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A

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 Complete 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 **Rivoli Theater**

other names/site number **098-295-1041**

2. Location

street & number **3155 East 10th St.** N/A ☐ not for publication

city or town **Indianapolis** N/A ☐ vicinity

state **Indiana** code **IN** county **Marion** code **097** zip code **46201**

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 36CFR 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.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

Indiana Department of Natural 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:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

☐ 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:)

Rivoli Theater
Name of Property

Marion IN
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
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object
☐ landscape

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/CULTURE: Theater

DOMESTIC: Multiple Dwelling

COMMERCE/TRADE: Specialty Store

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Multiple Dwelling

VACANT

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

19th & 20th c. REVIVALS: Mission/Spanish

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls BRICK

roof ASPHALT

other GLASS

METAL: Copper

Narrative Description

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

Rivoli Theater _____

Marion _____ IN _____

Name of Property _____

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.)

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE _____

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION _____

PERFORMING ARTS _____

Period of Significance

1927-1937 _____

Significant Dates

1927 _____

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A _____

Cultural Affiliation

N/A _____

Architect/Builder

Dietz, Henry Ziegler (architect) _____

Lederman, D.R. (engineer) _____

9. Major Bibliographic 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 # _____

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository: _____

Indiana Historic Sites & Structures Inventory

Rivoli Theater
Name of Property

Marion IN
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than 1 acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 16 576090 4403630
Zone Easting Northing

3
Zone Easting Northing

2
Zone Easting Northing

4
Zone Easting Northing

☐ 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 Lauren Oswalt & Meghan Green; Charles R. Chulchian
organization HLEI; Owner date 10-02-2003
street & number 1028 N. Delaware St telephone 317/639-4534
city or town Indianapolis state IN zip code 46202

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 Charles R. Chulchian
street & number 3155 E. 10th St. telephone 317/632-4659
city or town Indianapolis state IN zip code 46201

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 Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section number 7 Page 1

**Rivoli Theater
Marion County, IN**

Narrative Description

The Rivoli Theatre is a two-story building located on the near-eastside of Indianapolis, Indiana. The Mission Revival-style theater was constructed in 1927 for the Universal Studio theater circuit, and was designed by architect Henry Ziegler Dietz. Though currently in deteriorated condition, the building retains a significant degree of integrity by maintaining the original marquee, entrance, apartments, and storefronts. The theater was rated "Notable" in the 1991 *Center Township, Marion County Historic Sites and Structures Inventory*. The brick building exhibits certain features of the Mission Revival-style, including iron brackets, small second floor faux balconies and gables punctuating the pent roof overhang. Currently, red asphalt shingles cover the pent roof, which was originally clad in red clay tile, also a standard feature of the Mission Revival-style. The exterior of the Rivoli contrasts with the once grand interior, the latter reflecting a restrained Neoclassical style.

Exterior

The Rivoli Theatre fronts the busy east-west thoroughfare of East 10th Street. The street is two lanes wide with a full lane of parking on each side. The building has a narrow set back of about eleven feet from the street. Located across 10th Street, north of the theater, is Indianapolis Public School #54. To the east, across Dearborn Street, is a tavern. Private residences are located south of the theater, and a fenced parking lot with overgrown vegetation borders the theater's west elevation.

The north elevation or main facade of the theater is symmetrical and is divided into seven bays (photo 1). The central and largest bay contains the main entrance, and is separated by two brick piers that rise through the roofline. A discontinuous limestone sill runs along the base of the north facade and continues a short distance around the northeast corner. The main entrance is recessed twelve feet from the sidewalk, to form an outer lobby (photo 2). The floor of the outer lobby is comprised of terrazzo in a checkerboard pattern. There are three original sets of wood, double doors with fixed sash transoms. All wood used in the construction of the Rivoli Theatre is sweet gum, unless noted otherwise. The transom windows are covered with iron railings and each one is adorned with a calligraphic "R" for Rivoli. Above the outer lobby is a three-sided carriage canopy suspended from the second floor by decorative iron braces attached to the facade (photo 3). On the east and west sides, the carriage canopy displays "Rivoli" in neon lights, and a neon "R" is attached to the canopy's north side (photo 4). Small light bulbs frame the entire carriage canopy. Black, iron, carriage lights are located along the entire facade and centered on both walls of the outer lobby. The second floor of the center bay contains four, six-over-one windows with aluminum storms.

