

**Wisconsin Historical Society
Determination of Eligibility Form**

(Revised May 2013)

WisDOT Project ID #: 2440-09-00

WHS #: _____

RECEIVED
JUN 22 2016

BY: _____

Property Name(s): Capitol Theatre/Park I and II Theater

Address/Location: 3015-3021 Washington Avenue

City & County: Racine, Racine County Zip Code: 53405

Town: 3N Range: 23E Section: 17

Date of Construction: 1928

WisDOT Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this request for Determination of Eligibility:

Meets the National Register of Historic Places criteria.
 Does not meet the National Register of Historic Places criteria.

Jim no [Signature] _____
 WisDOT Historic Preservation Officer Date 6/17/16

State Historic Preservation Office

In my opinion, the property:

Meets the National Register of Historic Places criteria.
 Does not meet the National Register of Historic Places criteria.

Jim Draeger [Signature] _____
 Jim Draeger, State Historic Preservation Officer Date 7/18/2016

Comments (FOR AGENCY USE ONLY):

Has sufficient integrity for Cat. A: Entertainment and Recreation as one of the premier theaters in Racine of the 1920s.

Division of Historic Preservation
Wisconsin Historical Society
816 State Street
Madison, WI 53706

Classification:

Ownership	Type of Property:		# of Contributing	# of Non-Contributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building	-->	1	
<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> site	-->		
If public, specify:	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	-->		
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	-->		
	<input type="checkbox"/> district	Total:	1	0

Function/Use:

Historic Function(s): RECREATION AND CULTURE: theater
 Current Function(s): VACANT/NOT IN USE

Architectural Style(s): 20th CENTURY REVIVALS: Mediterranean Revival

Criteria:

- A (history)
- B (important persons)
- C (architecture/eng.)
- D (archaeology)

Areas of Significance: ARCHITECTURE; ENTERTAINMENT
Period of Significance: 1928-1975
Significant Dates: 1928; 1975
Significant Person: None
Cultural Affiliation: None
Architect/Builder: Dick & Bauer

Criteria Considerations:

- A (owned by religious institution)
- B (moved)
- C (birthplace/grave)
- D (cemetery)
- E (reconstruction)
- F (commemorative)
- G (<50 years old)

ATTACHMENT CHECKLIST

- USGS map with UTM coordinates (Figure 1)
- Historic boundary map (Figure 2)
- Labeled, professionally printed color photographs

Property Info:

Size – 0.284 acres

UTM Reference – Zone 16N, 433220 mE, 4729828 mN

Verbal Boundary Description:

The historic boundary for the Capitol Theatre/Park I & II Theater (Capitol Theatre) is a polygon with a long center axis perpendicular to Washington Avenue. Beginning at a point that corresponds to the northwest corner of Racine County Tax Parcel ID #276-00-00-10-158-000, the boundary extends southeast for 84 feet, mostly along the north parcel line/north face of the building, except to jut out slightly to include the theater's marquee. From the northeast corner of the parcel, the boundary then extends south for 175 feet along the east parcel line/east wall of the building. The boundary then proceeds west for 59 feet along the south parcel line/rear wall of the building, before turning north and extending 235 feet along the west parcel line/west wall of the building to the point of origin.

Boundary Justification:

The historic boundary for the Capitol Theatre was delineated to encompass the theater building and marquee. The boundary mostly corresponds to the current legal parcel, which, per the *Survey Manual*, is appropriate for an urban property. The north boundary line juts out slightly at its center to include the theater's marquee that projects over the sidewalk. The legal parcel is limited to the building's footprint.

Methodology:

The Capitol Theater (AHI #120910) was identified as potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (National Register) by the Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) as part of its review of a proposed project to reconstruct Washington Avenue in the city of Racine, Racine County. The property is located along the project corridor, immediately adjacent to planned construction activities. As a result, the SHPO requested a Determination of Eligibility (DOE) to assess the property's National Register eligibility.

A site visit was conducted in May 2016. Research materials available at the Racine Public Library and Racine Heritage Museum were used in conjunction with *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin* (Wyatt 1986) to develop the historic context and evaluate the property.

