Street in the center of Marion. But instead of building the theatre as planned, he sold the one-fifth-acre lot behind his apartment complex to Charles C. Lincoln, Sr.¹¹, who was keenly interested in having a modern theatre in Marion. Owner of a large local factory, The Virginia Table Company, Lincoln, a generous benefactor of his home town, built the theatre as a gift to the people of Southwest Virginia.¹²

Lincoln, Marion's wealthiest resident, built a large Tudor-style house, Graystone, east of the town of Marion. He also built the Francis Marion Hotel (later named the Lincoln Hotel) in 1927, in the same block as the site of the ornate moving picture house, which would also bear his name.

On a trip to Atlantic City, New Jersey, Mr. Lincoln had seen a new theatre which greatly impressed him. Upon learning that the Novelty Scenic Studios of New York City had designed the interior of that theatre, he engaged that firm to design and decorate the theatre in Marion. Eubank and Caldwell of Roanoke, Virginia, were the architects and contractors who designed and erected the brick theatre building.¹³

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Unfortunately, Charles Clark Lincoln, Sr., died 23 December 1928⁴ during the construction of the theatre. Work on the theatre was continued by his sons, Charles C. Lincoln, Jr., and John D. Lincoln, who became the managers of the Lincoln furniture plants in Marion, Damascus, and Bristol. After the theatre opened, workmen at the Lincoln factories received weekly passes to attend the Lincoln Theatre, which had capacity crowds every weekend.

With much publicity and eclat, the Lincoln Theatre opened to the public for the first time on 1 July 1929, with an early talking picture "Close Harmony."⁵ The 750-seat theatre could not accommodate all the patrons who had come not only to hear the talking movies but also to admire the unique decorations and accoutrements inside Marion's elegant new showplace.

The Lincoln Theatre, said to be the finest between Roanoke and Knoxville, not only offered first-run films and stage shows by noted performers, celebrities, musicians, and live vaudeville acts, but also served the area as a regional center for civic, cultural, industrial, and educational meetings in the 1930s and 1940s.

Although there were other movie houses in Marion during those years, only the Lincoln survived and remained in continuous operation for forty-four years. After closing temporarily in 1973, it reopened in 1975, but closed permanently on 28 August 1977 with the showing of the adventure film, "When the North Wind Blows."⁶

The Lincoln, abandoned, unused, and deteriorating, remained the property of members of the Lincoln family until 11 July 1988, when it was purchased by The Lincoln Theatre Foundation, Inc.⁷ The members of this corporation plan to restore as authentically as possible this unique historic moving picture theatre and to convert it into a state-of-the-arts cultural center for Marion, Smyth County, and the surrounding counties and towns. An intensive fund raising drive is now being planned to obtain funds to make this dream a reality--a much needed reality for this section of Southwest Virginia.

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ENDNOTES

1. Marion Democrat, "New Lincoln Theater is finest in all Southwest Virginia," 25 June 1929, p.3.
2. Smyth County Deed Book 59, 19 July 1928, pp. 285-286.
3. Huber, William, "Lincoln Theatre: Building Description & Existing Conditions." 1990.
4. Daykin, Judith, Daykin Art Associates, associate of the League of Historic American Theatres, "Report: Lincoln Theatre Marion, Virginia," 17 August 1989.
5. Marion Democrat. "Grand Opening of Lincoln Theatre Set for Next Monday," 25 June 1929, p.1.
6. Marion Democrat, "New Theatre Almost Completed," 25 June 1928, p. 1.
7. Orłowska, Rose, associate of Biltmore, Campbell, Smith Restorations, Inc., "Examination Report: six paintings on canvas," 7 March 1989.
8. Daykin, Judith, op. cit.
9. Lawrence, Evelyn, "Lincoln Holds Memories of a Different World," Smyth County News, March 14, 1992, p. 1-B
10. Smyth County News, "Wassum Building to go up at Once," 31 May 1928, p. 1.
11. Smyth County Deed Book 59, pp 285-286. Wassum's deed to Lincoln, 19 July 1928.

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12. Smyth County News, "He Conceived Theatre," 27 June 1929, p.1.
13. Marion Democrat, "New Lincoln Theater is finest in All Southwest Virginia," 25 June 1929, p. 5.
14. Ibid, 24 December 1928, p. 3.
15. Harrington, Ronny, "History of the Lincoln Theatre," 1988.
16. Ibid.
17. Smyth County Deed Book 384 , 11 June 1988, p. 722.

9: Bibliography

Daykin, Judith. "Report: Lincoln Theatre Marion, Virginia." 1989.
Deed Books, Smyth County, Virginia. Clerk's Office, Marion, VA.
Harrington, Ronnie. "History of the Lincoln Theatre." Ms. 1988.
Huber, William. Various reports, architectural drawings, and
recommendations for restoration of the Lincoln Theatre. 1989,
1990.

