

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Sooner Theatre Building

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

101 East Main Street

CITY, TOWN

Norman

STATE

Oklahoma

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

No. 4

VICINITY OF

CODE

40

COUNTY

Cleveland

CODE

027

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
			<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
			<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
			<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Harold Gimeno

STREET & NUMBER

1400 N. Sycamore

CITY, TOWN

Santa Ana

VICINITY OF

STATE

California 92705

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Office of the County Clerk

STREET & NUMBER

Cleveland County Courthouse

CITY, TOWN

Norman

STATE

Oklahoma

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Special Sooner Theatre Survey

DATE

1976

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Sooner Theatre of Norman

CITY, TOWN

Norman

STATE

Oklahoma

DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT
 GOOD
 FAIR

DETERIORATED
 RUINS
 UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED basically
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Sooner Theatre is a three-story brick and tile building with a basement under the stage area at the north end. It faces Main Street on the south, with a 50-foot front, stretches 140 feet north-south along Jones Street, which parallels the Santa Fe tracks. There are sidewalks in front and on the west, an alley to the north. Maximum outside of the stage house or loft is 47 feet.

The auditorium seats 819 - 585 on the main floor and 234 in the balcony. Special feature is its high vaulted ceiling with massive carved and hand-decorated beaming. There is a full proscenium-style stage, 28 feet wide and 30 feet deep. The proscenium opening itself is 28 x 30 feet. Stage loft is 44 feet high. Basement under the stage gives access to the orchestra pit. Unusual feature: the traditional stage curtain, with its ads for local merchants containing two-digit telephone numbers!

First floor contains a box office and lobby with concession area and two "store front" areas opening onto Main Street. The second floor accommodates a mezzanine lounge and two smaller rooms which originally served as ladies' lounge and an office. On the third level are the projection booth, seating areas, and storage rooms.

Changes to the original building include installation of air-conditioning equipment, both a central system and window units. Some doors and windows have been closed up. The marquee has been replaced and the first floor facade is covered with a recent tile false-front. Most of these are "cosmetic" changes, however. The structure is essentially unaltered. The window and roof detail are undisturbed, even if obscured by the modern marquee. Inside the auditorium the beams and wall panels still have the original hand-painted decoration so painstakingly executed by Patricio and Harold Gimeno. The light fixtures, designed and built for the theatre, are still in service. Most of the stained glass windows are still in position on the second floor; the others have been stored and can be re-installed. Happily, Gimeno's original plans are on hand to guide all restoration work.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES 1928 - 1974

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Harold Gimeno

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Sooner Theatre Building dates back only to 1929. But its site - where Norman's Main Street crosses the Santa Fe tracks - has been something of a social and cultural center since the April 22, 1889, "run" that turned the virtually treeless prairie into an "instant town." The first post-run holiday celebration came on July 4 of that year. A large brush arbor was erected at Main east of the tracks. At the invitation of town officials Big Jim's band of Absentee Shawnee Indians came in from their camp east of Norman (his descendents, the so-called Little Jims, still live in the Little Axe community, now a part of the sprawling college town) to present a stomp dance for a crowd estimated at 1,500.

By the end of 1889 the first brick building in Norman, the Adkins Brick Building, had been erected on the theatre site, at 101 East Main. Norman's first Christmas and New Year's dances were in the Adkins building that year. Here, too, on December 5, 1890, local talent gave the new town its first "legitimate theatre." The two-act play, Among the Breakers, was presented to what was reported in the papers as a sell-out crowd. Among the cast were Tony Nolan, W. C. Dillingham, and Mrs. Maud Dillingham, all three of whom have descendents still living in Norman.

It was in 1928, however, that entertainment came permanently to 101 East Main Street. That year Harold Gimeno, later to be described as one of Oklahoma's first significant architects, was just beginning his career. The son of Professor Patricio Gimeno, artist and long-time University of Oklahoma faculty member, he had graduated from OU in 1918, gone on to attend the Harvard Graduate School of Architecture. In time he returned to Oklahoma and in 1928 he bought the Adkins building, razing it to make way for his Sooner Theatre. It was the first business structure in Norman to embody the Spanish style he personally preferred ... a style then becoming increasingly popular all across the country, especially for use in the new-fangled "movie palaces."

Gimeno subsequently built a number of houses in Norman and nearby Oklahoma City, all in the same Spanish revival style, nearly all of which survive. The Sooner, however, is believed to be the state's oldest surviving example of the Spanish style movie house. Adding to its significance is the fact that the elder Gimeno, as an artist, cooperated with his architect son on much of the detail painting in the theatre auditorium.

The Sooner opened February 10, 1929, Norman's first "talkie" theatre. It also had a fully equipped stage and regularly presented acts from the Orpheum circuit

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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Sooner Theatre Building

as well as presentations by local groups. Community organizations, in addition, sometimes rented the theatre for special events. It remained in continuous use as a movie theatre until June 1974, when it finally closed, for good, after nearly a half-century of service to the community.

