

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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. 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.

VLR Listed: 12/13/2018
NRHP Listed: 4/15/2019

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Buchanan Theatre

Other names/site number: Star Theatre; DHR ID# 180-0028-0117

Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 19778 Main Street

City or town: Buchanan State: VA County: Botetourt

Not For Publication: N/A Vicinity: N/A

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A ___ B X C ___ D

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Signature of certifying official/Title:	Date
<u>Virginia Department of Historic Resources</u>	
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.	
<hr/>	
Signature of commenting official:	Date
<hr/>	
Title :	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 1

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: theater

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE: theater

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT: Moderne

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: BRICK; WOOD; CONCRETE; METAL

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Buchanan Theatre, located at 19778 Main Street in downtown Buchanan, Virginia, is a two-story frame building built ca. 1917-1918 and remodeled in the Moderne style in 1949. The building has a metal-sheathed gable-fronted roof, stretcher-brick veneer walls, and a brick-faced Moderne front addition made in 1949. Contemporaneous with the front addition is a one-story side addition, historically used as a restaurant, with similar brick veneer, a recessed front entry, and a parapet shed roof (the side addition also is addressed 19778 Main Street). The theater interior has a mix of original and later features including a lobby with knotty-pine wall finish, a ca. 1950 concession stand, an auditorium with a mezzanine and Moderne wall treatments, and second-floor apartments. The theater is a contributing resource in the Buchanan Historic District, listed on the National Register in 1999. The theater is flanked on both sides by parking lots and is surrounded by mostly historic-period commercial buildings. To the south across a vacant lot are railroad tracks. The building faces northwest, although to simplify the description, its sides and interior spaces are described herein as front, back, left-hand, and right-hand.

Narrative Description

Exterior

The theater's 1949 front addition has the building's principal stylistic features, namely a pair of Art Deco cast concrete plaques on the upper façade and a Moderne marquee. The marquee is painted red, white, and black and is triangular in form so that its canted sides, each with the word

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“Buchanan,” are visible to oncoming motorists and pedestrians. The letters of the words, the striping that brackets the words, and a striped prow-like feature at the marquee’s point are outlined with neon (pink for the words and prow, green for the striping). The prow wraps under the marquee, where it dies into an interior-illuminated sign to which translucent red plastic letters are affixed to spell out movie titles and times. The marquee is supported from above by chains and turnbuckle rods.

Under the marquee is a recessed entry area with a freestanding center ticket booth. The booth, constructed of plywood and glass with wood trim, has angled front corners that are reflected in the form of the poured concrete foundation on which the booth stands. Other features of the booth include a molded wood cornice, a back door, and, inside the front glass panel, a suspended gilded sign reading “Buchanan Theatre.” At the back of the recess are a pair of double-leaf doors with wood-framed glass panels and tall decorative aluminum door pulls. The wall surface around the doors is sheathed with molded wood paneling set at a diagonal and painted red. On the right-hand side of the recess is an original (1949) glass-fronted signboard with fluted trim and a fluted keyblock. On the left-hand side of the recess is a door that opens to a stair to the mezzanine and projection booth. A ring-shaped fluorescent light fixture is mounted on the stuccoed ceiling, and the floor of the entry recess is concrete, a continuation of the sidewalk in front of the theater, on which were painted stars (now faded) as part of the theater’s recent rehabilitation. In the concrete flanking the ticket booth are filled round holes, possibly the location of former turnstiles.

Glass-fronted sign boards modeled on the one in the entry recess were added to either side of the recess ca. 2000. The signboards are deteriorating and, as of July 2017, there were plans to replace them with ones more closely modeled on the historic sign board in the recess. The aforementioned Art Deco concrete plaques have a three-part columnar form. Between them, centered over the marquee, is a metal-framed casement window with a concrete sill and splayed concrete lintel. A similar window, but without the lintel, appears on the addition’s second-story right-hand side elevation. The addition has a flat roof behind a concrete-coped parapet. Above it, in the gable of the original building, is replacement wood shingle sheathing and a metal vent.

Contemporaneous with the front addition is a one-story left-hand side addition with similar brick veneer and a parapet shed roof with a concrete coping. In the front parapet is an Art Deco plaque like those in the front addition, although set horizontally rather than vertically. The side addition has a recessed entry, a large front picture window under an aluminum awning, mostly metal-framed casement windows with transom panels, a tall brick flue toward the back, and a rear freight entry under an aluminum awning. The name of a recent business tenant (“Stylin Shed”) appears in the picture window.

The right-hand side of the building has two brick stove flues, one-over-one windows in the second story, bricked-up windows in the first story, and an uneven band of brickwork at the foundation, rising at its highest about five feet above grade, which is different in appearance than the brick above it. (The difference, which is due mostly to wider mortar joints on the lower brickwork, may be the result of repointing associated with the building’s ca. 2000 rehabilitation.) Other features include a diamond-shaped bathroom window in the second story, a deteriorated

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wooden bathroom plumbing chase, and one window opening with a plywood cover rather than brick infill.

The left-hand side elevation is similar to the right-hand side, except that its first story is mostly hidden by the one-story side addition. The elevation has one-over-one windows, a diamond-shaped bathroom window, and a single stove flue. At the back corner is a one-story cinder block addition (painted pink) with a shed roof and a large metal-framed window. Between the cinder block addition and the back end of the side addition is an exit door serving the auditorium.

In the gable of the rear elevation are decorative bevel-cut wood shingles, painted green, and a one-over-one window. The rest of the rear elevation is covered by a two-tier shed-roofed porch with slender dimensional-lumber posts and balustrades constructed from sections of 2"x4" lumber. Although the form of the porch appears to be original, its posts, balustrades, and floor boards appear to be later. A wooden stair with two flights interrupted by a landing rises inside the porch, against the wall of the building. At the foot of the stair is a back-stage entrance with a stack-panel door with stained woodwork. The building wall inside the upper tier has a wood and glass panel door and one-over-one windows. The porch and stair components and the brickwork of the rear elevation are painted red.

