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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
MULTIPLE PROPERTY DOCUMENTATION FORM**

This form is used for documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form (National Register Bulletin 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information. For additional space, use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

New Submission Amended Submission

A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Movie Theaters in New Mexico, 1905 to 1960

B. Associated Historic Contexts

(Name each associated historic context, identifying theme, geographical area, and chronological period for each.)

The Historical Development of Motion Picture Theaters in New Mexico, 1905-1960

C. Form Prepared by

Name/title: David Kammer Ph.D.

Organization: consulting historian

Date: April 2006

Street & number: 521 Aliso Dr. NE

Telephone: (505) 266-0586

City or town: Albuquerque

State: New Mexico

Zip code: 87108

D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature and title of certifying official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

I hereby certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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Provide the following information on continuation sheets. Cite the letter and the title before each section of the narrative. Assign page numbers according to the instructions for continuation sheets in *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form (National Register Bulletin 16B)*. Fill in page numbers for each section in the space below.

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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.).

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E. The Historical Development of Motion Picture Theaters in New Mexico, 1905-1955

During the early 20th century, the motion picture theater emerged as an essential architectural and social fixture found in cities and along main streets in towns across the nation. Although the Territory of New Mexico often lagged behind other regions of the country in its introduction to popular building styles and new social activities, the coming of the railroad in 1879 served to accelerate the territory's exposure to changing popular tastes. Such was the case with motion pictures and the buildings in which they were exhibited. By 1898, just two years after the opening of the nation's first motion picture theater, the Edison Company, a pioneer in early film production, had shot a fifty-second film, *Indian School Day*, in New Mexico. That same year, Grant's Opera House in Albuquerque screened films documenting the exploits of the Rough Riders in Cuba.

By the early 1900s, theaters constructed to exhibit motion pictures, sometimes accompanied by live stage performances, had begun to appear in the Territory, especially in its larger cities. Following statehood in 1912, the construction of motion picture theaters extended to many of the state's smaller towns. Only a few of these theaters constructed during the 1920s in the state's larger cities embodied elaborate design details and amenities suggesting the grandeur of picture palaces associated with theaters in the nation's major cities.

From 1905 and continuing through 1960, however, smaller theaters embracing modest design details appeared along main streets in communities throughout the state. First illuminated with lines of bulbs and, during the 1930s, neon, their facades, signs and marquees, and picture display boxes offered a striking visual contrast to the staid commercial fronts typically lining main streets. With often equally striking interiors, these theaters provided a setting for the public's viewing experiences that temporarily transported patrons beyond the horizons of their daily lives to the exotic worlds created by the film industry.

Unchallenged in their ability to entertain the American public until the advent of television in the 1950s, these motion picture theaters functioned as gathering places throughout New Mexico, serving to define community through their architecture and the shared entertainment experience they offered. By the 1960s, the conditions that had encouraged the widespread construction of motion picture theaters along main streets had changed, prompting closures and, in some instances, demolition or substantial alterations to many theaters. Those that remain represent an architectural form and social institution that contributed to the vitality of main street life in New Mexican communities through the middle of the 20th century.

Historic Precedents

Prior to the emergence of the motion picture theater, a variety of sources offered entertainment to those living in the small towns and villages of New Mexico during the Colonial, Mexican and Territorial periods. With religion central to the lives of most early New Mexicans, these early forms of entertainment reflected that worldview. The Pueblos marked the solar, lunar and seasonal cycles of their world with dances that often occurred in village

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plazas. The ritual dances of Kachinas, the benevolent anthropomorphic beings who blessed crops and held the power to heal, were central to the lives of villagers, and the comings and goings of these dancers galvanized and entertained the community. Reflecting the mixing of Roman Catholicism with Pueblo belief, Matachines dancers, accompanied by musicians, appeared in the plazas of both Pueblo and Hispanic villages during the Christmas season.

Other rituals, dances and processions associated with the Nativity were also central to life in Hispanic villages along the Rio Grande Valley. During the weeks preceding Christmas, the folk drama of *Las Posadas*, depicting Joseph and Mary's unsuccessful quest for lodging in Bethlehem, was frequently performed, sometimes in conjunction with *Los Pastores*, depicting the experience of the shepherds on that same Christmas Eve. Similarly, during Holy Week Penitente processions involved entire villages as either participants or observers. Combining both religious and secular entertainment were the fiestas celebrating the patron saint of each village. Not limited to a narrow religious purpose, these fiestas combined religious ceremony with carnival-like events such as games of chance and dancing, often held in the largest halls available in the village.

Forms of entertainment more directly connected with the exhibition of motion pictures in that admission fees, or in-kind payments, were levied included performances offered by itinerant troupes of entertainers and puppeteers. The former, consisting of singers, actors, acrobats and trapeze artists suggestive of a small circus, dated to colonial times. Referred to as *maromeros*, or acrobats, these troupes traveled from village to village in New Mexico, advertising through broadsides and bartering performances for food (Weigle 404). With no enclosed space sufficient to hold the entertainers and their audience, these troupes often carried tents, or *carpas*, which they raised to use as their entertainment venue. The latter, known as *Los Titeres*, or puppet shows, also traveled from village to village. Typically, the *tirititero*, or manager, would rent the largest space available in the village, erecting a small stage for his marionettes at one end of the room and charging the villagers, who brought their own seats, an admission for the evening's entertainment. Extending into the early 20th century, these itinerant shows offered a precedent for the role of commercial entertainment bringing members of the community together in the expectation of experiences that went beyond their daily lives.

The coming of the railroad to the territory in 1879 strengthened New Mexico's ties with the prevailing material and popular culture in the rest of the United States. While the folk entertainment associated with New Mexico's Native American and Hispanic cultures would persist, the railroad accelerated the rate with which New Mexicans became exposed to mainstream cultural tastes, including popular entertainment. As some of the small depots that appeared along the miles of rails crossing the territory grew into small towns, their boosters sought to emulate the urbane culture they associated with town life elsewhere. Central among such symbols of civic cultural were the auditoriums and halls found in eastern and midwestern communities where traveling exhibitors presented one-night shows. Often multi-purpose and serving as public meeting halls, these auditoriums enabled audiences to experience at least a small taste of the entertainment routinely available to urban dwellers. Most often this entertainment consisted of vaudeville acts staged by troupes that toured the

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country. Offering a mixture of singers, magicians, animal acts and other circus-inspired performers, condensed plays, inspirational recitations, and magic lantern presentations, vaudeville provided a diversion from the routines of daily life in territorial New Mexican towns. Although few of these acts approached highbrow culture, small-town boosters often sought to add prestige to their communities—and to legitimize the entertainment to perspective patrons—by designating these early halls or auditoriums as “opera houses.”