Despite a certain surface dowdiness, the Sooner is basically sound, and essentially intact. "The construction materials," says Fred D. Shellabarger, a local architect, "are used honestly and the interior decor, with massive painted wood trusses and walls of exposed brick and tile, has a really great ambience." This architectural significance, along with the affection built up over the years by its significant role in the social life of the community, has led to formation of the non-profit Sooner Theatre of Norman, Inc. The board of directors includes representatives of the Cleveland County Historical Society, Norman Arts and Humanities Council, Norman Board of Park Commissioners, Norman Chamber of Commerce, and Civil Improvement Council. Plan is to purchase, restore, and maintain the old Sooner theatre as an historic landmark, and to operate it as a community service for a full range of cultural, artistic, and educational purposes.

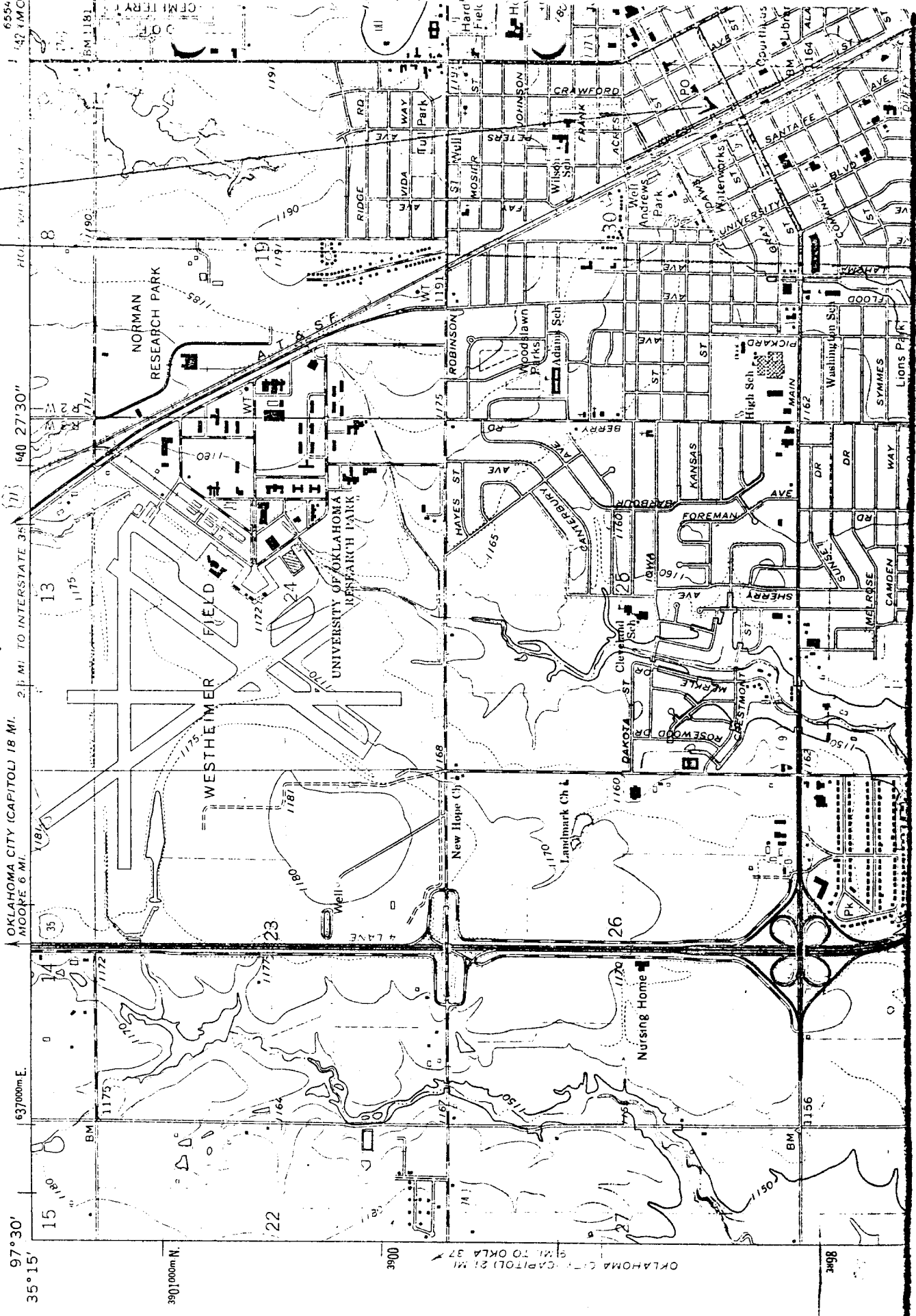


Sooner Theatre Building

Sooner Theatre Building
14/641720/3898495

6454 1 SE
OKLAHOMA CITY SE

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY



97°30' 35'15" E
637000m E
3901000m N
3900
8600