Narrative Description:

The Capitol Theatre is located on Washington Avenue on the far west side of the city of Racine in the neighborhood of West Racine (Figures 1 and 2). The building occupies the entire parcel on which it sits. A sidewalk parallels the north side of the property and a narrow alley runs the length of the east side of the property between it and a commercial building and parking lot. Additional parking lots are located to the west and south of the property. Residential parcels are located at the southern end of the west side of the property.

Exterior

The two-story Capitol Theatre was constructed in 1928.¹ It has a rectangular footprint with an angled façade to conform to Washington Avenue (Figure 3). The building has a flat roof with a brick chimney

¹ City of Racine Assessor, Property Information, accessed October 2, 2015, <http://www.cityofracine.org/Departments/Assessor/Property-Assessments/Main/>.

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stack. The rear portion, where the stage/screen was, is a story taller than the front of the building. The façade front Washington Avenue is divided into three sections consisting of a central pavilion housing the theater entrance flanked by a storefront bay on either side. The pavilion has a front gable roof that is capped in large tiles and is framed by wide brick pilasters. The pilasters have concrete caps. A decorative motif adorns the east pilaster. The pavilion's second story is brick with tiled and stucco panels. A prominent window display on the pavilion's second story consists of three one-over-one sash windows in arched openings. Each arch is framed in alternating bricks and concrete pieces, and Ionic pilasters flank the center window. Each of these windows has a relief motif set into the arch above the window opening.

The theater marquee divides the first and second story of the pavilion. The marquee angles outward over the sidewalk and has a stepped, vertical panel of lights at its center. The sides of the marquee have backlit message boards with changeable lettering. Each side is topped by a backlit sign that reads "The Park." The theater entrance is glazed with two pairs of off-center glass doors with glass transom windows, and a plate glass display window is located to the west of the doors. The walls surrounding the entrance are clad in vertical wood siding.

The flanking storefront sections each have a shallow, tiled, shed roof within the parapet. Both sections are divided into three fenestration bays and have a single brick dentil course directly below the shed roofs. The walls are brick and have decorative brick and tile panels below the second-story windows, and concrete belt courses above the storefronts. The second-story windows are one-over-one sashes. The east section's second-story windows are capped with lintels of alternating brick and concrete pieces. The east section's storefront has a transom window that consists of square glass lights and spans its full width. The east two bays are glazed with plate glass display windows resting on a tiled wall. The store entrance is angled and recessed in the westernmost bay.

The west section's second-story windows are also one-over-one sashes, but are unevenly spaced. The eastern and central bays have lintels of alternating brick and concrete that match those on the east section; however, the outer, western window is set into an arched opening with a motif that matches those in the center pavilion. The distinction between the western window bay and the other two bays is also enhanced by a small break in the belt course. The window's arch is mirrored on the bay's first story, which consists of an entrance recessed within an arched entryway. The arch is comprised of composite pilasters that are topped by alternating brick and concrete pieces on the outside of the arch and narrow concrete pieces on the inside. A storefront occupies the eastern two first-story bays of the west section. The easternmost bay is glazed with a large, plate glass display window resting on a tiled wall. The central bay has an angled, recessed pedestrian door. The remaining storefront wall is clad in vertical wood siding.

The east, west, and south elevations consist of brick walls with minimal fenestration. The east elevation has a stepped parapet near the center of the elevation (Figures 4, 5, and 6). A pair of one-over-one sash windows is located on the second story of the north end, with a single one-over-one sash window below. To the south of the paired windows is an enclosed porch with a doorway and two plate glass windows, and is clad in horizontal siding. A window is located below that has been infilled. A single one-over-one window is located towards the south, rear portion of the east elevation, and several paired doors are located below grade along the elevation. The rear, south elevation has paired doors on the east and west ends of the first story, and a long, narrow window above a concrete block-filled portion towards the west side. The west elevation has a stepped parapet that mirrors that on the east elevation, and paired, single windows towards the north end (Figure 7). The approximate northern one-third of the west elevation has been covered in stucco.