During the first three decades of New Mexico’s railroad era, opera houses appeared in most of the large towns as well as in smaller mining communities where brief booms inspired lavish spending on amenities designed to offer evidence of the town’s prosperity. By the early 20th century, all of the territory’s leading towns including Las Vegas, Albuquerque, Santa Fe, Socorro, Las Cruces, Silver City and Roswell had at least one large public space in which vaudeville entertainment regularly occurred. Among these facilities were Grant’s Opera House (1884) in Albuquerque, Kitchen’s Opera House (1895) in Gallup, and the Elks Club Opera House (ca. 1900) in Silver City.

In some instances, such as in Albuquerque and Gallup, the demand for downtown commercial space resulted in locating the opera house in the second story of a commercial building with the ground floor housing stores, cafes, and saloons. Often the largest space available for public gatherings in these communities, New Mexico’s early opera houses were significant in fostering a sense of community through the variety of events that occurred in them. Not only did they provide a site for vaudeville entertainment; they also served as arenas for boxing matches, political speeches, school graduations and union meetings. In doing so, the opera house cultivated within townspeople the habit of going to a public place and paying for entertainment, a conditioning upon which the nascent film industry would depend as it perfected filmmaking to become mass entertainment.

As was the case throughout the nation, the opera houses in New Mexico were among the earliest sites used for the exhibition of pioneer motion pictures. Commercial exhibition began with the advent of peep shows in New York in 1894 in which only one person could view a brief fifty-foot reel of film rarely lasting more than a minute. By 1896, Thomas Edison and his agents had arranged for the manufacture of the Vitascope, a European-invented projector that permitted a greatly expanded audience to view images projected on a screen. Vaudeville exhibitors were quick to see the appeal these flickering images held for their audiences and began including them, often as the last act, in their vaudeville shows. Analyzing the enthusiasm with which vaudeville embraced the motion picture, in 1944 sociologist Mae D. Huettig observed that in doing so exhibitors were “unwittingly digging the grave of vaudeville” (Huettig 11). Citing the Loew’s theater chain, initially a vaudeville company, as an example, she noted that beginning in 1896 the company billed its presentations as “Vaudeville and Pictures.” Only in 1906 coinciding with the advent of the nickelodeon, an exhibition space generally limited to the showing of motion pictures, did it reverse the phrase to “Pictures and Vaudeville.”

Edison’s Vitascope, as well as other newly patented projectors, including models sold through the Sears and Roebuck catalogue, enabled opera houses managers and other entrepreneurs to convert other spaces into

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makeshift theaters. Exhibitors in New Mexico, recognizing that films held a potential beyond a passing curiosity, quickly acquired projectors and began exhibiting moving pictures. Some of the most successful pioneer motion picture exhibits in the Territory included films about the Spanish-American War, especially those depicting Teddy Roosevelt's Rough Riders, many of whom hailed from New Mexico. Beginning in the summer of 1898 and extending through late 1900, many vaudeville acts, as well as motion pictures focused on the war, stirring the patriotic fervency of the time and celebrating the exploits of the Rough Riders (Gomery 16).

This pattern of exhibiting motion pictures in opera houses and other public halls began to change around 1905 when businessmen began to realize the potential that the motion picture held for becoming the core of America's mass entertainment. They were buoyed, in part, by remarkable progress in cinematography, particularly the first editing of film resulting in *The Life of an American Fireman*, and the first arrangement of scenes to develop a plot in *The Great Train Robbery*, both produced in 1903. With lengthier pictures treating a greater variety of subjects, entrepreneurs began to envision creating venues primarily devoted to showing motion pictures.

In New Mexico, exhibitors continued to show pictures in various settings ranging from opera houses to tent shows at carnivals, and by 1905 the Fountain Theater in Mesilla had opened, exhibiting both lantern slides and motion pictures (Baca 92). Over the next decade numerous commercial spaces in many towns were converted to theaters, or picture arcades, with their function generally limited to the showing of motion pictures. Their low entry fee, often a nickel, combined with the Greek work for theater, odeon, prompted the neologism, nickelodeon, denoting a new building type that began to appear along main streets in the years before statehood.

The cost of converting a commercial space along main street into a theater was relatively inexpensive. A screen at the end of a single room, chairs and benches along the flat floor for patrons, and a projection booth, soon sealed with lead to protect patrons from potentially explosive film, at the rear, generally was all that an interior required to undergo transformation into a theater. Fancier theaters, aspiring for middle class audiences, sometimes offered piano or small orchestra accompaniment during the film. Exhibitors often devoted more attention to the nickelodeon's exterior, seeking to publicize the theater with poster displays, electric signs, and a ticket booth, often lined with lights, located outside the front of the theater. By taking these few steps, exhibitors in small towns throughout N

Reflective of this trend in the smaller towns of the territory, were the first theaters to open in Clovis in 1907, the same year that the town was founded as a railroad siding and ranch and farming center. As a downtown commercial district began to develop, two theaters, the Clovis Grand and Unigus Theaters soon offered over a thousand feet of movie film as well as slide shows with musical accompaniment nightly. Initially, children paid a nickel and adults a dime to attend an evening's entertainment. Within four years two additional theaters, including the first Lyceum Theater, had opened. Suggestive of the etymology of the term,

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nickelodeon, the first manager of the Lyceum would stand in front of the theater, tossing nickels to surrounding children with those who caught a coin admitted for free (Hughes np).

