

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination FormSee instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sectionsFINAL
FILE COPY

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received

date entered

1. Name

historic Hoosier Theater Building

and or common

2. Location

street & number 1329-1335 119th Street N/A not for publication

city, town Whiting N/A vicinity of

state Indiana code 018 county Lake code 089

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other: Theater & Apt

4. Owner of Property

name Thomas N. Simstad

street & number 11276 Gerry Court

city, town Crown Point N/A vicinity of state Indiana 46307

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Lake County Recorder's Office

street & number 2293 N. Main St.

city, town Crown Point state Indiana 46307

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Indiana Historic Sites and
title Structures Inventoryhas this property been determined eligible? yes ☒ nodate 1979 federal ☒ state county local

depository for survey records Indiana Department of Natural Resources

city, town Indianapolis state Indiana

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The property contains two attached, inter-related, yet distinguishable structures, located in the "uptown" business district of Whiting. The first structure is a commercial/residential building and the second is the Hoosier Theater. The commercial/residential structure houses the main entryway and lobby for the theater. The lobby serves as the common area for and the location of attachment for both structures (see site plan). For ease of description only, each structure will be discussed separately. Both structures were built at the same time, share common ownership, and have remained at the original site. While both structures are in need of repair, they will retain most of their original appearance and are in fair condition. All of the following significant features of the building will be retained and/or restored.

Commercial/Residential Structure

This is a three-story, flat-roofed, unpainted brown brick building with glazed terra cotta features on the south and west sides of the building. The building is rectangular in shape, slightly larger than most of its neighbors, and was constructed in 1924.

The main facade faces south onto 119th Street, with three commercial storefronts and the main lobby entrance on the ground floor (photos 1 and 2). The westernmost storefront is only one bay wide and has a corner entrance, with another bay on the west side of the building. The next storefront is three bays wide with the entrance recessed in the center bay. Both of these storefronts feature terra cotta trim near grade level, and have brick pilasters with terra cotta trim separating the bays. Large plate glass windows with blind transom lights characterize these storefronts. The easternmost storefront, located next to the theater entrance, is one bay wide and has been remodeled to feature a recessed entrance and display window with solid framing. A terra cotta pilaster separates it from a single door that provides access to the upper floors. This door is sheltered by an ornate canopy with only one bracket, on the left side. Most of the storefronts have their original wood doors with glass lights, and are sheltered by canvas awnings.

The theater and lobby entrance and the marquee are in the easternmost bay, and were remodeled in the early 1950's. Three pairs of aluminum doors are flanked by corrugated aluminum panels, possibly covering the original materials. The simple marquee is suspended, with anchors in the terra cotta facade above.

Above the theater entrance and marquee is a three-bay pavilion faced with glazed terra cotta (photo 8). A coved, two and one-half story terra cotta arch frames the center bay, which features three six-over-six double-hung sash on both the second and third floors, with a diaper-patterned tympanum in the parapet above the arch (photo 10). Single, six-over-six double-hung sash flank the arch on each floor. Swags decorate the spandrel panels between the second and third stories (photo 9). Paired pilasters frame the three-bay pavilion up to the level of the third story window lintels. The terra cotta continues into the parapet above the paired pilasters, with swags and urns as ornament. The remainder of the parapet above the arch is brick, finished with terra cotta coping.

The rest of the second and third stories west of the theater entrance pavilion is of rough brown face brick, and is divided into six major bays, which do not correspond to the bays on the ground floor storefronts. Each bay has triple windows, or single windows alternating with solid brick panels. Bays are separated by brick piers outlined with terra cotta; window sills and lintels are terra cotta. Spandrel panels between floors, as well as the parapet, are decorated by rectangles in brick, with terra cotta corners. Terra cotta coping along the top is broken by a terra cotta ornament and cap above each brick pier.

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Continuation sheet Hoosier Theater Building

Item number 7

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Above the corner entrance at the west end is a simpler, one-bay version of the terra cotta arch and ornament above the theater entrance (photo 6). The west side of the building has three bays on the upper floors, resembling those on the main facade. The ground floor has two very high, small windows west of the storefront.

All of the storefront interiors were remodeled in the late 1950's. The upper two floors each contain eight residential apartments. Although the building is in need of repair, these floors still retain much of their original appearance. The apartment doors are solid wood with brass entry sets. Hallways have hardwood floors and wainscoting. Also located in the hallways are the original "ice box" access doors, used by local merchants when delivering ice. The stairs feature hardwood treads, risers and banisters. Interior walls are plaster, with cornice trim on the living room ceilings. The original wood windows (which will be restored) feature rectangular double-hung sash with mill finish storm windows.

Hoosier Theater Structure

The theater is a three and one-half story, flat-roofed, unpainted brick building with quality face brick on the West (LaPorte) Street side of the building. The theater is attached to and located directly behind (north of) the previously described commercial/residential structure. The commercial storefronts include the entryway for the theater and the theater's marquee. The building is rectangular in shape and was constructed in 1924. There is only one double-hung window in the building, located in the projectionist's washroom.

The lobby of the theater features a large crystal chandelier (photo 11). Two smaller chandeliers are located in the foyer, which is separated from the auditorium by wood-framed windows and leaded glass (photo 12). The floor of the theater's entryway is terrazzo, followed by a carpeted foyer and carpeted auditorium aisles. The auditorium floor is concrete and seats approximately 600 people. Directly in front of the seats is the stage which was enlarged (c. 1930) to cover the original orchestra pit (photo 3). The proscenium arch and walls and ceiling of the auditorium are decorated with ornate plasterwork. The auditorium has side exits, and false boxes flanking the proscenium (photos 14, 15). Above the false boxes is hand-carved wood grill work. The center of the ceiling is dominated by a dome with two large, brass chandeliers (photo 13).