Interior

The main entrance of the theater, located below the marquee in the central pavilion section, opens onto a long, narrow lobby (Figure 8). The floor is tiled and the ceiling is coated in plaster with a rough finish. The side walls are divided into sections by pilasters, which are topped by an entablature with ornamental plaster running the length of the lobby (Figure 9). Within each segment is a rectangular panel, with ornamental plaster along the edges and glass-front display units in the center, which are also surrounded by ornamental plaster and topped by hooded light fixtures. To the rear of the lobby is a small foyer with an arched ceiling and ornamental plaster along the cornice (Figure 10). Small restrooms are located on the east and west sides of the foyer. The projection room is located above the foyer.

The original theater auditorium is located behind the foyer. The interior of the auditorium has been heavily altered from its original configuration. In 1975 and 1976, the theater was divided into two separate screening rooms (Figures 11 and 12).² This was accomplished by bisecting the main theater down the center, from north to south. A partition wall was installed by cutting directly through the oval, coffered, plaster ceiling (Figure 13). The coffered ceiling contains ornamental plasterwork along the interior margins, and decorative stenciling is located between the coffer and exterior corners of the auditorium. In addition to loss of original material, there are many holes and other damaged areas in the ceiling. Other alterations have included installing a new wall at the front of the theater for the projection screen, installing fabric panels on the walls, and installing a ventilation system and drop ceiling, which also resulted in significant damage to the plaster ceiling. Some ductwork, and the metal skeleton of the drop ceiling and several ceiling panels remain. No theater seats remain in the building.

Behind the projection screen wall is the original stage/screening area of the theater, which was not as impacted by the interior remodel (Figure 14). Segments of the original plaster on the walls remain, including fluted pilasters and large panels outlined in ornamental plaster that reach from the floor to the ceiling (Figure 15). A large pilaster on each side, with paired brackets, supports a large arch spanning the width of the theater that has ornate plasterwork (Figures 16). A portion of the large, coffered ceiling is visible, although it was also bisected by the projection screen wall. To the front of the coffer is an ornate ventilation grill surrounded by stenciling (Figure 17).

The stage is surrounded by a large, wide proscenium arch that is covered in ornamental plaster, which is painted in many places. Above and to the front of the stage is an oblong ceiling coffer. To the sides, and slightly in front of, the stage, are two opera boxes (Figures 18 and 19). These are also set within arches that have ornamental plaster, and above each arch is a decorative plaster wreath and garland.

Integrity

The Capitol Theatre has lost historic integrity, particularly with respect to design, materials, and workmanship. The building is located in its original location and retains its original massing, but has been significantly altered both inside and out. Exterior alterations include the removal of the original blade marquee, replacement of decorative tilework with stucco, reconfiguration of the main entrance, and replacement windows.³ Alterations to the interior include the division of the auditorium into two separate spaces. As a result, character-defining details have been damaged or completely lost. Some decorative plasterwork and stenciling remain, as well as the basic elements of the stage, but much of the lobby and auditorium has been irreparably damaged, and is generally in poor condition.

² Don Schauf, "Marcus Closes Theater," *Racine Journal Times*, September 12, 1987.

³ "Capitol Gets New Look, Name," *Racine Journal Times*, November 17, 1981.

Narrative Statement of Significance:

CRM Context Chapters: ARCHITECTURE

The Capitol Theatre is recommended not eligible for the National Register. The property consists of a 1928 theater associated with entertainment/recreation in the West Racine neighborhood. Due to a loss of historic integrity from renovations in the 1970s and 1980s, the property is unable to convey that association. The theater building is also associated with commercial development in West Racine, but it does not distinctively represent historic commercial activity in the neighborhood, in comparison to the nearby National Register-eligible West Racine Commercial Historic District. Consequently, the property is recommended not eligible under *Criterion A: History*.