The low expenses associated with exhibiting motion pictures combined with New Mexico's warm southwestern climate saw the territory's nickelodeons competing with an even less expensive theater type, the airdome. In an era predating rudimentary air-cooling of the 1920s and air-conditioning of the 1930s, outdoor theaters emerged as an alternative to hot, stuffy theaters in buildings baked by the sweltering New Mexico sun. Generally airdomes were located on vacant lots in the commercial district and enclosed with wood, sheet-iron, or canvas and with a single well-lit entry. Offering less security and more susceptible to knotholders, who peaked through holes in the walls without paying admission, than enclosed theaters, airdomes appeared in communities in the southern and eastern sections of the territory where warm, generally dry weather permitted them to function during late spring, summer and early fall. An airdome competed with the Grand Theater in Clovis. The Air Dome Theater in Tucumcari (1908), located on the site of the current Odeon Theater, the Airdome in Alamogordo, later site of the current Sands Theater (ca. 1930), and the Airdome of 1909 in Silver City marked the first motion picture theaters in those communities.

Given the low costs involved in opening airdomes and nickelodeons and their location in the heart of growing downtown areas where businessmen soon found more valuable uses for properties, these pioneer motion picture venues were short-lived. Other than the Fountain Theater, no examples without substantial alterations of these pioneer theaters remain in New Mexico. Their significance, however, in helping to create a new public forum for experiencing, arguably, the first form of mass entertainment is substantial. As the cultural critic, Gilbert Seldes, would observe in the early 1930s, the success of the early motion picture industry grew from its ability to compel people to leave their homes in anticipation of entertainment, "to go to any movie rather than not go at all" (Seldes 9). The process of prompting them to do so and "to enter a place designed for entertainment, to experience the sort of contagious pleasure, which several hundred other people feel at the same time" made its first great advances during the era of the nickelodeon and airdome.

The Emergence of Modern Motion Picture Theaters

In sharp contrast to the low costs associated with opening and operating a nickelodeon, the growing popularity of motion pictures during the 1910s, particularly among the middle-class, prompted exhibitors to improve the quality and increase the size of new theaters. In large cities, where the phenomenon of the picture palace would culminate with theaters seating several thousand, the thinking of many promoters was reflected in the comments of leading motion picture impresario S.L. "Roxy" Rothapfel. Convinced that the public had little idea of its preferences in theaters, that "they want to be entertained, that's all," he concluded, "Don't give the people what they want—give 'em something better" (Hall 37). During the national spending spree of the 1920s, Rothapfel's dictum resulted in an escalation of increasingly elaborate theaters that ceased only with the Great Depression.

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To realize such expensive theater projects, ownership in large cities necessarily shifted to chain-owned theaters financed by well-capitalized investors including the major Hollywood studios.

In New Mexico, where in 1920 Albuquerque was the state's single city with a population greater than ten thousand, the construction of theaters and their management assumed a more modest scale reflective of the size of the towns scattered across the lightly populated state. Only the Kimo (1927) in Albuquerque, El Morro (1928) in Gallup, and the Lensic (1931) in Santa Fe offer hints of the grand scale and ornate detailing associated with the great picture palaces of the era. While each of these theaters is listed in the National Register and this Multiple Property Documentation Form focuses on theaters constructed in the state's smaller towns, occasional references to them enriches this contextual discussion.

So removed was New Mexico from the theater chains that generally owned theaters in major cities that, by 1940, only thirteen of New Mexico's 71 theaters were owned by those studios, placing it forty-fourth among all states in that category (Huettig 134-45). On a scale commensurate with other commercial development found along the main streets of the state's communities, however, motion picture theater construction began to expand beginning with statehood in 1912. This trend continued until the onset of the Great Depression in 1929, when a faltering national economy and changing popular styles induced a shift to more modest design in theater construction during the 1930s and continuing into the 1950s.

Particularly striking is the pattern of theater construction and ownership that emerged in New Mexico during the 1910s and 20s. Rather than widespread investment by out-of-state theater chains, leading local businessmen undertook the construction of modern theaters on prime downtown properties. In the larger towns, some of these owners sought architects, such as the Boller Brothers of California, nationally known for their theater design. In these, and a few other theaters, designers imbued both the exteriors and interiors of their projects in New Mexico with details reflective of regional sensibilities. In other instances, theater exteriors bore little connection to the region, generally offering what architectural historian Richard Longstreth terms two-part commercial blocks, buildings characterized by horizontal division into two separate zones that would have fit on main streets elsewhere in the nation.

This pattern of local businessmen investing in theater construction was also apparent in many of New Mexico's smaller towns as well. Some of these investors were already familiar with the growing popularity of motion pictures, having previously owned opera houses. Frank Allen, who constructed the first theater in Farmington in 1922, had owned Allen's Opera House, where his daughter provided piano accompaniment for the silent movies. Arch Hurley had operated the Evans Opera House in Tucumcari until 1915 when he opened the New Theater only to replace it with the Princess Theater in 1917 following extensive flood damage to the town's first modern theater. In Gallup, W.E. Morris, who owned many commercial properties along Railroad and Coal Avenues, had resisted opening a nickelodeon because he believed motion picture entertainment

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unsuitable for women and children. Following the success of Gallup's first modern theater, the Strand (ca. 1920), he hired Carl Boller to design the ornate El Morro in 1929.

Still others entering the theater business came to the new industry from other activities along main street. Morris Herzstein, the leading merchant in Clayton as well as a cattle and sheep rancher, lost his mercantile store to a devastating fire in 1915. Rather than simply rebuilding the store he chose to construct the Mission Theater (1916) on the site, including a wide storefront to the east of the theater as part of a half-block reconstruction project. Eugene Hardwick, having sold his ranch in the Pecos Valley, moved his family to Clovis and began acquiring properties including the first Lyceum Theater (1912) in 1915, soon erecting an eye-catching twenty-five-ft.-high arch across Main Street in front of the theater. Following the construction of the rival Mesa Theater (1918), in which he soon became a partner, he concluded that Clovis' growing population could support yet another theater. Thus in 1919, Hardwick constructed the present Lyceum Theater, including in its plans a large stage and fly tower, an elevated section above the stage that permitted the hanging of curtains and backdrops used in live stage performances, as well as a pioneer air-cooling system.