The second floor was used as a balcony, and with its arched openings, it provides an excellent view of the stage. The third floor houses the projection room and equipment.

The theater was built to provide for both stage shows and movies. To accomplish this task the movie screen is rigged via cables and counter-weights so that it may be lifted up and out of sight. The original mechanical systems of the theater are quite remarkable, even by today's standards. The original "Frick Refrigeration System" (air conditioning), the design of which is still in use today, will be retained. The electric lighting systems, the stage rigging, the heating plant and the air conditioning were all considered to be the best available.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	community planning	landscape architecture	religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	conservation	law	science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	economics	literature	sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	XX <input type="checkbox"/> architecture	education	military	social
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	engineering	music	humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	exploration settlement	philosophy	XX <input type="checkbox"/> theater
XX <input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	industry	politics government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1924

Builder Architect Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Hoosier Theater Building was completed in 1924 and is the most ornate brick and terra cotta structure in the city of Whiting. The south and west sides of the building are appointed with custom-made terra cotta designs. The terra cotta facade and the intricate plaster work of the theater embody the European culture and craftsmanship that was brought from the Old World by the immigrants who first settled in the city of Whiting. During the earlier years of its existence the theater served as the major vaudeville, play and movie house in the city of Whiting. The Hoosier Theater is now the only operational house remaining in Whiting.

The early 1920's were a time of tremendous prosperity and growth for the city of Whiting, not only in population but in cultural sophistication, as well. No expense was spared in the design or construction of the building, as is evidenced by the theater's original cost of approximately \$250,000.¹ Several theaters were built in Whiting during the first part of this century to address the demand for clean, family-oriented entertainment. The Star, Princess and Capitol theaters followed one another, each more elaborate than the preceding. This era culminated with the building of the Hoosier Theater in 1924, acclaimed by the newspapers that said, "There is not to be found in this state a house more beautiful or with appointments indicating a greater interest in the comfort or pleasure of its guests."² The Hoosier is one of only three theaters still operational, out of more than 50 theaters built in northern Lake County. None of the other operational theaters can compare to the Hoosier in style, architecture, or appointments.

Upon its opening, the Hoosier Theater was hailed as the most beautiful and comfortable theater in the entire northwest Indiana area. The exquisite exterior terra cotta relief work reflected the classic detailing found throughout. Inside, its rich furnishings, detailed plaster work and tasteful color schemes earned it the title, "House Beautiful"³. Its innovative refrigeration system (air conditioning) was matched by only a few other theaters in the entire midwest. It attracted many out-of-town guests and was an immediate success.

Besides featuring movies, the Hoosier was an important "pilot" or "try-out" theater for the national vaudeville and stage circuit. Many performers who went on to fame in vaudeville, radio and television played on the stage of the Hoosier Theater before becoming famous. Enthusiastic reception at this Class A theater undoubtedly helped launch their careers.

While no single actor can be credited with the success of the Hoosier Theater, the Hoosier Theater certainly played an important part in the careers of many young performers. One of the more famous repeat acts to appear on stage was a pair of young men known as "Sam and Henry". These two young men were Charles Correll and Freeman Gosden, who later changed their show names to "Amos and Andy" and eventually went on to radio fame. Another of the Hoosier Theater's favorite young actors, fresh from England, was Charles Laughton. Other and possibly less well known actors include: Moran and Mack (comedians and song writers),

¹ and ² The Times Newspaper, February 13, 1924.

³ The Times Newspaper, February 15, 1924.

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Harris and Holly (dance team), Finx Mules (comedian and animal trainer), LeCompte and Fletcher (producers of musical comedies), Borah Minnovitch and His Harmonica Rascals, Alex Christenson (described as the "Victor Borge of his day"), and Brett Wood (monologist, also known as "Mr. Vaudeville"). While many of these names may not be familiar to today's youth, they were certainly "Big Time" acts when the Hoosier Theater reached significance.

The theater contributed much to the city over the years besides entertainment. The Hoosier Theater sponsored children's Christmas parties, benefits for charity and it still serves as a prominent landmark in the center of Whiting's business district. Long-time citizens of Whiting acknowledge the many ways their lives have been touched by the Hoosier Theater and the adjoining building: in entertainment, housing, commerce and civic support.

Item number 9

Moore, Powell A. The Calumet Region, Indiana's Last Frontier. Indiana Historical Bureau, 1959.

The Times Newspaper. Various articles. January, 1924, through December, 1924.

Whiting City Almanac and Cook Book. Historical edition, August 4, 1939.

Personal interviews: Verta Klem, Austin Boyle and J. Gifford, of Whiting Historical Society.
Personal interviews: John Tobias, local history buff, May and June, 1986.

Personal interviews: Archibald McKinley, Bert Hindmarch, local scholars and historians,
May and June, 1986.

Personal interview: John Kucka, former employee of the Hoosier Theater, June, 1986.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Please see continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property Less than one acre

Quadrangle name Whiting, Indiana

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	6
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4	5	8	6	9	0
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Verbal boundary description and justification

Lots 16, 17, 18 and 19 of block 8, Central Park Addition to Whiting, as shown in plat book 5, page 1, in Lake County, Indiana.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state N/A code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Thomas N. Simstad

organization N/A

date July 10, 1986

street & number 11276 Gerry Court

telephone 219/663-3609

city or town Crown Point

state Indiana

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

☐ national ☐ state ☒ local

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 *Richard Hartley for J. M. Robinson*

Indiana State Historic Preservation Officer
title

date 11-26-86

For NPS use only

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

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