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**Rivoli Theatre
Marion County, IN**

To each side of the main entrance are two identical storefronts, each divided by a narrow entrance bay (photo 5). The doorway to each store is recessed three feet, four inches, and the floor of its entranceway is finished in terrazzo. Each storefront is composed of a copper-framed display window on either side of its multi-pane door. The storefronts currently contain hanging neon signs that are recent additions. Each storefront includes one large transom composed of leaded prism glass (photo 6). Above each transom is a soldier course lintel. The two storefront transoms, closest to the main entrance, contain two rectangular sections of plate glass replacing the original prism lenses. A neon sign made of corrugated plastic and sheet metal, projects over the storefront on the east corner of the north façade (photo 7).

The bay which divides the storefronts is topped by a gable which punctuates the cornice and pent roof. A doorway in this bay is recessed five feet and provides access to the second floor apartments (photo 5). Above the doorway is a round arch that is flush with the brick, and accented with springers and a raised keystone. One small metal carriage light is located on each side of the apartment doorway. Over each apartment door and under each dormer is a centrally located single sash, twelve-pane window with an aluminum storm. The windows also have the same round arches, springers, and keystones seen above the apartment doors. Projecting just below the windows are iron faux balconies supported by decorative iron brackets (photo 5). The two bays on either side of the gabled bays include three, six-over-one windows with aluminum storms. All second floor windows on the façade have the same round arches and springers as the gabled bay, but they do not have keystones. With the exception of the store windows, all the windows at the Rivoli have slightly projecting brick sills.

Initially, the front façade and sections of the east and west sides of the building were not painted the pale yellow seen today. The theater was painted in 1970, covering the red English bond brickwork. English bond is a stronger and more aesthetic design than the common bond seen on the south and west sides of the theater. At the east and west ends of the facade the roofline is intersected by a gabled parapet. The same decorative iron brackets that support the faux balconies support the open and wide overhanging eaves. Metal gutters and drainpipes located along the eaves and other places around the theater show extreme disrepair. Placed atop the roof and supported by steel bracing is a deteriorating, vertical marquee reading "Rivoli" with theatrical masks illustrating "Comedy" and "Tragedy." (photo 8). The vertical marquee is not original, but due to its age, it has nonetheless become a historically significant part of the theater.

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**Rivoli Theatre
Marion County, IN**

The east elevation of the theater is divided into two sections: an apartment, storefront and the theater lobby to the north, and the auditorium to the south (photo 9). The painted brick delineates the northern section of the building. It is also shorter in height than the auditorium/southern section. The English bond brickwork on the north façade continues around to the east side and includes the auditorium wall, where it remains unpainted. A gabled parapet, identical to those on the north façade, extends over the northern most bay. There are a total of four doors on the theater's east side, and all four doors are boarded. The doors immediately to the north of the auditorium section are double steel doors; the remaining three are single wood doors. On the north corner of the east facade is a two-paned, aluminum, display window with a transom composed of leaded glass, prism lenses. Above the store windows are two, six-over-one windows with storms that have round arches and springers flush with the brick. Above the northern-most door are two, three-paned windows with storms. The second floor displays three additional sets of paired six-over-one windows with aluminum storms. The second floor windows have flat arches flush with the brick. There is also a twin, one-over-one window on the second floor slightly north of the auditorium section. The auditorium roofline extends higher than the apartment block of the theater, but drops down to a two-story level at the far-south end. A sheet metal, funnel vent is visible on the auditorium roof from the east elevation.

An alley that extends across Dearborn Street runs parallel to the south elevation (photo 10). Located on each end of the south side are two metal double doors, set a few feet from their respective corners. Near the second set of doors on the west side is a brick chimney that rises well above the height of the roof. The double doors on the east side of the south elevation are recessed five feet, and are boarded above. Above and to the west of the doors is an opening covered with a metal ventilation hood. The building rests upon a concrete foundation, which is visible on this facade. The brickwork on the south façade is a different type of brick, and, unlike the English bond on the north and east facades, it is laid in the common bond pattern.