Nowhere was the tendency of leading local businessmen investing in the construction of modern theaters more apparent than in Albuquerque. Several Italian families, many of whom had migrated to New Mexico because of the opportunities the new state offered, took profits from investments in mercantile stores, groceries, and real estate and reinvested them in the constructed several large theaters. Beginning with the success that Giacomo Puccini had with the acquisition of the aging Pastime Theater in the late 1910s, Joe Barnett constructed the Sunshine Theater in 1923; Oreste Bachechi constructed the Kimo Theater in 1927. Two decades later, during a second wave of theater construction, Puccini would construct the El Rey Theater in 1941 and Frank Peloso the Hiland Theater in 1951.

Reflective of the success that these businessmen had encountered in Albuquerque and their great faith in the city's future, the scale and capacity of both the Sunshine and Kimo Theaters far outstripped any other theaters in the state. Both contained stages for the live entertainment that continued in Albuquerque through the 1920s. With a capacity of over 900 and an ornate gold-gilded proscenium, the Sunshine was located in the six-story Sunshine Building. The city's second skyscraper, constructed a year after the nine-story First National Bank, the building employed a symmetrical Beaux Arts style not unlike the detailing that its architect Henry Trost had given to the new bank, a block west on Central Avenue. Incorporated into a two-part vertical block, the theater's marquee and entry provided a visual base to the building with the five story vertical shaft rising above to the decorative cornice capping the building.

Two blocks to the west was the Kimo with a seating capacity of over 700. In contrast to the Sunshine's design, the Kimo, which in Tiwa Pueblo means "the king of its kind," conveyed Bachechi's desire to pay homage to the Southwest's architectural traditions. In doing so, Carl Boller incorporated Pueblo designs and details into the terracotta friezes of the façade. He then embellished the interior with a myriad of plaster-of-Paris

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Indian designs, wall friezes, murals, and a ceiling studded with stars suggestive of the elaborate atmospherics typical of the picture palaces found in large cities. Fronted by marquees lined by thousands of bulbs prior to the installation of neon in the 1930s, the city's two leading theaters functioned as beacons illuminating Central Avenue. Their presence helped to assure that the city's main street, which Clyde Tingley, the city's mayor, termed Albuquerque's "Great White Way," remained active even after stores had closed.

On a less grand scale, the theaters appearing in the state's smaller towns performed similar roles. Similar to the contrasting styles manifested in the Sunshine and Kimo Theaters, the design of some theaters mimicked those found elsewhere in the country while the design of others embraced the growing sense of regionalism characterizing public architecture in New Mexico.

In Clayton, Morris Herzstein's Mission Theater with its adjoining commercial space presented a symmetrical one-block façade articulated with a molded belt course and a slightly stepped parapet. At the center of the building was the theater's deeply recessed entry framed with an ornate terracotta frieze leading to a ticket booth located between two double doors. In the basement below the theater, Herzstein included a ballroom with a wood floor that for decades would also provide the townspeople with a roller skating rink.

In Las Vegas, the Coronado Theater (ca. 1922, demolished), built a decade after the Mutual (now Kiva Theater) offered a façade consisting of elevated paired fluted columnar pilasters supporting an ornate entablature topped by a dentil course and a molded cornice. Two figures, each blowing a horn, were mounted between the columns, and a large, two-story semi-circular arch with a terracotta frieze framed the recessed entry with a ticket booth in the center.

The Silco Theater (ca. 1925) in Silver City offered a more mundane facade with a ticket booth located in the center of a rectangular entry in which a narrow marquee and a wall-mounted vertical sign offered the only evidence of the building's function.

Although the façade of the second Lyceum Theater in Clovis offered a few architectural details, such as a stepped parapet and tiled hoods over first and second-story windows associated with Mediterranean design, regionally-inspired theater design was generally limited, especially in the eastern part of the state. In Santa Fe, where in 1912 city leaders decided to embrace the Spanish-Pueblo Revival style to promote its identity as "the city different," El Oñate (ca. 1920, demolished) employed church bell towers similar to the Fine Arts Museum across the street. Similarly, Boller's El Morro in Gallup and the Lensic in Santa Fe, while not regionally inspired, embraced an eclectic group of details related to Moorish design found on the Iberian Peninsula and popularized just years before at the 1926 World's Fair in Seville, Spain.

While the details of their facades varied, most of the early motion picture theaters constructed in New Mexico during the 1910s and 20s shared common characteristics that define their property type. Common

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exterior characteristics included recessed, often slightly raked, or inclined, tiled entries with entry walls often lined with poster boxes advertising coming pictures. Ticket booths were generally attached to the entry wall with an access door located inside the lobby. Attention-drawing lighting and signs, increasingly with marquees, often framed much of the façade, serving to distinguish theaters from the other commercial buildings lining main streets. Since constructing a motion picture theater represented a large investment, most theater properties also included small commercial rental spaces.

Since constructing a motion picture theater represented a large investment, most theater properties also included small commercial rental spaces. Generally these spaces flanked the recessed entry and were an integral part of the overall composition of the façade. To convey their function they were fronted with large fixed commercial windows and entries with large-light commercial doors. Prior to the installation of refreshment stands in lobbies, many of these small rental spaces catered to moviegoers offering candy, drinks, newspapers and tobacco items. Others functioned as coffee shops, barbershops, as well as jewelry and optical stores.

Common interior characteristics included lobbies with varying degrees of ornamental details. Theaters such as the Kimo or Lensic offered ornate lighting fixtures consistent with the architectural character of the building, while others, such as the Lyceum in Clovis, conveyed their grandeur with marble panels and ornate mosaic-tiled floors. Generally accessible from the lobby in all theaters were a range of amenities that included lounges and restrooms and, in some theaters, crying and smoking rooms. Some lobbies also included flanking stairways leading to balconies and the projection booth, and, in some instances, office spaces. In general, refreshment counters only began to appear in lobbies during the 1930s when the Great Depression prompted exhibitors to begin selling refreshments in order to find a new stream of income.