The Capitol Theatre is associated with Max and Florence Krofta, owners/managers from c.1929 to 1963. Neither individual appears to have made demonstrably important contributions to history within any context. As a result, the Capitol Theatre does not possess significance under *Criterion B: Significant Person*.

The building is an example of a Mediterranean Revival-style theater. However, the removal of the original blade sign and much of the tile/brickwork, as well as alterations to the marquee and storefronts, has greatly diminished its exterior integrity. The interior retains some original plasterwork in the lobby and the original proscenium, but the "twinning" of the theater in 1975 damaged the original walls and ceiling, as well as removed the pipe organ and its components. Because of these substantial changes the building is no longer a distinctive example of a Mediterranean Revival theater and is recommended not eligible under *Criterion C: Architecture*.

Historic Context

The Capitol Theatre is located in the West Racine neighborhood, which developed along Washington Avenue, near and west of West Boulevard between 1910 and 1930. Washington Avenue had been an established transportation corridor since the early 1800s, when it was a territorial road serving as a primary transportation route through the area. In 1911 the Chicago, North Shore & Milwaukee Railroad (North Shore Line) interurban was extended to Racine. Running in a north/south direction on West Boulevard, the tracks marked the westernmost edge of the city. That same year, the area west of West Boulevard, at Washington Avenue was annexed by the city. A station of the interurban rail line was located near this intersection, and the neighborhood of West Racine subsequently developed around this hub.⁴

The transition away from agriculture on the rural west fringes of the city was rapid after establishment of the interurban and annexation by the City.⁵ The area was subdivided in 1912 by Arthur Ehrlich.⁶ In 1913, there were only three businesses on Washington Avenue west of the railroad; however, that soon changed as the World War I economy brought about enormous industrial and agricultural growth in Racine. Commercial development pushed westward, and the associated neighborhood of West Racine

⁴ Mead and Hunt, Inc., *City of Racine Neighborhood Historic Property Reconnaissance Survey: Washington Avenue Corridor, West Sixth Street Area, and West Racine Business District*, prepared for the City of Racine (2001), 8; "History of West Racine Reads Like A Romance of Boom Days of Wild West," *Racine Times-Call*, November 14, 1924.

⁵ "History of West Racine Reads Like A Romance of Boom Days of Wild West."

⁶ "West Racine History," *Shoreline Leader*, July 30, 1981.

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developed to meet the housing shortages.⁷ By the early 1920s the Washington Avenue corridor of West Racine was fully developed with homes, businesses and institutions. Art Matson, who owned an auto supply company in the neighborhood, was quoted in 1924 as saying, "West Racine has a wonderful future. I'm not in the real estate business, but if you want to make some money buy property out here for it will double in value within a few years."⁸ Matson's optimism proved true, as West Racine's population steadily increased.

The Capitol Theatre was constructed during this West Racine boom period. It opened in the spring of 1928 under the management of D.J. Smith.⁹ The Capitol Theatre was constructed during a wave of theater building in the city; between 1927 and 1928 four theaters were built, bringing the total in the city to eight. In addition to the Capitol these included the Venetian Theatre, Uptown (Majestic) Theatre, and the Granada Theatre.¹⁰

Property History

The Mediterranean Revival-style Capitol Theater was designed by the Milwaukee firm of Dick & Bauer.¹¹ A flashy marquee and prominent blade sign affixed to the façade attracted visitors from the Washington Avenue and West Avenue corridors (Figures 20 and 21). The angled marquee included a backlit message center on the north and south sides, terminating to a panel of geometric design and a small ziggurat lit by a series of individual bulbs. Large block letters spelled out "CAPITOL" atop the message boards. The blade sign extended from the top of the marquee to several feet above the roofline, as pictured in a 1987 newspaper article.¹² The sign had scalloped edges which featured chaser lights, and was topped by a capitol dome. Open channel letters spelled "CAPITOL" vertically down the sides of the sign. This combination would catch the eyes of both pedestrians and motorists, and the building's position near a prominent intersection would have made the sign/marquee visible for a substantial distance when lit. The interior of the theater was finished with ornate plasterwork and stenciling. The 1000-seat auditorium had a decorated ceiling, which featured a coffered oval to house indirect lighting.¹³ The proscenium was surrounded by decorative plasterwork that included twisted ropes and floral motifs. The theater included a Wurlitzer pipe organ with the pipe chambers housed in two false theater boxes flanking the proscenium.¹⁴ A *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map*, revised in 1930, noted that the building had "fireproof construction except exposed steel frame," in addition to concrete floors, a tiled roof, a metal lath ceiling, and brick curtain walls.¹⁵