Marion Democrat. Various issues of this newspaper published in
Marion, Virginia.

Smyth County News. Various issues of this newspaper published in
Marion, Virginia.

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Section number 8, 10 Page 15 Lincoln Theatre, Smyth County, Virginia

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Addendum

In response to a question about other Mayan theaters in Virginia and the United States, Mr. Bill Benedict, Archive Administrator of the Theatre Historical Society of America, wrote in a letter dated 18 August 1992, ". . . regarding Mayan architecture and Mayan-style theaters. The only three theaters that we know of with heavy Mayan design were: MAYAN - Los Angeles, CA, FISHER - Detroit, MI, and MAYAN - Denver, CO."

The letter is in the possession of the Lincoln Theatre Foundation, Inc., and seems to indicate that the Lincoln is the only known theater in Virginia with Mayan decor and is one of only four known to survive in the United States.

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property is best described as being Lots 4 and 3A of Section 190 on the Town of Marion, Smyth County Tax Parcel Map.

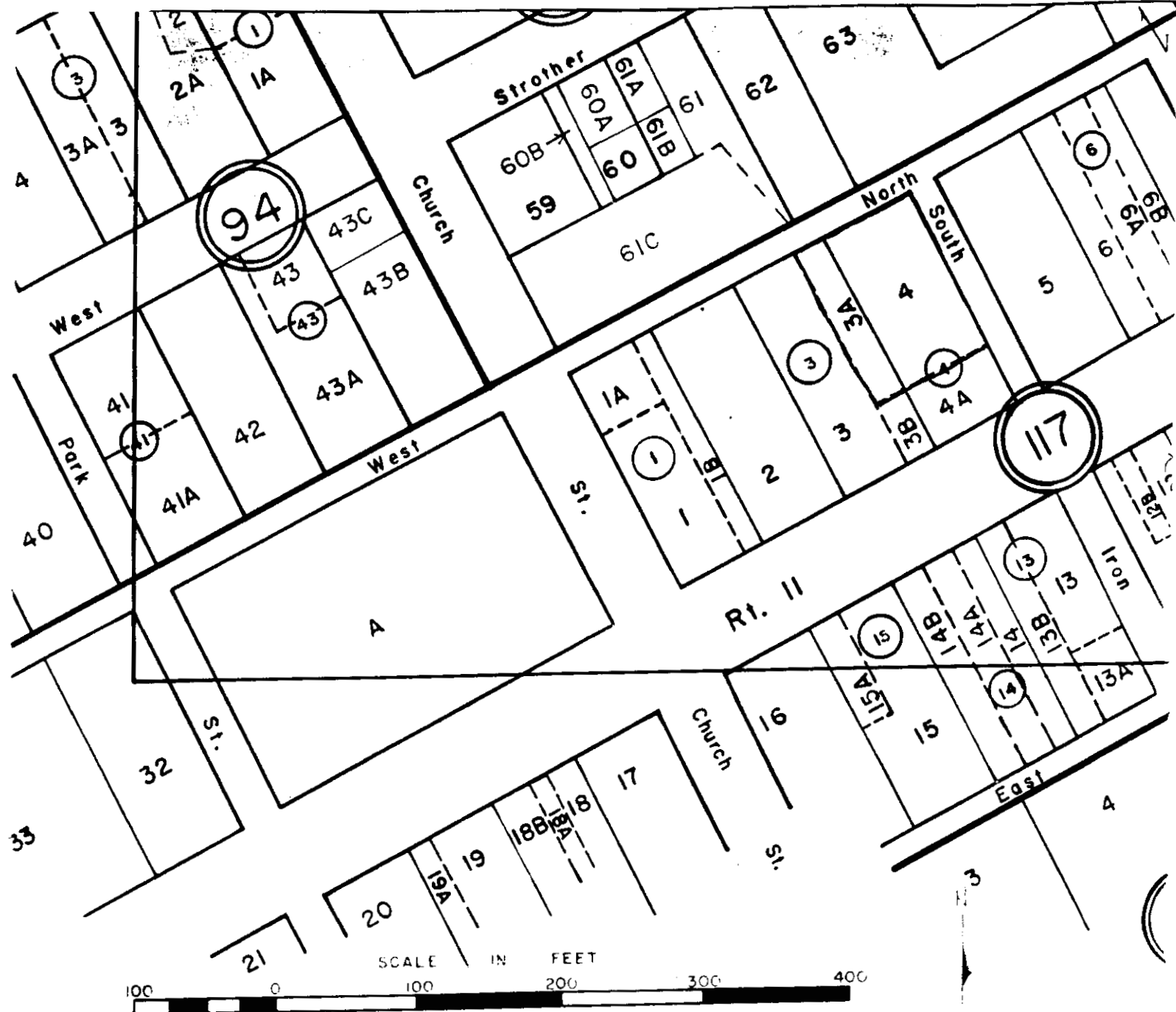
Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the nominated property include the two city lots occupied by the Lincoln Theatre since its construction.