Auditoriums, generally accessible from two doors flanking the interior wall of the lobby, offered raked seating, and a proscenium framing the screen. Lighting varied with some theaters having overhead or wall lights, sometimes with sconces with polychromatic shades to contribute to the interior's exotic atmosphere. Larger theaters generally included balconies accessible either from the lobby or from stairways located at the front of the raked balcony near the rear of the auditorium. As noted, some of these first generation modern theaters also included stages and fly towers with multiple curtains in order to accommodate live performances during the twilight years of vaudeville.

Although air-cooling systems were installed in some theaters as early as the 1910s, it wasn't until the 1930s that Willis Carrier perfected a compact, low-cost air-conditioning system (Gomery 75). Only during the second phase of theater construction, extending from the 1930s through 1960, did New Mexican theater owners begin to include this amenity in an effort to induce more customers to seek a cooled, dark refuge from the hot southwestern summer climate.

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Regardless of their particular details, all of the theaters dating to the 1910s and 1920s brought to the main streets of New Mexico's small cities and towns a new building type. Whether they were an integral part of a larger commercial building, offered small commercial rental spaces in addition to a theater, or functioned simply as a motion picture theater, their well-signed exteriors drew the attention of passersby. Generally located in the heart of a downtown district, they became a central element, defining the character of a particular town's main street. With their eye-catching illumination, they stood in sharp contrast to the predictable, often dowdy commercial buildings that lined the streets of downtown. In fact, it was the sharpness of this contrast with the rest of main street that spoke to townspeople, reminding them that within the darkened theater they could be transported away, if only temporarily, to "the Hollywood of glamour and movie stars and happy endings" (Chase 12).

Commenting on the attraction of the "magic of picture palaces," in 1927, *New York Times* writer George Mitchell noted how the experiences offered there "may lift your up out of your narrow Main Street, be it in New York, Chicago, or Jerkwater, and in a giddy moment you may be whisked away to the crazy streets of Tokio[sic] or the dykes [sic] of Holland" (quoted in Melnick 62). This analogy often appeared in the advertising messages exhibitors used to draw patrons. In assuring the residents of Clovis that they "can always see a good show at the Lyceum," the Hardwick family urged them to "take short vacations often at the Lyceum." The Mission Theater encouraged residents of Clayton to experience "blazing the trail of love and civilization" during its showing of "The Iron Horse."

In addition to bringing a new property type to New Mexico's main streets, motion picture theaters also presented towns with a new social institution capable of bringing town and rural residents, many more now with vehicles, together to share a common experience. Whether offering a motion picture or, at some theaters, a live stage performance, a boxing match or a local benefit, theaters provided a venue that helped to define membership within the community. With the completion of the Rio Grande Theater (1926), the town of Las Cruces had, not only a modern theater, but a facility that discounted tickets for merchant-sponsored community nights, hosted American Legion benefits, and offered a stage for the town's baby popularity contest.

In Clayton, as part of the town's Christmas celebration the Mission Theater provided a free matinee as well as a Santa Claus who distributed a small gift to each child. Widespread throughout New Mexico's theaters, events such as these underscore anthropologist David M. Guss' assessment that "As cultural institutions theaters helped to define people's sense of place and served as anchors or reference points" for community members (quoted in Melnick 34). Or, as Gilbert Seldes put it, the movies offered "*mass entertainment* and both these words are important because the feeling that large crowd is sharing one's experience is cherished by almost all human beings."

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Motion Theater Construction during the Great Depression and the Post-War Period

In undermining the nation's commercial life, the Great Depression took its toll on the movie industry including the construction and operation of motion picture theaters. Many small theaters seating less than 300, which comprised thirty-seven percent of the nation's theaters during the 1920s, already faced the additional challenge of meeting the costs to purchase sound equipment following Warner Brothers release of "The Jazz Singer" in October, 1927 (Fuller 195). In many instances, those marginal theaters failed. Following the stock market crash twenty-four months later, nationwide attendance began to fall from 110 million weekly during the late 1920s to less than 60 million by 1932. Faced with this economic duress, over 6,000 theaters closed, reducing the national total to 13,000, of which approximately 9,000 were wired for sound by 1933 (Melnick 69).

Dependent on farming, ranching, and extractive industries such as timber and mining, New Mexico's economy had been on a slow downward spiral during much of the 1920s as the prices for raw materials and land values and, therefore, the state's tax base declined. As a result, during the second half of the decade, the Great Depression arrived incrementally in the state with business conditions already weakened prior to the market crash of 1929. Despite the downturn, some investment in theater construction continued during the first years of the depression. The completion of the Lensic Theater in Santa Fe in June, 1931, for instance, marked the culmination of several theater projects undertaken in the capital by real estate investor Nathan Salmon and E. John Greer Sr. (Baca 97). By the mid-1930s, investment in theater construction began to revive with other theaters appearing along the main streets of the state's towns.

In Silver City, longtime Mayor E. W. Ward, owner of the Silco Theater added to a group of small local theaters he owned in nearby copper mining towns with the construction of El Sol Theater (1935) and, after the war, the Gila Theater (1948). In Tucumcari the Hurley family added a second theater to complement the Princess Theater (which would succumb to a fire in 1962) with the construction of the Odeon Theater (1936). In Albuquerque, where the growth of the city was primarily eastward out of the Rio Grande Valley and onto the East Mesa, developer Latif Hyder constructed the Lobo Theater (1939) along Central Avenue near the University of New Mexico. Removed from downtown but still located along Albuquerque's main street, the theater marked the first suburban theater in the state.

The design of some of these new theaters reflected the growing interest in regional architecture, stimulated, in part, by the many public works projects undertaken by New Deal programs in New Mexico that incorporated regional design into civic buildings. El Sol Theater in Silver City, the Cactus Theater (1935, demolished) in Carlsbad, and the Ocotillo Theater (1937) in Artesia, all incorporated stepped parapets, earthen-toned stucco cement facings, and, in some instances, portal-like entries and vigas to affect regionally-inspired facades. Other theaters, however, exhibited designs that dispensed with the costs incurred with ornate detailing, reflecting a frugality that characterized movie theater construction nationwide. Commenting on this trend in *Architectural Record* in 1931, Irvin Scott described the new trend in theater construction as signaling "the

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complete elimination of all features and details not contributing to the functions of the theater or to the comfort of the audience” (quoted in Melnick 71).