The theater was set to open on May 30, 1928.¹⁶ A June 1 advertisement lists the admission price at twenty-five cents for adults and ten cents for children, with an orchestra and organ accompanying the

⁷ Alice Sankey, *Racine, the Belle City: A History of Racine* (Racine, Wis.: Racine Board of Education, 1958), 117; *Plat Book of Racine and Kenosha Counties, Wisconsin* (Racine, Wis.: Western Printing & Lithographing Co., 1924); John Bunker, *Invention City: The Sesquicentennial History of Racine, Wisconsin* (Racine, Wis.: Racine Heritage Museum, 1998), 96.

⁸ "History of West Racine Reads Like A Romance of Boom Days of Wild West."

⁹ "Theater Opening Set," *Racine Review*, May 24, 1928.

¹⁰ Konrad Schiecke, *Historic Movie Theaters of Wisconsin* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009), 199-204.

¹¹ "Theatre Architects," *Exhibitors Herald World*, October 25, 1930, 124.

¹² Schauf.

¹³ "Theatre Architects"; Paul Grant, "Park I & II Theatre," *Cinema Treasures*, accessed May 23, 2016, <http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/7439>.

¹⁴ Grant.

¹⁵ Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Racine* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1930).

¹⁶ "Theater Opening Set," *Racine Review*, May 24, 1928.

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feature film "Rose of the Golden West."¹⁷ One year after the Capitol opened, a new electronic sound system by Western Electric was installed, marking the transition from silent films to talkies.¹⁸ The building spanned 3015-3021 Washington Avenue, the theater itself comprised the center of the building at 3017, with small retail shops on the first floor at 3015 and 3019, and three upstairs offices at 3021. In 1929 the entities that occupied these spaces included the Capitol Tea Room at 3019 and the Buhler Agency, Milo Sorenson (dentist), and the Racine branch of the Wisconsin College of Music at 3021 (3015 was vacant).¹⁹

After the Stock Market crashed in 1929, movie theaters had to implement innovative advertising and promotions to get customers in the door. Promotions such as Bank Night, Bingo, and Dish Night offered patrons free gifts or the chance to win cash.²⁰ The Capitol took part in some of these, including Dish Night, which aimed to attract women (and thus their families) to the theater to win an inexpensive dish set.²¹ A 1940 reproduced advertisement in *Motion Picture Herald* depicted a set of "Heat Resisting Glassware" available at the Capitol Theatre.²²

During this time, Max Krofta was owner and manager of the Capitol. He moved to Racine from Milwaukee in 1929 to manage the Granada Theater (AHI #10770) and subsequently became owner and manager of the Capitol Theatre. He sold the Capitol in 1935, but reacquired it in 1938, before purchasing the Granada in 1940.²³ Max Krofta, along with his wife Florence, owned and managed the two theaters into the 1960s. In 1961 they sold the Granada and Max died in November of that year.²⁴ Florence continued to own and manage the Capitol until 1963.²⁵ During his career, Max Krofta served on the Board of Directors for the Independent Theatremen's Association of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan, and he served as a representative for the National Board of Theatremen.²⁶ Krofta was also active in the West Racine business community. In 1934, he was elected president of the West Racine Business Men's Association. A newspaper article that year noted that he brought to the theater "pictures of unquestionable entertainment value for all members of Racine families."²⁷

In 1949, the Racine Outdoor Theatre opened on Washington Avenue just west of the Racine city limits.²⁸ The new drive-in theater catered to the auto-centric post-war suburban community. This, combined with the development of suburban multiplex theaters with adjacent parking lots, posed challenges for the older pedestrian-friendly neighborhood theaters in Racine. By the 1960s, as the trend toward auto-friendly theaters continued, many neighborhood theaters were no longer able to compete.