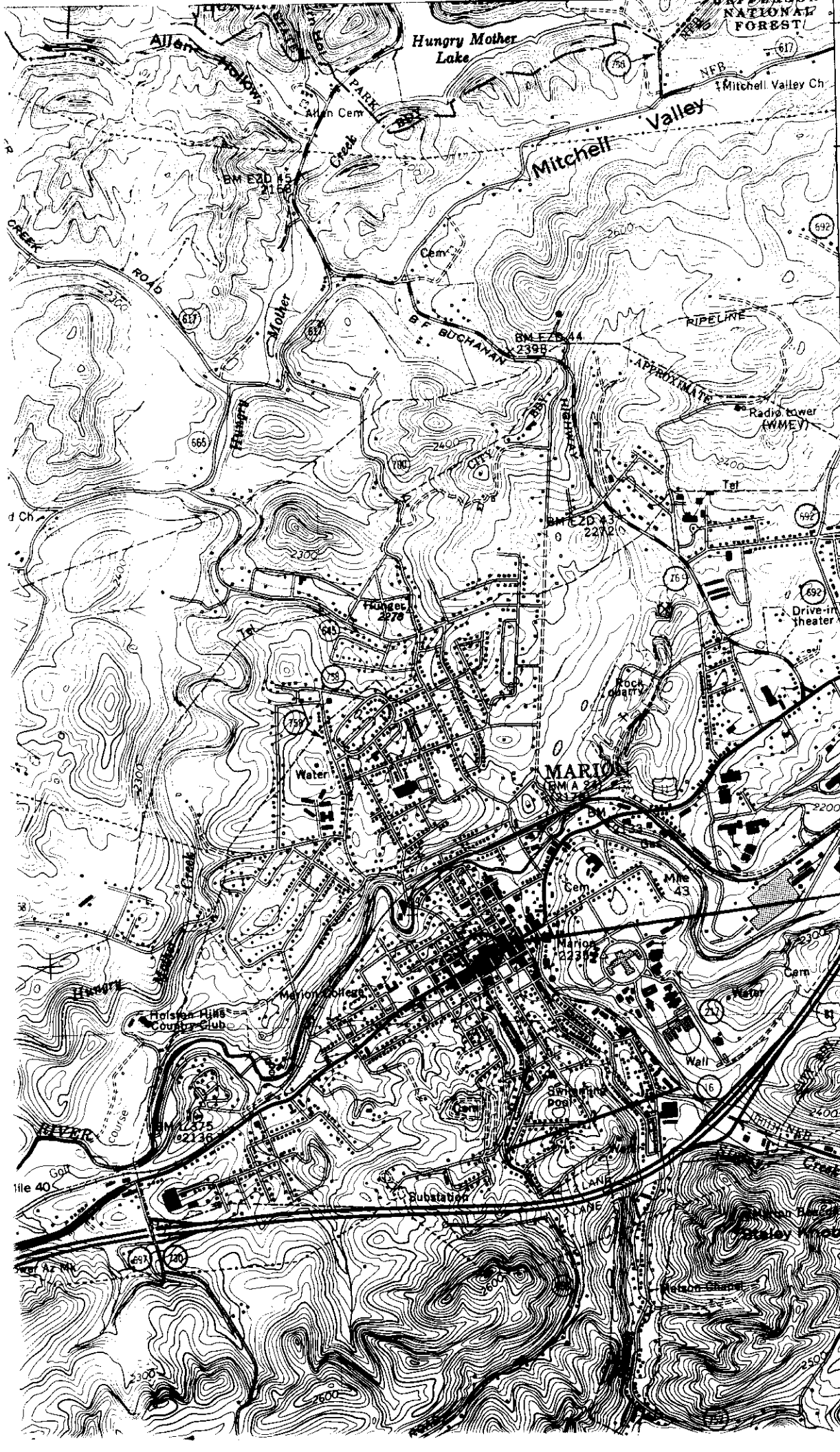
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Lincoln Theatre, Town of Marion, Smyth County, Virginia



210 000
FEET

4080

4079

4077

50'

ATKINS 4.4 MI.
WYTHEVILLE 22 MI.

WYTHEVILLE 24 MI

ATTOWAY 2.2 MI. /
24 MI. TO U.S. 58

(711)

23-SW)
SW

LINCOLN
THEATRE

UTM References
 Zone: 17
 Easting: 453700
 Northing: 4076320