Often the inclusion of a modicum of Art Deco or Moderne details on the façade sufficed as ornamentation, a sharp contrast to the elaborate terracotta friezes of a decade earlier. A modest use of these details typically included geometric molding along a white stucco cement façade, a molded pylon rising above the façade providing an anchor for a wall sign, and complementary neon signage, as evidenced in the facades of the Lobo and Odeon theaters. In other instances, builders included more ornate detailing, using brick and tile facing along curved walls, glass blocks, and bands of horizontal windows along the second-story façade. Of particular note is the State Theater (1939) in Clovis. Using blond brick for the façade, the designer fashioned a concave inset in the second floor, inserting a circular brick tower four feet in diameter to which a neon wall sign was mounted. Further detailing included lining the cornice and the top of the tower with polychromatic porcelain steel and lining the ground floor façade with ceramic tile bands.

Those investing in theaters were mindful of the risks they were taking during a period of economic uncertainty and sought to maximize opportunities for profits. The practice of including retail space continued with the frequent inclusion of small rental spaces flanking the theater’s recessed entry. The plans of some theaters went a step beyond simply including ground-level rental spaces and added rental spaces by expanding second floor plans, which had traditionally included a small theater office and projection room, to include other income-producing spaces. In Raton businessman T. F. Murphy had architect George Williamson include two second-story apartments when he designed the castle-like El Raton (1930). Not only was the theater’s façade lined with a crenellated parapet and punctuated with towers, but its interior also conveyed a medieval atmosphere with purple back-lighting illuminating a castled proscenium.

In a further effort to compensate for declining admissions, owners began taking the additional step of adding refreshment counters in the lobby. Not only did this measure introduce Americans to popcorn, resulting in a twenty-fold increase in popcorn production between 1934 and 1940, it also resulted in alterations to older theaters, such as the Lyceum Theater in Clovis. There, the Hardwicks added a refreshment stand in the lobby, also remodeling the façade of the theater, altering its details from a Mission to modest Moderne style. As noted, perhaps most important with regard to audience comfort, however, was the growing use of the new compact air-conditioners manufactured by the Carrier Company. Following their introduction to the public at the Century of Progress Exhibition in Chicago in 1933, by the mid-1930s these units were installed in some theaters in New Mexico, while other theaters continued to rely on evaporative, or swamp, cooling systems.

Casting further light on how theater owners in New Mexico adjusted to the challenges of remaining viable during the Great Depression and through the war decade were the efforts on the part of some independent theater owners to band together to gain more leverage in acquiring and exhibiting films. As previously noted, with only thirteen of the 71 theaters in the state affiliated with Hollywood’s five major studios in 1940,

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independent owners operated most of the theaters in the state. As was the case elsewhere, these independent theaters had a smaller seating capacity and were often located in the smaller towns. As a result, they often were forced to wait for popular films and, then, received older, often spliced copies of films. In order to overcome these limitations, several New Mexico theater owners joined other independent owners in Colorado, Nebraska and Utah to form Gibraltar Enterprises, a company that bought and booked films. Consisting of a board of directors that included at least two mayors and theater owners who, in some instances owned small local theater chains, the company enabled its members to reduce booking and rental costs, thereby gaining leverage against the studio-owned theater system. Included in this group in 1934 were the Silco, Lensic, and El Raton theaters. In 1935, T. F. Murphy also purchased the Mission Theater in Clayton, as the cooperative expanded to thirty-five theaters. Installing a new sound system, new heating, and leather seats, Murphy also added a cantilevered marquee bearing the theater's new name, Luna. Although there are no known records for the company, it continued as a booking and film rental company until the mid-1950s.

The success of companies such as Gibraltar Enterprises as well as individual theaters in New Mexico marked the height of the popularity of movie-going in the United States. So significant a role had the motion theater assumed by 1940 that, for the first time, the United States Census included data regarding theaters, their revenue and number of employees in its assessment of Service Establishments (16th Census, Census of Business, Vol. III 514-557). In addition to indicating the 71 theaters operating in New Mexico, the data showed that the theaters' income from admissions for 1939 totaled \$2,201,000 and that owners realized another \$190,000 from sales of refreshments and other merchandise. These theaters also employed 449 people, 369 who worked full time and 80 who worked part time. While this data offers little insight into the specific distribution of employees between the state's few large theaters and its many smaller ones, longtime exhibitors recall that many of the smaller theaters operated with a minimal staff. This staff generally included a projectionist, ticket seller, concession salesperson and usher, some of whom may have members of the owner's family and not included as employees.

The total of receipts from admissions also suggests the popularity movie-going had assumed in New Mexico. Based on a twenty-five cent admission fee typically charged adults at smaller theaters (children were generally charged ten or fifteen cents) during the late 1930s, the total number of admissions was approximately 8.4 million. With a statewide population in 1940 of about 530,000, one might infer that the average New Mexican attended a motion picture about sixteen times per year—or that a third of all New Mexicans attended a motion picture weekly. (Factoring in children who filled popular Saturday matinee showings, the figure would likely be higher.) Underscoring Gilbert Seldes' observation about American's movie-going habits, in less than four decades motion pictures had emerged as the culture's mass entertainment. For New Mexicans, as for others, "the fundamental passion" had become "a desire to go to the movies" (Seldes 9).

This "desire to go to the movies" in New Mexico's smaller towns and cities resulted in the theaters located along main streets becoming gathering places, functioning as centers for socializing and community

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interaction. Not only did the theater offer entertainment that changed weekly, or more frequently in some cases, but theater owners, seeking to promote their buildings as centers for community activity, often made their theaters available for other civic activities. T.F. Murphy annually brought children from the coal mining camps around Raton to his El Raton Theater for a free afternoon of movies at Christmas. Similarly, the Mission Theater in Clayton hosted a children's Christmas show. Later, as the Luna Theater, the management offered free admission to those purchasing bonds during World War II. The ballroom in the basement below the theater also served as a popular venue for benefit dances, bazaars and dinners. During the 1950s, the Lea Theater in Lovington served as the site for the annual Miss and Mrs. Lovington contests. More than simply providing the most illuminated building along main street with a capacity to transport moviegoers to worlds beyond their hometowns, theaters offered a gathering place for diverse events celebrating the life of the community.