A corner of the porch is occupied by a weatherboard-sheathed enclosure for an Arctic Nu-Air evaporative cooling and ventilation apparatus. The cooler consists of a drum-like blower constructed of boards painted blue-gray and connected to the building by a cowl of heavy material. The blower is operated by a belt that connects to a small electric motor. The iron rim of a circular air intake on the side of the apparatus is cast with the name of the manufacturer, the Arctic Nu-Air Corporation of Chicago. The manufacturer's name also appears on a small metal plaque on the side of the drum.

Interior: First Floor

The front entries open into a narrow lobby area separated from the auditorium by a concession booth. The concession booth is constructed of Masonite painted with horizontal bands of light turquoise and light yellow separated by narrow aluminum trim pieces. The Masonite is curved at the two corners, giving it a Moderne appearance. The wide opening across the front of the booth is filled with a Manley popcorn popper of Moderne design and a candy counter with a faux Moroccan leather base. Inside the booth are shelves and storage cubbies and a pair of chamfered wood posts that may originally have served as supports for the projection booth above. These posts align with a seam in the concrete floor that indicates the formerly narrower width of the booth. The added rear portion has a plywood floor.

The lobby itself has walls with molded and varnished knotty-pine paneling. The ceiling is sheathed with beaded tongue-and-groove boards in front of the concession booth and modern pressed metal to the sides. At the ends of the space, hollow-core doors open into restrooms that occupy the corners of the 1949 front addition. The women's room, which is larger, occupies the right-hand corner and the smaller men's room occupies the left-hand corner. The restrooms are

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indicated by softly illuminated glass signs reading “Men” and “Ladies” with the letters etched into the back of the glass and gilded, giving the letters a three-dimensional appearance. In the corner of the lobby opposite the women’s room door stands a coin-operated scale with a silvered glass panel at the top with the phrase “Over 200 different quiz questions.”

The auditorium has a sloping concrete floor interrupted by occasional expansion joints, with carpet runners down the two side aisles. The seats are Moderne in style, with curved supports of red-painted fluted metal, red fabric seat backs and red vinyl seats, wood armrests, and red-painted metal backs. The ceiling has modern pressed metal based on the pattern of the theater’s historic pressed metal ceiling, which survives above the back stage.

The auditorium wall treatment, which probably dates to 1949, consists of horizontal fabric panels separated by wood moldings. The top panel, which runs as a band just under the ceiling, has bronze-colored foliated chevron damask fabric that appears to be original to 1949 and is likely the fabric that formerly covered the rest of the wall, which is currently covered by red fabric with a chevron pattern. Light boxes upholstered with the same original fabric project from the top band, two on each wall with upward-directed lights. Where the modern fabric has torn or drooped, two types of backing are visible behind it. Next to the doorway on the right-hand side of the stage, the backing has a hard olive-drab surface with green paint where it is dinged. The upper section near the right-hand end of the projection booth has a soft backing like carpet padding. The fabric panels are framed by rounded wood moldings, which are double-ribbed around the lower panels and single-ribbed around the top band. The moldings were originally painted gold but are now painted yellow. The current wainscots are sheathed with modern plywood panels grooved to simulate beaded tongue-and-groove. The panels probably replaced historic beaded tongue-and-groove wainscoting.

The auditorium slopes down to a raised stage with a wooden floor on top of a cinder block foundation. A long cast iron radiator extends across the front, which is indented between curved Moderne projections at the ends. At the ends of the stage are doorways to steps that lead up to the stage level. The doorways are framed with ranch trim, and both have curtains. The right-hand doorway formerly had a door, but there is no evidence of a door in the left-hand doorway. Above each doorway are the louvered fronts of heaters. Above the heater on the left-hand side is a speaker and fan vent. Above the heater on the right-hand side is the large wood-louvered vent of the Artic Nu-Air cooler, with a wooden duct that connects the vent to the cooler on the exterior of the building.

The stage has red velvet curtains secured by a gold sash. Behind the front curtains are green damask side curtains with a chevron-frond pattern. The same green damask hangs as swags from the ceiling. Between the front of the stage and the back wall hangs a movie screen. At the back corners of the stage are black-painted stack-panel doors to the outside. Over the steps on the right side of the stage is a tall window frame of dark-stained wood (the window opening is walled up). A matching window frame was removed on the left-hand side and the area walled up with cinder block.

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The mezzanine over the lobby has a low blue-painted tongue-and-groove railing behind modern fabric. The projection booth occupies the center part of the mezzanine and is supported by two steel poles. The mezzanine stairs are inside the left-hand corner of the 1949 front addition and rise inside a stairwell partially sheathed with molded paneling painted red and set at a diagonal. At the top of the stairwell, doors lead to the mezzanine and a front office. The left-hand end of the mezzanine is occupied by three rows of seats on stair-stepping wooden platforms. Near the seating, on the front wall of the mezzanine, is a wall-mounted porcelain drinking fountain. The projection booth contains two main pieces of equipment: a Barco DP2K-12C digital projector and an Eprad Universal lamphouse. Over the projectors are metal-lined ceiling alcoves, and in the booth are a make-up table and a wall-mounted glass-fronted cabinet. The right-hand end of the mezzanine is partitioned off as a storage compartment. On its right-hand wall is the top of a window surround like that over the steps on the right side of the stage.

A beaded tongue-and-groove wainscot wraps around the right and front sides of the mezzanine. On the right side, the wainscot chair rail has a series of notches cut from it that suggests the former presence of upright supports of some kind, perhaps for shelves. The wainscot is interrupted directly behind the projection booth, a gap that corresponds on the former exterior with a pair of louvered wooden vents that presumably served to exhaust the heat from the projector.

The office, entered through a stack-panel door, has the aforementioned formerly exterior brick wall and vents on its back wall and a painted cinder block wall on the front side. Set into the brick above and to the sides of the vents are wood nailer blocks that may have served as points of attachment for the upper tier of a front porch that appears in old photos. A stack-panel door at the right-hand end of the office opens into a storage room with shelves for red plastic marquee letters, a sign with mid-twentieth century lettering reading "Matinee Sunday," clocks with product promotions (Coca-Cola, Sealtest Ice Cream), and other items.