The type of brick and bond pattern used on the south elevation can also be seen on the west elevation. The west elevation is divided, like the east elevation, into two sections: the painted apartment, storefront, and lobby section, and the auditorium section (photo 11). Near the south-end of the west elevation is a sign painted on the brick that directs traffic flow out of the parking lot. Above the sign is a curved-neck lamp that, at one time, illuminated the sign (photo 12). The only two windows on the west elevation are near the northwest corner of the theater, and are currently covered in a steel screen. Above the windows, a portion of the rooftop patio is visible (photo 13). Near the patio, on the auditorium roof is a large, funnel vent identical to the one visible from Dearborn Street.

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**Rivoli Theatre
Marion County, IN**

Interior

The first interior space through the main entrance is the inner lobby. The terrazzo floor, original to the building, is comprised of Georgia white and Riviera black marble. The walls have been covered with square cork tiles, and a drop ceiling hides the wood molding that borders the perimeter of the room. The drop ceiling also covers the original corrugated concrete and flat plaster ceiling. The chandelier in the lobby, as well as those in the foyer, are not original to the theater. A concession stand and a storeroom doorway, which were added after the building's original construction, are located to the right of the entrance. Two, small, pump organs border the opposite wall and flank two, glass, hanging display cases (photo 14). Three sets of French doors with glass transoms lead into the foyer and are identical to the front entrance doors.

The foyer extends along the rear of the auditorium to the east and west. One large chandelier hangs above the central portion of the foyer and two smaller chandeliers light the east and west sides. Wood partitions, which run the entire length of the foyer, divide the foyer and the auditorium into two sections. Solid wood runs from the floor to an approximate height of four feet. Glass panels add another two feet, and the space above is open (photo 15). Over the years, portions of the partition were rebuilt. Five entranceways through the partitions provide access to each auditorium aisle.

The west section of the foyer contains a men's and women's restroom (photo 16). The women's restroom is divided into a powder room and restroom. The powder room's glass light fixtures are circular, and hang on the wall opposite the door to the foyer. The light fixtures in the women's restroom are of the period, but are not original to the theater. Remnants of a ceiling fixture can be seen in the powder room, as well. The toilets in the restroom are enclosed by original, ivory-colored stalls made by the Weisteel Co. Two original sinks are attached to the opposite wall. A bowl-shaped light illuminates the women's restroom. The men's facilities consist of a separate entryway and a restroom with two urinals, two toilets, and one sink. A black, iron chandelier, not original to construction, lights the men's restroom. The east section of the foyer includes a steel double door, which serves as an emergency exit on the east wall. The east section of the foyer also contains a door along the north wall leading to a small passageway. The passageway consists of a door to the theater office to the north, an outside exit to the east, and stairs to the second floor patio to the west.

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**Rivoli Theatre
Marion County, IN**

Auditorium

The auditorium has five aisles that divide the seating: one central aisle, one on either side of the central aisle, and one bordering the east and west walls (photo 17). Presently, there are approximately 1200 seats, which are 300 seats less than the theater's original capacity. According to an article in the Indianapolis News from 1964, a number of seats were replaced with seats from the old Ritz Theater on North Illinois Street. Due to severe water damage in the auditorium the layers of wood that form the backs of the chairs are splitting away. The seats were originally upholstered with leather backing and cushions, but now some of the seats are upholstered in replacement fabric. The iron stanchions of the seats feature two, Neoclassical pilasters on each side adding to the overall classical motif of the auditorium.

The focal point of the auditorium is the stage and the framing proscenium arch (photo 18). The proscenium arch is decorated with egg-and-dart molding above an Adamesque garland design. Due to water damage and exposure to the elements, portions of the decorative details have been lost. The stage floor is corrugated concrete, but is covered with a smooth surface. The front of the stage floor is finished in a wood veneer that extends past the height of the stage to form a ledge. The ledge conceals the small, colored stage lights from the audience's view. Directly below the stage is a small organ pit with a doorway that leads to the basement. The organ rested on a lift that is located in the center of the organ pit. The back wall of the visible portion of the stage is covered with a large white screen. Three partitions, to block the audience's view of backstage, hang from the ceiling on either side of the stage, and are not original to construction. The walls of the side stages are covered in brickwork that matches the common bond of the exterior south and west elevations. The stage ceiling is composed of six wide flanges that run north and south. Above the flanges are 2 x 6 wood joists on end running east and west. Additional 2 x 6 joists, above the on end joists, are joined by tongue and groove and run north and south.