Although other neighborhood theaters were closing, such as the Granada in 1961, the Capitol Theatre managed to survive into the 1970s and 1980s by modernizing its facilities. In 1975, the Capitol Theatre

¹⁷ "Today-Tomorrow Mary Astor and Gilbert Roland in 'Rose of the Golden West,'" *Racine Journal News*, June 1, 1928, Section 2, 4.

¹⁸ "West Racine Theatre Installs Sound Device," *Racine Review*, May 31, 1929.

¹⁹ Wright's Directory Company, *Wright's Racine City Directory 1929* (Milwaukee, Wis.: Wright's Directory Company, 1929), 840.

²⁰ Maggie Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: an Architectural History of the Movie Theatre*, Starring S. Charles Lee (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1994), 90.

²¹ Kathryn H. Fuller-Seeley, ed., *Hollywood in the Neighborhood: Historical Case Studies of Local Moviegoing* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2008), 227.

²² Fuller-Seeley, 227.

²³ "Theater Owner, Krofta, Dies," *Racine Journal Times*, November 14, 1961.

²⁴ "From Cinema to Cigars: Remodel Granada for Wholesaler," *Racine Journal Times*, May 26, 1961; "Theater Owner, Krofta, Dies."

²⁵ "Theater Owner, Krofta, Dies"; "Krofta, Mrs. Max C. (Florence E.)," *Racine Journal Times*, April 17, 1972.

²⁶ "Krofta Assumes Ownership of Granada Theatre," *Racine Journal Times*, August 8, 1940.

²⁷ "In the NEWS During the Year 1934," *Racine Journal Times*, December 31, 1934.

²⁸ "New Racine Outdoor Theatre to Open for Public Saturday," *Racine Journal Times*, April 28, 1949.

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was purchased by Carmichael and Associates Inc., who remodeled the building.²⁹ The theater was "twinned" by creating a partition wall down the center of the auditorium, thus becoming a two-screen facility. The former 1,000-seat auditorium now had one auditorium with 240 seats and a second with 270 seats.³⁰ The remodel removed the pipe organ and covered over or destroyed much of the plasterwork, irreparably damaging the original ceiling in the process.³¹ After the renovations, Carmichael and Associates rebranded the theater Capitol I and II. The new Capitol I and II was touted in a local newspaper editorial saying: "Not only have they modernized their facility but they have improved their policy by providing student rates."³²

In 1981, the Milwaukee-based company Marcus Corp. purchased the Capitol I and II for \$50,000 and renamed the building Park I and II.³³ The building was remodeled again, removing the original blade sign on the façade and altering the marquee. A newspaper article suggested that the iconic blade sign would be replaced with a new vertical sign, but that does not appear to have happened.³⁴ Marcus Corp. closed the theater on Labor Day 1987, citing there were ten other movie screens in the city and it was not economical to keep the Park I and II open.³⁵ Since that time the building has rented its various spaces, but has not operated as a cinema or other type of theater. In 1996, the building underwent another renovation, this time adding three apartments above the front lobby where the former office spaces were.³⁶ In 2004, the Park I and II was purchased by Westbury Group, LLC, who intended to rehab the facility to the "Capitol Theatre for the Performing Arts," however the restoration plans were never implemented.³⁷ Based on photos in the Wisconsin Historic Property Database (WHPD) as recently as 2010 the façade pavilion retained all of its decorative tilework and original brick on its parapet. A large section of tilework has since been removed and replaced with stucco, and replacement brick has been applied in areas.

Architecture of Theaters

The Capitol Theatre was built in the Mediterranean Revival style. Period Revival architecture in Wisconsin was most prevalent during the first half of the twentieth century, but peaked in the 1920s.³⁸ Characteristics of Mediterranean Revival design include flat wall surfaces with decorative terra cotta, plasterwork, or tile ornamentation, sometimes with classical motifs. Red tile roofs with heavy brackets were most common, although the Capitol Theatre utilizes green tiles.