Interior: Second Floor

The second floor of the building is organized around a narrow center corridor with multiple rooms on either side, an arrangement known as the double-loaded corridor plan. The rooms currently form three apartments, those in the rear corners remodeled in the mid-twentieth century and the one in the right-hand front corner with more of its ca. 1917 character. The two rooms in the left-hand front corner appear never to have been finished: plaster was never applied to the laths and they have no ceiling. They appear to have always served as storage rooms. Wall and ceiling finishes in the apartments and corridor are typically plaster and lath, although in some spaces this original treatment has been replaced or covered with materials like plywood and batten (right-hand rear apartment), modern wood paneling (rear end of corridor), and paper tiles (ceilings in both rear apartments and the rear end of the corridor). Portions of the corridor have an original pressed metal ceiling with a cove cornice and a pattern of quatrefoil-like figures in squares.

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Floors are sheathed in a variety of materials depending on the function and evolution of the spaces. Narrow board floors are typical, unfinished or lightly finished in the front rooms and with a waxed or polyurethane finish in the rear left-hand apartment. Carpeting and composition tile are also present. The two-room front apartment has wallpapered walls and ceilings. The rear room has paper with a pattern of pink roses and a matching narrow ceiling border. The front room has paper with a pattern of wide and narrow bands with pink roses and green foliage and a narrow matching ceiling border. This is the second generation of paper in this room; a scrap of earlier flowered paper is observed. There is also a scrap of silver figured ceiling paper. The rear room retains four-panel doors with a dark varnished surface and pottery door knobs. The same finish appears on the plain door and window surrounds of the two rooms.

The rear apartments have bathrooms with molded knotty-pine paneling facing the kitchen areas. The paneling, which differs from that in the lobby due to its alternating narrow and wide boards, has its original varnished surface in the left-hand rear apartment and has been painted in the other rear apartment. The two apartments have a mix of four-panel, stack panel, and hollow core doors. The left-hand rear apartment has a stove flue encased in a plywood and batten enclosure with the brick of the flue at the top of the enclosure and shelves accessed by a narrow door below. The plywood finish in this apartment has traces of light green paint under the current white. The corridor has a random-width vertical flush board wainscot with a simple chair rail. The wainscot is varnished except at the rear end, where it is painted.

The two storage rooms in the left-hand front corner have changed little since ca. 1917. A door opening from the rear room into the corridor has been boarded up, and the corridor doorway in the front room has a flimsy cardboard and batten door. A shelf has been built onto the partition between the two rooms and most of the lath removed to create a passthrough so that objects on the shelf can be accessed from both rooms. The space that formerly formed the lower part of the front windows was boarded up when the windows were reduced with the construction of the 1949 front. Likewise, the door at the front end of the corridor was reduced.

The ends of tie rods that anchor the 1949 front to the building project into the front storage room and the front room of the apartment across the corridor. A boarded-up gable opening with a triangular vent at the top is visible between the ceiling joists of the front storage room. Also visible is the building's roof construction, consisting of rafters butting at a roof board and connected by collar boards. Vents and casing associated with the equipment in the projection booth protrudes through the floor of the front end of the corridor.

A number of items associated with the operation of the theater are stored on the second floor. In the rear storage room are two fancy "Queen Anne" door leaves with textured glass upper panels consisting of large center panes bordered by smaller panes. The doors are similar in construction and detail, with (for example) reeded rails and stiles, and they presumably originally belonged to the same building or space, but they do not form a pair. The fancier of the two has a double band of spindlework and finials at the top. It may have originally formed one half of a pair of swinging saloon-type doors. It was attached to a vertical beam at some point in its history and beam and door were removed from their former context and stored in the storage room. In the

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front storage room is a large wood box or crate on which is painted the inscription "Express, Val. \$100⁰⁰, Commodore Theatre, Portsmouth, VA, Order 25797." Stapled to a corner of the box is a later shipping label addressed to the Buchanan Theatre from the National Theatre Supply Company of Baltimore. Also in the room is a US flag with forty-eight stars and a box-like piece of equipment made from a sheet-metal sign with the red-painted words "Motor Oil."

In the rear apartments are stored old projectors, bulbs, carbon arc rods, cast aluminum drive-in theater speakers, and other theater-related equipment. A crate contains red plastic marquee letters, and there is a box of printed and hand-lettered plastic and card stock sign cards labeled with days of the week (e.g. Sun. & Mon, Wed. thru Sat.) and information such as "Coming Soon." Some of the sign cards have Art Deco lettering. There is also a box of red, white, and blue poster strips reading "Sunday."

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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.)

- 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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

Period of Significance

Ca. 1917-1968

Significant Dates

Ca. 1917

1949

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Shank family (builder)

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Buchanan Theatre has served as the principal entertainment venue and an important social hub for the Botetourt County town of Buchanan since its construction ca. 1917. Originally known as the Star Theatre, the two-story gable-fronted building was built and operated by the Shank family. Jack and Homer Jackson purchased the building in 1946 and, in 1949, remodeled it in the Moderne style, adding a new brick front, neon marquee, ticket booth, and restaurant wing. The interior, with its knotty-pine lobby, streamlined concession stand, and Art Deco seating, dates to the remodeling and a subsequent, less extensive 1950s remodeling. The Buchanan Theatre is a contributing building in the Buchanan Historic District, which was listed on the National Register in 1999 with areas of significance of Transportation, Architecture, Commerce, and Manufacturing. The theatre, however, is individually eligible for the National Register under Criterion A in the Entertainment/Recreation area of significance as Buchanan's principal entertainment venue during the historic period of significance. The theater is also eligible under Criterion C in the Architecture area of significance as an intact 1940s Moderne-style small-town movie theater. The period of significance extends from ca. 1917, the date of construction, until 1968, encompassing the first half-century of the theater's operation. The Buchanan Theatre, which remains in use as a movie theater and event venue, is nominated at the local level of significance.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Criterion A: Entertainment/Recreation

In March 1912, F. W. and Lillie T. Steger of Princeton, West Virginia, sold Buchanan town lot 39, the future site of the Buchanan Theatre, to local resident John F. Shank for \$3,000. The deed described improvements as "a brick dwelling, tenant house, etc." valued at \$900 in county tax records. The value remained constant through 1917 before doubling to \$1,800 in 1918, an increase which suggests construction of the theater in 1917 and/or 1918. The Town of Buchanan website states that the Star Theatre, as the theater was originally known, opened in 1919 and that John Shank's son Elmer L. Shank "purchased the A.E. McCurdy's Open Air Theatre and built the current building with lumber that his family cut themselves." Suzanne Stinnet, the great-granddaughter of John F. Shank, confirms that the lumber for the building was cut on the Shank family farm and that Elmer Shank assisted with construction. Elmer's children Margaret Delong (Shank) Sprinkle, Ralph Edwin Shank, and Betty Jean (Shank) Jones helped run the theater in later years. Prior to the McCurdy and Shank theaters, a cinema does not appear to have operated in Buchanan, at least no movie announcements appear in early January 1911 issues of the town newspaper, the *Buchanan News*.¹