The east and west walls are each divided into five bays by four pairs of floor-to-ceiling pilasters. The two central bays contain two smaller pilasters with an arch above. There are two archways on both the east and west sides of the auditorium. A frieze placed on top of the pilasters and below the arches connect the two archways together. The arches are decorated in an Adamesque garland design with egg-and-dart molding above, as seen on the proscenium arch (photo 19). The frieze is accented by the same Adamesque garland design, but without the egg-and-dart molding. Originally the inside of each archway was swathed in heavy, velvet drapery, which has since been replaced with acoustical tiles.

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**Rivoli Theatre
Marion County, IN**

The two bays closest to the stage frame two organ chambers, one chamber in each bay (photo 17). The east and west sides of the auditorium each reflect this design. The organ chambers nearest to the stage are slightly smaller in size. Each chamber is composed of plaster and wood grillwork. The wood grillwork creates a double fanlight on the upper portion of the chamber. Surrounding each organ chamber is another arch decorated with the same Adamesque garland and egg-and-dart design. A faux balcony projects out from under each chamber and is supported by scroll-like brackets. The small organ chamber on the east side has been damaged over the years and little of the balcony and fanlight remains. Five metal fixtures are secured vertically as single sconces along the east and west walls, and due to their Art Deco design, were likely added some years after construction was completed. Ventilation is supplied through evenly spaced openings with decorative wood grillwork along the east and west walls. One emergency exit door is placed on the east wall. Wood wainscoting borders both walls and the stage, but stops at the north wall's wood partitions. The uppermost portion of all four auditorium walls were once decorated with a plaster egg-and-dart cornice, most of which has fallen to the floor (photo 19).

Above the wood partitions at the rear of the auditorium, the north wall is divided by four pairs of pilasters to form five bays. The pilasters are similar in design to the large pilasters on the east and west walls. The entire north wall is covered with acoustical tiles. A cluster of seven windows at the top demarcate the location of the theater's projection booth (photo 20).

In the auditorium a drop, flat, plaster ceiling, not original to construction, covers the original domed ceiling. The domed ceiling has a diameter of fifty-five feet and a height of seven feet. The auditorium ceiling has endured a significant amount of damage due to the failing roof system, therefore, allowing rain and moisture to enter the auditorium's interior (photo 21). The basic overhead structure is comprised of four steel flanges that span the entire distance of the auditorium from north to south. Two large trusses span north to south, and two smaller trusses span east to west. Steel cables hung from the larger elements suspend a steel grid system, which includes a catwalk. Although the structural integrity of the auditorium remains intact, large portions of the plaster ceiling are falling to the auditorium floor. The decorative tulip pattern that, at one time, bordered the perimeter of the auditorium and the edge of the domed ceiling is also in poor condition. However, the large, plaster medallion above the stage, partially blocked by speakers, is in excellent condition (photo 22).

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**Rivoli Theatre
Marion County, IN**

Access to the basement stairs is located from stage right and from the doorway in the organ pit. The basement holds remnants of men's and women's dressing rooms, and an intact coal bin room and boiler room. Currently, the basement is not lit, and its floor is occasionally flooded with water. The Pacific boiler, which holds 5,000 gallons of water, is located in the boiler room and is no longer in use. The ceiling is constructed of steel columns and corrugated concrete.

Commercial Stores

There are a total of four stores in the Rivoli Theatre. The storefront on the northeast corner has two display windows facing north, and one around the corner facing east (photo 23). A curtain currently covers each display window. There are three leaded glass, prism transoms over the store windows and doorway. A doorway in the rear corner of the store leads to Dearborn Street. Above the door is a three-paned window. The arched doorway, which leads into a small storage space connected to the theater office, is not original to construction. This store is the only one of the four that does not contain a corner, makeshift restroom. The typical commercial space of the remaining storefronts includes a single large room with plaster walls and wood baseboards. The western storefront includes two small windows on the west elevation.