The popularity of movie-going remained strong in New Mexico in the post-war years despite the inroads that television had begun to make by the early 1950s. In Albuquerque, as suburban growth moved eastward along Central Avenue, the Hiland Theater (1951) was included in a strip commercial center, a harbinger of the city's first shopping center that opened in 1962. Although the number of newly constructed theaters grew slowly, small communities experiencing growth due to the emergence of new industries such as the development of natural gas fields and uranium mining saw local investors open theaters in hopes of attracting patrons from the towns' swelling populations. In Farmington, the Allen family added the Totah Theater (1949), soon acquiring other theaters in the Four Corners area to form the Allen chain of theaters. Lovington, located in the natural gas fields of the western Permian Basin, saw the Lea Theater (1949) open, and in 1960, local investor J.C. West remodeled a former warehouse to open the West Theater in Grants, center of the state's developing uranium industry.

The advent of shopping malls that included theaters or nearby multi-screen complexes coupled with Americans' embrace of television as a more convenient and readily accessible form of mass entertainment contributed to a further decline in movie-going. Downtown theaters began to relinquish the prominent role they had played in the life of New Mexican communities. In the state's larger cities, malls located nearer to new suburban enclaves eliminated the need to drive downtown.

In its smaller towns, many of which experienced a decline in population, audiences simply dwindled to the point that many owners could no longer operate a theater profitably. As a result, the last quarter of the 20th century saw the closing, significant alteration to other functions or, sometimes, demolition of theaters along main streets. Reflecting on this decline, Toby Smith, the leading feature writer for New Mexico's largest newspaper, lamented that in many of the state's small towns theaters stood abandoned, as "bare bones" now "baking in the sun" (Smith 4). He likened their decline to the demise of the small-town theater depicted in Larry McMurtry's novel and film of the same name, *The Last Picture Show*. Nearly a quarter of a century later, Smith's concerns have proven true in many small communities where video rentals have joined cable television in further undermining "the desire to go to a movie."

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Despite their widespread decline, some historic downtown movie theaters have survived. Some are included as contributing properties within downtown historic districts; others, such as the Kimo and Rio Grande are individually listed in the National Register. Still others have benefited from recent efforts through the New Mexico Main Street program to revitalize the commercial districts of several towns and cities by restoring key buildings including theaters. In some instances, these restored theaters show motion pictures; in other instances, with interior alterations their auditoriums accommodate live performances. It is in response to the ongoing interest on the part of many communities in recognizing the contribution these theaters made to the vitality of main streets throughout the state that this multiple property nomination is being prepared.

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F. ASSOCIATED PROPERTY TYPES

Description

Movie theaters constructed during the period of significance, 1905-1960, appeared in downtown commercial blocks and, later, along extended main street strips where the footprint of the theater conformed to the rectangular shape of the parcel on which it was built. Some are set in the middle of commercial blocks while others are located at corners. A few theaters exemplify the one-part commercial block; most, however, are two-part commercial blocks with one or more stories rising above the marquee with a vertical wall sign generally mounted to the upper element. Roofs are either vaulted or slightly sloped, and most are lined with parapets that vary, depending upon the stylistic details included in the building's design. Foundations are generally concrete with some rising slightly above grade. Due to precautions against the danger of fire common to early projection systems, most theaters are framed with steel trusses and concrete structural systems and include masonry facades.

Perhaps more than any other building type lining main streets, theaters are identifiable by their exteriors whose design details reflected the evolving popular building styles of the first half of the 20th century. In New Mexico these various stylistic details include Beaux-Arts elements, regional details including the Spanish-Pueblo Revival and hybridized Pueblo/Art Deco details, period revivals such as the Medieval, and Moderne elements in some of the theaters dating near the end of the period of significance. These details are most apparent in the façade of the building and sometimes receive further emphasis in vertical wall signs, architectural neon, and marquees. In some instances, corresponding stylistic details also appear in the interior in lobbies and atmospheric elements in the auditorium and the proscenium framing the screen and stage.

Facades also reveal the dual commercial nature of many theater buildings with small commercial spaces often flanking recessed entries. Most often, these flanking spaces are symmetrical with large fixed commercial windows and doors. Second story office spaces as well as projection rooms are also apparent with single or grouped windows lining the second story of the façade. Recessed entries lead to ticket booths that are generally located between double entry doors and accessible from a door inside the lobby. In a few some instances ticket booths are located along one side of the recessed entry. Entries are often slightly raked with tiled floors that may include a mosaic design denoting the name of the theater. Picture display boxes framed with wood or metal often line the walls of the recessed entry as well as the exterior walls of the façade below the marquee.

Designed to provide a public space that enabled patrons to socialize and, later, purchase refreshments, as they entered the auditorium, lobbies vary in size and their degree of ornamental details. Theaters such as the Kimo or Lensic have lobbies with lighting fixtures and other ornamentation consistent with the architectural character of the building, while others, such as the Lyceum in Clovis, convey their grandeur with marble panels and ornate mosaic-tiled floors. Lobbies in smaller theaters present more modest spaces, offering little more than

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a carpeted space with walls often lined with pictures depicting coming attractions. All theaters, however, provide basic amenities adjacent to or near the lobby, including restrooms and drinking fountains and, sometimes, lounges, and crying and smoking rooms. Some lobbies also include flanking stairways leading to balconies, a smaller second-story lounge, the projection booth, and, in some instances, office spaces. In general, refreshment counters only began to appear in lobbies during the 1930s when the Great Depression prompted exhibitors to begin selling refreshments in order to find additional sources of income. The addition of refreshment counters often accounts for some of the alterations evident in the plans of some lobbies.