The Shank family theater appears as the Star Theatre in *Buchanan News* advertisements from the 1920s and 1930s. A July 1928 ad noted that the theater was cooled with "Arctic New Air." The

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following month the spelling was corrected to “Arctic Nu-Air,” the name that appears on the evaporative cooling unit inside the back porch. The Arctic Nu-Air Corporation of Chicago was a major supplier of evaporative cooling and ventilation systems to movie houses during the era. The spelling correction, and the fact that the cooling system was not mentioned in an earlier ad from September 1926, suggests the system was newly installed in 1928. The theater also boasted a “New Velvet Gold Fibre Screen” in 1928. In addition to the showing of movies, the theater was used for preaching in 1926.²

Photographs in the theater collection from the 1930s trace the theater’s early exterior evolution. A close-up front view from about 1930 (approximately datable from pedestrian clothing styles) shows the two-story gable-fronted building with what is likely at least part of its current brick veneer. The gable was sheathed with wood shingles, presumably similar to the shingles that survive in the back gable, and a two-tier porch projected on the front. The porch had an upper tier with square wood posts and balusters supported by a lower tier of slender metal poles. The entryway is not visible in the photo, with the view obstructed by a gas pump in the foreground as well as what appears to be an approximately six-foot-high fence panel, one of two panels at the ends of the porch. The fence panel at the other end appears to be covered with playbills or posters that presumably announced movies. The projection booth vents now contained in the mezzanine office may be just visible in the view.

The second photograph, datable to the second half of the 1930s based on the style of automobiles in the view, is not as detailed as earlier and later photos, but it shows changes to the lower front porch tier that are more clearly revealed in a third photo. In this photo, the marquee displays the movie title *The Rains Came*, starring Myrna Loy and Tyrone Power and released in September 1939. The presence of leaves on surrounding trees may date the photo to September or October 1939, although a later date associated with a re-release of the movie is not impossible. By the date of the second and third photos, the lower porch tier had been improved with the construction of brick walls at the ends, creating a sheltered ticket-purchase area, and by the addition of a cantilevered marquee. The inside surface of one of the brick walls is covered by a large movie poster in the view, and the underside edge of the marquee may have been studded with light bulbs. Between the marquee and the second porch tier was a feature that the photo suggests may have been a prism glass transom.

By 1942, John F. Shank was deceased, and lot 39 had passed to his sons, Elmer L. and Warren P. Shank. In a February 1942 division of the lot, Warren Shank and his wife, Virginia A. Shank, received the lot’s eastern part, and Elmer Shank and his wife, Louise E. Shank, received the western part, which included the theater. In January 1946, Elmer and Louise sold the theater to Jack Lee Jackson and Homer Elvin Jackson for \$18,000. In 1949, the value of buildings on the lot increased from \$1,170 to \$3,000, indicating substantial improvement. In the August 4, 1949, issue of the *Buchanan News*, the theater announced it would “close for remodeling and re-seating August 22 and will remain closed about 10 days.” Combined, the tax and newspaper information dates the current Moderne front to 1949, a date that is consistent with the style of the addition. A search of *Buchanan News* issues from August and September 1949 has failed to turn up other

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information on the remodeling. An August 18 ad noted that the theater was scheduled to reopen around September 3, but it appears to have reopened a few days earlier, on September 1.³

In January 1951, Homer Jackson and his wife, Mary Lucille McCulloch Jackson, divided the property with Jack Lee Jackson. Subsequent tax records recorded the value of J. L. Jackson's portion as \$2,000 and Homer's as \$1,000. Later, apparently in 1958, a CinemaScope screen was installed. An ad in the June 26, 1958, *Buchanan News* noted "After the show Sun. June 29, the Buchanan Theatre will close INDEFINITELY." The July 3 paper did not run a theater ad, but ads reappeared by the end of August 1958, indicating the theater had reopened.⁴

Movie advertisements in the *Buchanan News* provide glimpses of the theater's operation in the 1920s-1940s period. An ad in the June 20, 1929, issue listed such movies as *Tarzan the Mighty*, *The Shop-worn Angel* (with Gary Cooper), and *The Hit of the Show*, as well as unidentified offerings such as a "two reel western and Paramount News" and a "two reel comedy." A May 7, 1942, ad noted that the show started at 8:15 PM "War time" and tickets cost 25 cents for adults and 15 cents for children under twelve. Those admission prices differed from 1937 (25 cents and 10 cents) and 1945 (30 cents and 16 cents). Featurettes continued with "News of the Day" and a "Technicolor cartoon comedy" as a part of the fare, and in May 1946 the theater hosted an "All-Fun Show," possibly geared to youngsters. A feature of the theater that speaks to the Jim Crow era segregation of the times is the existence of the separate mezzanine entrance. This entrance, plus the separate drinking fountain in the mezzanine, probably reflect segregated mezzanine seating for African American patrons.⁵

Later Buchanan Theatre owner Dale Carter attended movies in the theater in the 1950s. He recalls Sunday matinees with Roy Rogers westerns and the upgrade to CinemaScope. Bluegrass musicians Donald Wesley Reno (1926-1984) and Arthur Lee "Red" Smiley (1925-1972) played at the theater, probably in the 1950s or 1960s, and Carter has been told Grand Ole Opry comedian Minnie Pearl (1912-1996) performed there. A Mr. Madison ran the restaurant in the side wing, which may have been known as Madison's Restaurant. The theater was the only cinema known to have operated in Buchanan from the 1910s until the late 1940s, but in the 1950s it was joined by the Mt. Joy Drive-In movie theater located south of town on Route 11. The late 1940s and 1950s were the heyday of drive-in theater construction. The number of drive-ins jumped from 102 in 1946 to 1,000 in 1949, and by the close of the 1950s, an estimated 4,600 drive-ins were in operation. According to one source, the Mt. Joy drive-in, a single-screen theater that operated from 1952 until it closed in the early 1960s, was owned by J. L. Jackson, who also owned the Buchanan Theatre. Wayne Thompson owned the Buchanan Theatre in later years and closed it on November 5, 1985, the date of a devastating flood that struck Buchanan. Carter notes that Thompson owned apartments and other properties damaged by the flood and that reopening the theater, which may have been unprofitable, was probably a low priority for him. During the years the theater was closed (1985-2001), one of the upstairs apartments remained in residential use.⁶