The theater office, a fairly small room with a high ceiling, is located off the east section of the theater foyer. Aside from a small, three-paned window facing Dearborn Street, light is supplied from an overhead fixture in the center of the room's ceiling. A radiator is attached to the east wall.

Projection Booth

The stairs near the theater office lead up to the open-air patio on the second floor. The patio contains an outside entrance for each of the four apartments and the only door to access the projection booth and light booth. The projection booth is an oddly shaped, small room that is connected to the roofline of the auditorium (photo 24). When entering through the exterior door, there are two entrances, to the west is the projection booth and to the east is the light booth. The projection booth has a total of five windows that look toward the stage in the auditorium. The first and largest window near the door to the booth is a panoramic window to view the entire auditorium. To the west of the panoramic window are two sets of projection port windows and side port windows slightly above. A projection port window is used to project a film onto the screen. A side port window is used for the projectionist to view the film while changing the reels. The projection booth has two, small, three-paned windows on the west wall. The

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**Rivoli Theatre
Marion County, IN**

windows are painted to block natural light from entering the booth. The projection booth also has a small workbench on the north wall for film repair and maintenance (photo 25). The light booth is smaller in size than the projection booth and contains two panoramic windows. The light booth is primarily used for operating spotlights during a performance.

Apartments

Each apartment has an exterior kitchen door that leads to the patio (photo 26). Each apartment also has windows overlooking the patio. The majority of the windows facing the patio are the paired, six-over-one, double-hung sash windows seen on the façade of the theater. The patio has a slight Spanish style influence with the clay tile parapet that borders the apartments' roofline (photo 27). Also, the original sheet metal gutters and drainpipes are seen along the roofline of the apartments from the patio.

On the theater's north façade, east and west of the main entrance, two apartments share a common door. From the exterior door, a staircase provides access to two of the apartments' front doors. Each apartment is similar in design, but with minor differences. The two apartments that share the staircase east of the theater's main entrance mirror each other in floor plan. The apartment door to the west of the staircase leads into a hallway, from which two bedrooms and a bathroom are located. The bedrooms are small in size, but have a patio view and a closet (photo 28). Oak floors can be found throughout the apartment, and terrazzo floors are in the bathroom. Every room in the apartment has decorative baseboards and wood moldings around the doors. The living room has three windows facing the north, which overlook 10th Street. The living room also has a closet along the south wall, and a radiator under the front windows (photo 29). French doors connect the living room and dining room. Through the dining room (photo 30) is the small, but utilitarian kitchen (photo 31).

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**Rivoli Theatre
Marion County, IN**

Statement of Significance

The Rivoli Theatre building is eligible for the National Register under Criteria A and C. It is located at 3155 E. 10th Street in an east side neighborhood of Indianapolis, Indiana. The Rivoli's architectural design reflects the Mission Revival-style, popular during the 1920s, and is a significant example of a neighborhood theater of the era. The Rivoli Theatre is one of the best neighborhood theaters left in Indianapolis. The theater was designed by Henry Ziegler Dietz and engineered by D.R. Lederman. The Rivoli was commissioned by Carl Laemmle, president and owner of Universal Film Manufacturing Company and Universal Chain Theatrical Enterprises. The Rivoli's presence played an important role in the social and entertainment history of Indianapolis. The period of significance for the Rivoli is 1927 to 1936, which covers the time during Universal's ownership of the theater.

Historical Background and Significance

During the 1920s, the east side of Indianapolis experienced rapid growth in industry and developed thriving middle- and working-class neighborhoods. Indianapolis' east side flourished with the use of the trolley service and the affordable automobile. The Rivoli was the last stop on the trolley outbound, and the first stop into town during development of the city's eastside. The theater would soon serve as a landmark and an enticing attraction for Indianapolis. Carl Laemmle observed Indianapolis' rapid growth and saw the opportunity and need for a motion picture theater on the city's east side.