Auditoriums are accessible from two doors flanking the interior wall of the lobby. Seating is raked, with the number of seats varying from around 300 in smaller theaters to 900 in larger theaters. Larger theaters generally included balconies accessible either from the lobby or from stairways located at the front of the raked balcony near the rear of the auditorium. Walls are sometimes lined with decorative fabric. Lighting varies with some theaters having overhead and/or wall fixtures, sometimes with sconces covered with polychromatic glass shades to contribute to the interior's exotic atmosphere. Grilled vents for heating and cooling systems are often installed in upper sections of walls. Fronting the auditorium is a proscenium framing a screen, sometimes fronted by a stage. Proscenium details vary ranging from simple moldings to ornate details consistent with other stylistic theme of the interior. Mechanical or hand-drawn curtains cover some screens. In older theaters designed to accommodate live stage shows as well, the stage also includes a fly tower with multiple curtains. Mechanical equipment including heating and cooling systems is generally located in spaces, some excavated, to the rear of the screen. Steel fire doors identified with red exit lights flanking the proscenium generally open onto an alley or side street at the rear of the building.

Significance

Movie theaters constructed in New Mexico between 1905 and 1960 are significant as a new property type serving as the setting for an emerging form of mass entertainment. They are also significant for the roll they played in fostering a sense of community along the main streets of the state's towns and cities. With their frequently changing programs and newsreels and their low admission fees they provided New Mexicans with opportunities to experience horizons extending far beyond their quotidian lives. As such they are significant under Criterion A for the category of Entertainment/Recreation. Readily identified along main streets with facades whose eclectic details distinguished them from surrounding commercial buildings, movie theaters enlivened the architectural character of many communities. This visual stimulation was especially apparent at night when lighting designed to attract patrons also served to illuminate main streets with electric bulbs and then neon outlining architectural details, marquee, and wall-mounted signs. Sometimes rich in stylistic details provided by notable theater architects, sometimes more modest in detailing, movie theaters were distinctive as a property type and are significant under Criterion C for Architecture.

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Registration Requirements

To be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, the theater must retain a high degree of integrity with the historical characteristics associated with the building's function as a theater readily apparent. To be eligible also under Criterion A, there must sufficient evidence as to the theater's contribution to entertainment and recreation in the history of the community in which it appears.

The setting, plan, design details, materials, and workmanship of both the exterior and interior of the theater are important in determining its integrity and conveying its feeling as an historic property under Criterion C. Exterior details include the design elements of the façade, entry details, and retention of signage. Although the entries of some theaters have undergone alterations, including the removal or relocation of ticket booths, if other significant details remain so that the façade continues to convey the building's function as a theater, the property is considered eligible. For instance, a theater retaining its original façade as a two-part commercial block with notable Moderne style elements and distinctive original signage is considered eligible even though the entry and ticket booth location have been altered. Similarly, a theater in which the façade was altered during the period of significance to conform to current popular norms for theater design is considered eligible. Alterations completed after the period of significance will need to be weighed within the context of all of the façade's details to determine eligibility.

The retention of interior details also applies to both the lobby and the auditorium. Historic lobby plans and their associated amenities must remain apparent. As noted in the historic context, the appearance of refreshment counters during the 1930s resulted in alterations and additions in some earlier theaters. These alterations alone, however, will not preclude a property from being eligible. Similarly the auditorium, proscenium and stage must retain a high degree of integrity. If, as in some cases, the number of seats has been reduced to widen rows and add patron comfort, these changes are not regarded as diminishing the integrity of the auditorium. Similarly, if changes to the theater in order to permit live performances have resulted in the removal of less than forty percent of original seating or if a screen has been removed to enlarge a stage for live performances but other details remain largely unaltered, the property is considered eligible.

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H. SUMMARY OF IDENTIFICATION AND EVALUATION METHODS

This Multiple Property Listing marks the first step on the part of the New Mexico Historic Preservation Division (NMHPD) to support initiatives by the New Mexico Main Street Program to recognize and encourage the preservation of historic motion picture theaters in many of the state's communities. When NMHPD contracted with historian David Kammer to prepare a Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF), it agreed to provide him with inventory forms of theaters that had previously been surveyed. Some of these theaters were surveyed in conjunction with earlier inventory projects of downtown commercial buildings that had resulted in some theaters being listed as contributing properties within historic districts or individually.

Kammer then conducted a preliminary search using Internet Web sites, data from the 1939 Census of Business, and local business directories to ascertain the likely number of theaters that existed in New Mexico during the period of significance. He then compared that data to known remaining theaters. Upon completing this preliminary list, Kammer consulted with HPD staff to determine priorities for a limited intensive-level inventory of additional theaters, supplanting it with a reconnaissance-level inventory of other theaters.

Using HPD's Historic Cultural Properties Inventory (HCPI) Detail Form (Form 2), he then inventoried nine selected theaters. In several instances, these theaters are located in communities that have initiated Main Street programs, and HPD felt that including them in the inventory might contribute to ongoing efforts to stimulate commercial activity in downtown districts. In order to record details unique to theater architecture and to evaluate the eligibility of these properties based on those details, Kammer developed an additional page for the HCPI that permitted a detailed examination of both the exteriors and interiors of each building. Upon completing the survey and reviewing the forms of all previously inventoried theaters, he conferred again with HPD staff to select theaters for nomination to complete the MPDF.

Organizing the Statement of Historic Context into two periods and then determining the single property type of Motion Picture Theaters with a Period of Significance from 1905 to 1960 reflects an assessment of both the research data and all of the inventory forms pertaining to theaters. Through most of the period of significance, New Mexico remained a lightly populated state with only two cities, Albuquerque (35,000) and Santa Fe (20,000), having a population of more than 20,000 by 1940. As a result, most theaters statewide tended to be smaller than average and, as discussed in the Historic Context, either independently operated or included in small locally owned chains. Since the Kimo, El Morro, and Lensic Theaters, all designed by Carl Boller and listed in the National Register, are the only theaters displaying the ornate details, if not size, of a picture palace, the decision was made to treat all remaining theaters as a single property type.

Upon completion of the inventory and consultation with HPD staff regarding the selection of theaters likely to be nominated for listing in the National Register, HPD notified all owners by letter about the nomination process and possible state tax credits available should a property be listed. Doing so has enabled

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community planners and staff for the New Mexico Main Street program to look ahead at how the listing of these properties may contribute to broader efforts to revitalize districts. It has also encouraged owners to consider maintenance projects supported by tax credits that will preserve and enhance their buildings.

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