In 1999, Dale and Gloria Carter purchased the theater and began renovations. A nonprofit called Standing Room Only was formed to manage operations, and the theater reopened on November

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1, 2001, with a showing of *The Majestic*, a Jim Carrey romantic comedy about a small-town movie theater. The Carters used the Arctic Nu-Air “swamp fan” to cool the theater during the first few years of operation (Dale Carter notes that the fan remains operational). The Carters made few changes to the building, the main one being the replacement of the auditorium wainscot, which had extensive water damage (the right-hand wainscot was damaged; the undamaged left-hand wainscot was replaced to match). In 2012, the theater upgraded to a digital projector. The Buchanan Theatre has won a number of awards and has served as the venue for film festivals.⁷

Criterion C: Architectural Significance and Integrity Statement

The Buchanan Theatre was built as a theater with apartments on the second floor. The brick veneer, which has been partially rebuilt on at least one occasion, appears to be the original exterior treatment; photos from the 1930s show brick, and there is no evidence of earlier siding. The rear elevation retains the original decorative bevel-cut wood shingles in the gable and a two-tier porch that, although it is likely to have been altered or rebuilt over the years, retains its basic original/early form and extent.

Several early features survive on the interior. The mezzanine may be original; its beaded tongue-and-groove wainscoting and railing and a chamfered post are in keeping with the building’s 1910s period of construction. The mezzanine, currently accessed via a stair added in 1949, may originally have had a steep interior stair that is now missing. The interior surrounds of at least two windows, now bricked up on the exterior, survive wholly or in part. The window surround near the stage retains its original dark stained finish. More early fabric survives on the second floor, which retains two relatively unaltered apartment rooms with original four-panel doors with pottery knobs and door and window surrounds. Also early are the Queen Anne door leaves stored in the upstairs, although it is unclear whether they were originally in the building or not.

The 1949 front addition has Art Deco and Moderne-influenced features popular for movie theaters of the era such as the neon marquee and concrete accent panels. Moderne features were also added to the interior, notably the auditorium wall panels consisting of fabric and double-ribbed moldings, which probably date to 1949, and the concession stand with its curved and banded frame, which probably dates to the 1950s, possibly 1958 when other upgrades are known to have been made. Uncharacteristic of the Moderne style is the molded knotty pine paneling in the lobby, although the material was popular for roadhouses and domestic interiors during the period. The banded appearance of the paneling may have been considered aesthetically in keeping with the banded appearance of the building’s Moderne features. This is also suggested by the diagonal placement of the paneling in the mezzanine stair, which with its red paint appears less rustic and more modernistic. Molded knotty pine paneling of a slightly different type was also used in the back upstairs apartments as part of a modernization. The diamond-shaped bathroom windows appear to date to around the same period (1949) and may indicate the introduction of indoor plumbing to the apartments at the time, just as the front addition added restroom facilities to the main level.

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The cinder block substructure of the stage suggests it too was added in 1949, although the 1950s (possibly 1958) are also a possibility. Few if any vestiges of the original stage appear to survive, although the pressed metal ceiling above the stage may be original to the theater (the modern metal ceiling in the auditorium and elsewhere is modeled on its design). The green damask curtains in the backstage probably date to the 1940s or 1950s. Their foliated chevron pattern echoes the pattern of the surviving strip of bronze-colored damask at the top of the auditorium walls. The bronze fabric's metallic sheen was matched by the sheen of the double-ribbed moldings, which were originally painted gold. The metallic color palette, which created an atmosphere of glamor and luxuriousness, is also expressed in the gold lettering of the restroom signs, the gold "Buchanan Theatre" sign in the ticket booth, and the silver and gold and silver and red sign placards that survive in storage.

Red was another color theme established in the 1940s, most evident in the marquee and auditorium seats. The incongruous pale blue and yellow of the concessions booth is a color palette more characteristic of the late 1950s and early 1960s, although the banding and curved forms of the booth are in keeping with the Moderne style introduced in the 1940s. The 1999-2001 renovation respected the historic features and finishes of the theater, even evoking the ribbed Moderne aesthetic in the design of the front signboards.

The Buchanan Theatre is a product of a trend in American movie theater design that began in the late 1920s, gathered force in the 1930s, and continued in the 1940s: the movement away from the exotic and period revival designs that characterized movie palace design during the silent era toward architectural modernism. The first widely-accepted modernist idiom was the Art Deco style, employed for movie theater design by leaders in the field like California architect S. Charles Lee. An early expression of the modernist trend in western Virginia is the Art Deco Lyric Theater (1929-1930) in Blacksburg, designed by Roanoke architect Louis Phillippe Smithey. Moderne designs—generally simpler, blockier, and more planar than Art Deco—appeared in the region by the mid-1940s, as demonstrated by the Mount Jackson Theatre (1946) in Mount Jackson, a buff brick, black and white Carrara glass, and glass block building designed by architect J. Raymond Mims. The Mount Jackson Theatre and the Wayne Theatre (remodeled 1949) feature or originally featured prow-like marquees like the Buchanan Theatre. The Elkton Theatre (DHR ID 216-5016) in nearby Rockingham County, completed circa 1941, is also notable for its vernacular variation of the streamlined Moderne style; like the Buchanan Theatre, it is also characterized by a three-bay façade with a central recessed main entrance. Historically, a three-sided red marquee was cantilevered over this recessed entry vestibule; the marquee was recently reconstructed after a decades-long period of vacancy and deterioration following the theater's closing in 1966. Exterior ornamentation on the front elevation is otherwise minimal, characterized primarily by Moderne-style brickwork details and a simple parapet roofline.