Carl Laemmle, Sr. (1867-1939), a German immigrant, began a nickelodeon business in Chicago in 1906.¹ His company, the Laemmle Film Service, specialized in serials in storefront nickelodeons. By 1909, Laemmle decided to produce his own movies and established the Independent Moving Picture Company. As Laemmle's ambition and stature in the film industry grew, he relocated his business to New York City, merging with several other companies to form the Universal Film Manufacturing Company. The company began production in 1912 and was a producer and distributor for independent movie theaters not affiliated with another studio.² Also in 1912, land was acquired in Los Angeles for a new studio location. During this period, Universal developed an expertise for movies in the horror genre, producing films such as *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923) and *Phantom of the Opera* (1925).³ By 1925, Laemmle formed an additional company, the Universal Chain Theatrical Enterprises. The company began building theaters rapidly, tripling the number of theaters it owned by 1926.⁴

¹ Carla Caccamise Ash, Photographs from the Archives of Universal Studios: Carl Laemmle and the Early Years of Universal. Available from <http://archives.studio.universalstudios.com/photos/phototext.html>, November 1997.

² Jeff Pirtle, Universal Studios: Archivists of Manuscripts and Special Collections. E-mail to author, 26 March 2003.

³ Carla Caccamise Ash.

⁴ Jeff Pirtle.

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One of the most experienced theatrical engineers in the country, D.R. Lederman, was a construction engineer connected with Universal, and his involvement further expedited the swift construction of the theaters for the studio. He was connected with Universal for over 15 years and was required to visit every theater owned by the studio on its opening day, including the Rivoli.

Laemmle called upon Henry Ziegler Dietz (1878-1951) to design the Rivoli. Dietz, a native of Pennsylvania, was educated at Washington University in St. Louis.⁵ Dietz specialized in hotel design; he designed the Fowler Hotel at Lafayette, Indiana in 1915 and the McCurdy Hotel at Evansville, Indiana in 1917, both of which reflect a simple Neoclassical Revival style. Dietz also did extensive work along Meridian Street in Indianapolis. Between 1924 and 1930, he designed and built eight apartment buildings in the area just below 38th Street. Despite his concentration and dedication to hotels and apartments, he brought a much needed flair and insight to a theater design that would serve the community well. On the evening of September 15, 1927, the east side of Indianapolis witnessed a new era of entertainment with the grand opening of the Rivoli Theatre. The Inaugural Program proclaimed that the Rivoli would be "a new home of happiness for the entire family."⁶ A number of Henry Ziegler Dietz's works in Indiana have been recognized by the National Register of Historic Places. The Fowler Hotel is listed in a National Register Historic District, the McCurdy Hotel is listed in a National Register Multiple Resource Area, and some of Dietz's apartments are located within the Shortridge-Meridian Street Apartments Historic District of Indianapolis.⁷

The Rivoli represented a total investment by Universal Studios in excess of a quarter million dollars⁸, and it stood as Universal's first theater in Indiana.⁹ Consequently, the Rivoli provided local jobs, tax revenue, and entertainment for the entire community. The theater also helped maintain a vibrant and informed public. In the 1920s, the Rivoli's newsreels presented national news to the neighborhood, and provided an optimistic picture of the United States during the time of depression and war. Romances blossomed in the back of the movie theater, or over a Ballard ice cream sundae in the Rivoli's Tostee Shop. The management displayed a notice to the Rivoli's patrons in an advertisement that read, "We want the Rivoli to be an intimate association of your daily life. It was built for you - It belongs to you!"¹⁰ The theater gave the neighborhood

⁵ Indiana Biography Series, vol. 36, 49. This source states that Dietz came to Indianapolis in 1913 to open his practice.

⁶ "The Rivoli Theatre: Inaugural Program," 1.

⁷ Paul Diebold, ed., Historic Indiana 2003-2004 (State of Indiana – Department of Natural Resources, Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology, October 2002), 49.

⁸ "The Rivoli Theatre: Inaugural Program," 3.

⁹ Jeff Pirtle.

¹⁰ "The Rivoli Theatre: Inaugural Program," 2.

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pride, and it became a place that initiated social interaction as well as cultural exposure. An article from a 1927 issue of the *Indianapolis Star* raves, "The East Side of Indianapolis has long felt the need of a well-managed, modern motion picture theater where the people might enjoy excellent programs at moderate costs, and the Rivoli bids fair to prove a mecca for those who appreciate those things that are really fine."¹¹

The Rivoli's architectural design reflects the Mission Revival-style, often used in designs of movie palaces of the 1920s. As a style that dominated West Coast construction, it may be speculated that the Mission Revival-style features of the Rivoli brought a Hollywood influence to the Indianapolis theater. Like many other architectural designs, the Mission Revival-style was promoted through expositions. In 1893 the California Building at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago employed the Mission Revival-style as did the 1894 Manufacturers and Liberal Arts Building at the California Midwinter Fair in San Francisco.¹²

Mission Revival-style architecture in Indianapolis is rare for large commercial buildings, such as the Rivoli. The most common examples of the Mission Revival-style architecture are houses built in the 1920s. However, a large building in the Mission style was the Cadle Tabernacle in Indianapolis. Cadle Tabernacle was built in 1921 for religious services and had a seating capacity of 11,500. In 1968 the tabernacle was razed for a parking lot. The original St. Joan of Arc Church at 42nd and Ruckle, also an early example of Mission Revival design from 1921, was demolished c.2000.

The Rivoli's size, which boasted a seating capacity of 1,500 patrons and five wide aisles, was quite unusual for a neighborhood theater.¹³ At the time of its construction, the theater held one of the largest stages in Indianapolis, and its acoustics were exceptional. In addition to the auditorium, the building hosted four storefronts and four separate apartment units.

By 1928 Universal owned more than 300 theaters throughout the world.¹⁴ In addition to the Rivoli Theatre, Universal built and operated the Granada Theater at 1043-47 Virginia Avenue in Indianapolis. The Granada opened a year after the Rivoli in 1928. Universal's second theater no longer functions as a motion picture venue. When the Granada closed in 1951, the building was remodeled for the expansion of the G.C. Murphy Company.

¹¹ "Opening to Be Magnificent Affair; Many Prominent Citizens to Be Guests of Honor," *The Indianapolis Star*, 15 September 1927, 9.

¹² Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1870* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1969), 214.

¹³ "Opening to Be Magnificent Affair," 9.

¹⁴ "The Rivoli Theatre: Inaugural Program," 2.

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When Laemmle sold Universal in 1936, the company also sold the Rivoli. This was a result of Laemmle being unable to make payment on a loan and due to the cost required to update sound quality in many of its venues.¹⁵ Universal sold the Rivoli in 1937 to a man by the name of Joseph Cantor. Joseph Cantor operated the theater for live performance and motion picture entertainment. After selling the Rivoli, Universal struggled to maintain ownership of its other theaters. In 1948 the United States Supreme Court ruled that Universal Pictures Company, along with a group of studios that included Paramount Pictures, United Artists Corporation, and Loew's Incorporated, violated the Sherman Anti-Trust Act by monopolizing the distribution and exhibition of motion picture films. As a consequence of the decision, the studios were ordered to divest of their theaters.¹⁶

History After Period of Significance

Joseph Cantor owned the Rivoli until 1952. Based on a limited record of ownership, the Rivoli went through an estimated seven different owners after 1952, including the current owner (in 2004) of the theater. Nevertheless, during the theater's unstable past it provided motion picture entertainment, and it hosted live performances that included Bette Davis, John Mellencamp, Kansas, Kris Kristofferson, Bruce Springsteen, Gloria Swanson, and many more. The famous organist, Dessa Byrd, chose the Rivoli exclusively to record two of her popular albums because of the building's exceptional acoustic resonance.

Mr. and Mrs. Forest Kraning, the fourth owners, bought the theater in 1964 and presented second-run movies and rock concerts on its stage. They added a new ticket office, repainted the interior, redecorated the lobby, and restored the marquee.¹⁷ In a newspaper article from 1964, the Kranings stated, "They're [the community] glad the Rivoli is going to operate again and they have assured us they are going to support us".¹⁸ Nonetheless, the Kranings sold the theater to Thomas Ferree in 1970. Ferree attempted to continue the Kranings' initial efforts for revitalization. He had a passion for the 1,247-pipe organ that he installed in 1966 under the Kranings' management, and its music inspired him to purchase the theater.¹⁹ In 1972, Ferree remodeled the stage to better accommodate live rock concerts. Charles Richard Chulchian purchased the Rivoli in 1976. Charlie Chulchian soon reopened the theater, beginning his ongoing restoration effort.