Several other contemporaneous examples of small-town theaters in Southwest Virginia highlight the trend toward architectural modernism while also further illustrating the unique transitional nature of the Buchanan Theatre as well as its relatively high integrity among similar resources within the region. The Russell (DHR ID 252-5021) in the town of Lebanon (Russell County), built in the 1930s, is a two-story, three-bay Art Deco style theater with a central recessed

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entrance featuring a ticket booth flanked by entry doors. A triangular marquee is cantilevered over this recessed vestibule, with an additional rectangular sign extending vertically upward from the peak point. Exterior ornamentation is primarily limited to textured Art Deco style brickwork above and below second-story windows as well as brick corbelling along the parapet roofline. Though the building remains in fair condition, it is currently vacant.

The circa 1940 Pearis Theater Building (DHR ID 279-0035) in the town of Pearisburg (Giles County) is a two-bay, two-story masonry building with a multi-colored marquee cantilevered over a recessed entry vestibule that comprises much of the first story. Notably, the Pearis Theater exhibits relatively more complex Art Deco ornamentation surrounding its second-story windows. However, while the exterior appearance seems largely unaltered, recent photos suggest that the theater is likely vacant, and the marquee shows some signs of deterioration.

The Lee Theatre (DHR ID 281-5001) in the town of Pennington Gap (Lee County), built in 1946, was historically characterized by a minimally ornamented, red-brick veneer exterior with a triangular marquee cantilevered over a central, slightly recessed entry vestibule with Moderne style wooden doors. Following the theater's closing in the late 1970s, the original marquee and ticket stand were removed from the vestibule and replaced with a simple awning, though both features were reconstructed as part of a larger rehabilitation project in 2013.

The Rex Theater in Galax (DHR ID 113-5001-0018), completed in 1948, is a three-story, three-bay Art Deco theater notable for its asymmetric main façade, with the marquee and recessed main entrance situated to one side of an otherwise symmetrical stucco façade with simplified, Art Deco style geometric tilework ornamentation. The Colonial Theater (DHR ID 113-5001-0006), an earlier (c.1930) Moderne theater also located in Galax, was a two-story, two-bay building with a stucco façade ornamented with brick corbelling, though the historic theater marquee and entry have been completely removed and the building converted into commercial space.

Finally, while bearing few other characteristics of the Moderne style, a small circa 1940 theater (DHR ID 052-0177) located along Route 58 in Ewing (Lee County) is demarcated by a cantilevered, triangular red marquee very similar to the one fronting the Buchanan Theatre, though the building itself is an otherwise unadorned masonry edifice painted white. Like many other examples surveyed in the region, recent images indicate that it has been vacant for some time and is somewhat deteriorated.

Small-town Moderne theaters like the Buchanan Theatre were part of the same wave as their big-city counterparts, which made their first appearance in the late 1930s and continued to be built nationwide after the hiatus of World War II. Based on available survey data from across Southwest Virginia, the renovated Buchanan Theater was stylistically up to date when it was completed in 1949.⁸ Like many of its contemporaries, the Buchanan Theatre exhibits the

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vernacular adaptation of a streamlined Moderne style that employed several characteristic architectural elements – the cantilevered marquee, the recessed entry vestibule and ticket booth, and simple geometric or planar ornamentation – in often unique and contextually specific designs. Additionally, though the Buchanan Theatre faced a similar period of inactivity during the latter half of the twentieth century, it is arguably unique among the other resources discussed given the degree to which architectural elements from its earliest phase through its stylistic transition in the late 1940s have remained intact and retained integrity of design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Given its architectural evolution, its distinctive adaptation of the increasingly pervasive architectural modernism of the 1930s and 1940s, and its relative persistence as a small-town theater and entertainment venue in Southwest Virginia, the Buchanan Theatre is a locally significant community landmark and surviving example of how post-World War II national trends in architectural design were manifest in more local contexts.

Endnotes

1. Suzanne Stinnet personal communication with the author, July 19, 2017; Botetourt County Deed Book H, p. 132; *Buchanan Area Guidebook* (2017-18 Edition), 10; Town of Buchanan website; *Buchanan News*, January 6 and 13, 1911. In 1914 A. E. McCurdy was granted a franchise to operate a hydroelectric plant in Buchanan, the presumed power source for his “open air” theater, and in 1916 an A. E. McCurdy was a movie theater manager in Baltimore (*Power*, March 3, 1914; *The Moving Picture World*, September 2, 1916). The Stegers’ last name is also spelled Steiger in county records. A number of people assisted the project, among them Jo Eggers with Standing Room Only; Harry Gleason with the Town of Buchanan; Megan H. G. Bower with Botetourt County; former theater owner Dale Carter; architect Barry Rakes; Suzanne Stinnet; Barbara McGullam; and Lena McDonald and Michael Pulice with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.
2. *Buchanan News*, September 16, 1926 and July 5 and August 23, 1928; Rhodes, *Perils of Moviegoing in America*, 102, 280.
3. Botetourt County Deed Book 92, p. 7, and Deed Book 96, p. 64; *Buchanan News*, August 4, 18 and 22 and September 1, 1949.
4. Dale Carter personal communication with the author, July 17, 2017; Botetourt County Deed Book 104, p. 90; *Buchanan News*, June 26 and July 3, 1958.
5. *Buchanan News*, June 20, 1929, and May 7, 1942.
6. Dale Carter personal communication with the author, July 17, 2017; Cinema Treasures website; Mike Rogers post; McKeon and Everett, *Cinema Under the Stars*, 5, 28; *Buchanan Area Guidebook* (2017-18 Edition), 10. A box of drive-in theater speakers and a box with “Mt. Joy Drive-In” on it, both stored upstairs in the theater, support an ownership link between the Buchanan Theatre and the drive-in. Ads for the Mt. Joy Drive-In Theatre appear in 1950s issues

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of the *Buchanan News*, such as the issue of July 3, 1958, when the Buchanan Theatre was closed for renovations.

7. Dale Carter personal communication with the author, July 17, 2017; *Buchanan Area Guidebook* (2017-2018 Edition), 10. The movie showing at the time of the theater's closing in 1985, a Chuck Norris action flick, remains on the make-up table in the projection booth.

8. Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk*, 78, 89, 118-119; Pezzoni, "Blacksburg: An Architectural Overview," 71-72; Lee, *Buildings of Virginia: Valley, Piedmont, Southside, and Southwest*, 75, 114.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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Lee, Anne Carter, et al. *Buildings of Virginia: Valley, Piedmont, Southside, and Southwest*.
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McKeon, Elizabeth, and Linda Everett. *Cinema Under the Stars*. Nashville, Tn.: Cumberland
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The Moving Picture World (journal).

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Richardson, D. Darlene. "Buchanan Historic District." National Register of Historic Places
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Rogers, Mike, writing on the Cinema Treasures website
(<http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/12359>), accessed July 10, 2018.

Stinnet, Suzanne. Personal communication with the author, July 19, 2017.

Town of Buchanan website (<http://www.townofbuchanan.com/news/12-virginia-theaters-offering-an-unforgettable-experience/>), accessed July 14, 2017.

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Valentine, Maggie. *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk*. New Haven, Ct.: Yale University, 1994.

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 # _____
 recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency
 Local government
 University
 Other
Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, Virginia

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): DHR ID# 180-0028-0117

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property approximately 0.25 acre

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 37.527730 | Longitude: -79.678410 |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

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Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

- | | | |
|----------|----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The historic boundary corresponds to Botetourt County tax parcels 65A(5)39B and 65A(5)39C, the two town lots on which the nominated resource stands. The true and correct historic boundary is shown on the attached Location Map and Tax Parcel Map.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary corresponds to the two town lots on which the nominated resource stands, along with a small portion of the surrounding parking lot, thus encompassing the extent of land historically associated with the theatre and all known associated historic resources.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: J. Daniel Pezzoni
organization: Landmark Preservation Associates
street & number: 6 Houston St.
city or town: Lexington state: VA zip code: 24450
e-mail: gilespezzoni@rockbridge.net
telephone: (540) 464-5315
date: November 2018

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

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- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Buchanan Theatre
City or Vicinity: Buchanan, Botetourt County, Virginia
Photographer: J. Daniel Pezzoni

Photo 1 of 9: VA_BotetourtCounty_BuchananTheatre_0001
Date Photographed: July 2017
View: Front and right side elevations, view facing southeast.

Photo 2 of 9: VA_BotetourtCounty_BuchananTheatre_0002
Date Photographed: July 2017
View: Left side elevation, view facing south.

Photo 3 of 9: VA_BotetourtCounty_BuchananTheatre_0003
Date Photographed: July 2017
View: Rear elevation, view facing northwest.

Photo 4 of 9: VA_BotetourtCounty_BuchananTheatre_0004
Date Photographed: July 2017
View: Ticket booth.

Photo 5 of 9: VA_BotetourtCounty_BuchananTheatre_0005
Date Photographed: July 2017
View: Arctic Nu-Air evaporative cooler.

Photo 6 of 9: VA_BotetourtCounty_BuchananTheatre_0006
Date Photographed: August 2017

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View: Lobby.

Photo 7 of 9: VA_BotetourtCounty_BuchananTheatre_0007

Date Photographed: August 2017

View: Auditorium facing screen.

Photo 8 of 9: VA_BotetourtCounty_BuchananTheatre_0008

Date Photographed: August 2017

View: Auditorium facing lobby.

Photo 9 of 9: VA_BotetourtCounty_BuchananTheatre_0009

Date Photographed: July 2017

View: Second-floor apartment.

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.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