¹⁵ Carla Caccamise Ash.

¹⁶ United States v. Paramount Pictures. Cite as 68 S. Ct. 915, 3 May 1948.

¹⁷ Charles Vaughn, "Small Movie Houses Stage A Comeback," The Indianapolis News, 21 July 1964, 22.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "Vintage Films Big Hit," The Indianapolis Star, 21 July 1974.

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The Rivoli operated as a venue for adult entertainment, ultimately closing in 1992. Although it remains in its closed state today, the Rivoli is one of a few theaters in Indianapolis that still stands with many of its original features. It is also one of the few surviving neighborhood movie houses that was built for both live entertainment and moving pictures in Indianapolis.

The Fountain Square Theatre, a neighbor to the Granada Theater (Rivoli's sister theater, located in the National Register listed Virginia Avenue Historic District), was built in 1928. The Fountain Square Theatre was a neighborhood theater like the Rivoli, but larger with 1,800 seats and a ballroom. In April 1960, the Fountain Square Theater closed and was gutted to provide retail space for the F.W. Woolworth Company.

The Irving Theater, Emerson Theater, and Arlington Theater are all east side, neighborhood theaters in close proximity to the Rivoli. The Irving Theater was a small theater built in 1915 (Irvington Historic District). The Irving is now undergoing plans to reopen as a live music venue. The Emerson Theater was built in 1928 as the Eastland and had a seating capacity of 542. The seats in the Emerson Theater were gutted to provide room for live music entertainment. The Arlington Theater was built in 1949 with a seating capacity of 1,100. The Arlington Theater was also completely gutted and is currently used as a hardware store.

Theaters in downtown Indianapolis tended to be larger in seating capacity than the neighborhood theaters. The Walker Theatre, named after Madame C. J. Walker, was built in 1927. The Walker Theatre Building contained a movie house with small vaudeville accommodations, ballroom, stores, and offices. Another theater built in 1927 is the Indiana Theatre, now known as the Indiana Repertory Theatre and Indiana Roof Ballroom (National Register, 1979). The Indiana Theatre was used to show movies and stage shows, but now it is reduced to live performances only. It has been reconfigured to accommodate two stages for performances, however, its ballroom, lobbies, and other features remain. The Circle Theater, on Monument Circle in downtown Indianapolis, was built in 1916 (National Register, 1980). Originally, the theater was used as a movie and live performance venue. Today the theater is home to the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra and has a reduced seating area and extensively rehabilitated extra lobby space.

Another theater built in 1927 was the Ritz Theater, on the near north side of Indianapolis. For years the 1400 seat theater was one of the leading movie houses in the city. In the 1960s, the theater's seats were removed for adult entertainment and live music performances.

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Presently, Mr. Chulchian continues to maintain the Rivoli in hopes that it will once again reopen as a vital and historically significant neighborhood theater. Mr. Chulchian has owned the theater, and lived in one of its apartments for 27 years. Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana, the Near East Side Community Organization (NESCO), Mr. Chulchian, and other concerned groups are currently working together to ensure the architectural preservation and rehabilitation of this grand theater.

The Rivoli remains an important and unique landmark in the eastside community, and has the potential to positively impact the quality of commercial activity on East 10th Street. During the 1920's, dozens of movie theaters opened in Indianapolis and the Rivoli is one of a few still remaining. Despite many ups and downs since its opening in 1927, the Rivoli still maintains a level of integrity necessary to depict the essence of the original design and purpose.

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**Rivoli Theatre
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Verbal Boundary Description

The theater sits directly in the center of two parcels of land. The first parcel of land is 1054033 – 3151 E. 10 – A.C. Stumps Vawters Add. L.5. The second parcel of land is 1054034 – 3159 E. 10 – A.C. Stumps Vawters Add. 19'68" W. Side L.H.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries for the nominated property were chosen based on the property associated with the Rivoli Theatre since 1927.

T. 16 N.
T. 15 N.
830 000
FEET