LOCATION MAP

Buchanan Theatre

Town of Buchanan

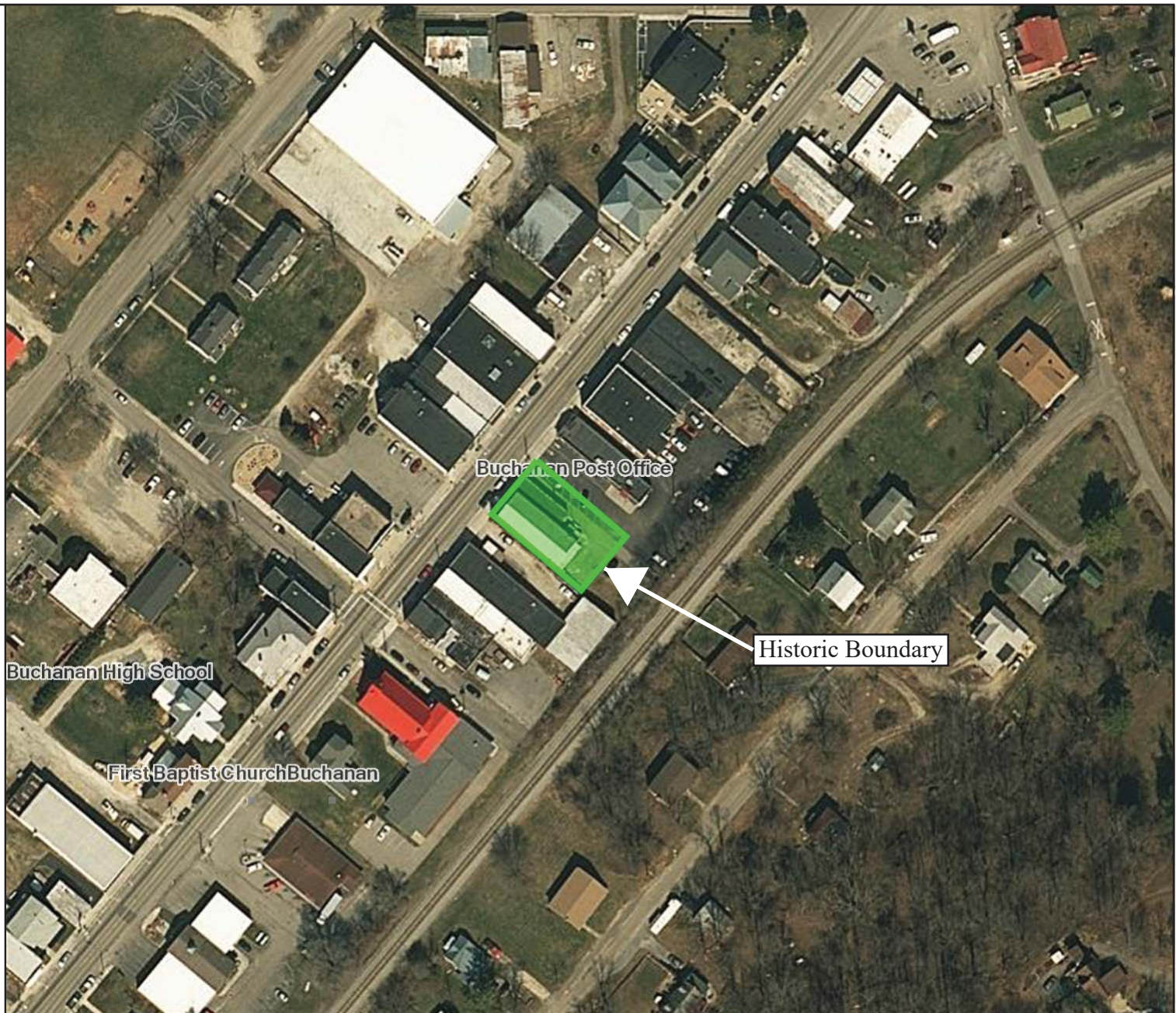
Botetourt County, VA

DHR No. 180-0028-0117

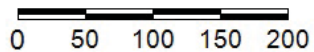
Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Latitude: 37.527730

Longitude: -79.678410



Feet



1:2,257 / 1"=188 Feet

Title: Digital Location Map

Date: 10/17/2018

DISCLAIMER: Records of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) have been gathered over many years from a variety of sources and the representation depicted is a cumulative view of field observations over time and may not reflect current ground conditions. The map is for general information purposes and is not intended for engineering, legal or other site-specific uses. Map may contain errors and is provided "as-is". More information is available in the DHR Archives located at DHR's Richmond office.

Notice if AE sites: Locations of archaeological sites may be sensitive the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) and Code of Virginia §2.2-3705.7 (10). Release of precise locations may threaten archaeological sites and historic resources.

Buchanan Theatre

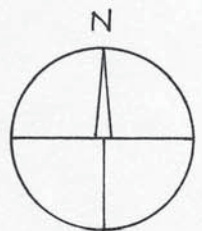
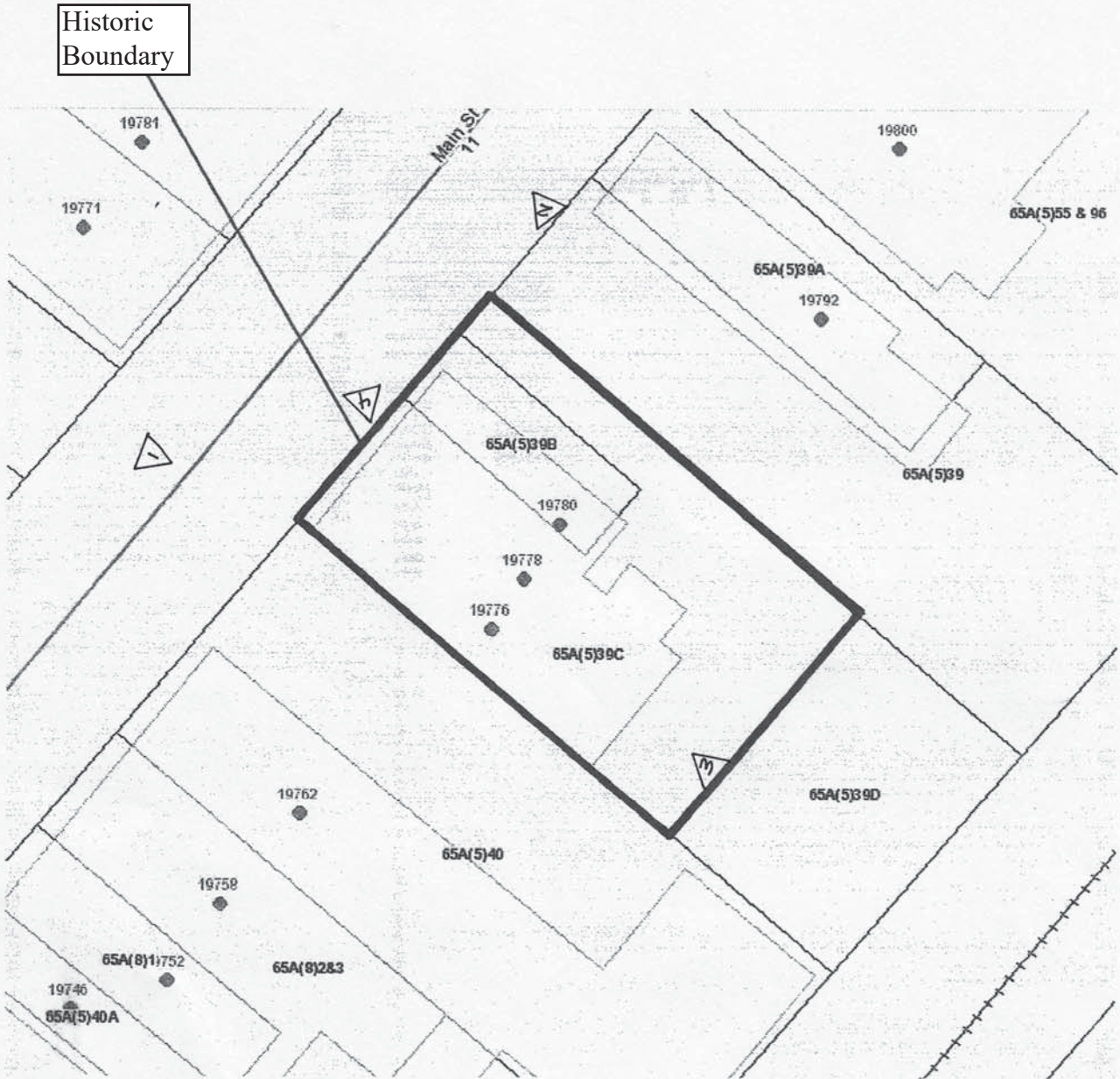
(1 contributing building)

19778 Main Street, Buchanan, VA

Botetourt County, VA

DHR File No. 180-0028-0117

Sketch Map/Site Plan & Photo Key



Exterior Photos

Number and direction of view of nomination photos indicated by triangular markers.