Although Mediterranean Revival buildings are relatively rare in Wisconsin, theatre architecture of the period often embraced exotic interpretations of revival styles, such as Mediterranean Revival.³⁹ This design freedom came from a desire to express modernity, as movie theaters were seen as a "new presentation technique."⁴⁰ Beaux Arts-trained architects took historical styles and presented them in a new, radical way.⁴¹ The most ornate of these "movie palaces" were designed to surround patrons in "an

²⁹ "Marcus buys Capitol Theater," unknown newspaper, August 14, 1981, on file at the Racine Historical Society, Racine, Wisconsin.

³⁰ Shauf.

³¹ Schiecke, 202.

³² "Theatre Saluted," *Racine Journal Times*, February 15, 1976.

³³ Shauf.

³⁴ "Capitol Gets New Look, Name."

³⁵ Shauf.

³⁶ "Renovation," *Racine Journal Times*, March 12, 1996.

³⁷ Schiecke, 202.

³⁸ Wyatt, Barbara L., ed., "Architecture," in *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin*, vol. 2 (Madison, Wis.: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986).

³⁹ Wyatt.

⁴⁰ Valentine, 71

⁴¹ Valentine, 71.

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environment of excess."⁴² Theater architect E.C.A. Bullock wrote that a theater façade should "overshadow everything in its immediate neighborhood," even over the retail shops sharing its marquee.⁴³ The luxury and affordability of movie-going extended across ethnic and social classes, and movie attendance doubled nationwide in the 1920s from 40 million to 80 million patrons per week.⁴⁴

The interiors of these movie palaces often featured spacious lobbies and lounges with comfortable furniture, fireplaces, paneled walls, and ornamented ceilings. The concession stand, now considered standard in movie theaters, was not implemented until the 1930s.⁴⁵ Some ornamental plaster is still visible in the Capitol Theatre's lobby, however it is unclear where the concession stand was historically positioned.

Movie theaters of the 1920s often incorporated large pipe organs and orchestra pits to accompany silent films.⁴⁶ Ornate screens or grills were incorporated into the auditorium design to hide the organ's pipes. The Capitol Theatre's Wurlitzer pipes were shielded behind false opera boxes. Sound was introduced into motion pictures in 1927 and theaters began to phase out their musical instruments. The Capitol Theatre installed a new sound system in 1929, just one year after opening. This was a necessary move, as by 1930 nearly all Hollywood films included sound.⁴⁷

The Capitol Theatre was designed by the Milwaukee firm of Dick & Bauer, whose principals were Gustave A. Dick, and Alex H. Bauer.⁴⁸ Their entry in a directory of theater architects for a 1930 issue of *Exhibitors Herald World* listed some of their "principal theatres designed." In addition to the Capitol Theatre, this list included six theaters in Milwaukee (the Milwaukee, Tower, Colonial, Oriental, Garfield, and National), as well as the Sprague in Elkhorn and the Oshkosh in Oshkosh.⁴⁹ Research did not reveal other works by this firm in Racine. Only one resource in the WHPD is attributed to the firm, the Russell A. and Odessa Clark House (AHI #201122) at 1601 East Cumberland Boulevard in Whitefish Bay, Milwaukee County. The 1931 Tudor Revival house is contributing to the National Register-eligible Cumberland Forest and Palo Alto Residential Historic District.

Gustave A. Dick (1872-1935) worked for various architecture firms before attending the University of Pennsylvania, graduating with a "Certificate of Professional Architect" c.1898.⁵⁰ In 1896 he partnered with fellow Milwaukee architect, Henry Buemming.⁵¹ The pair worked together until 1907, designing several Milwaukee buildings.⁵² Dick partnered with Alexander Bauer c.1925 to specialize in the design of theaters. The duo designed several Wisconsin theaters before Bauer bought out Dick's shares, dissolving the partnership. Gustave Dick passed away in 1935 at the age of 63.⁵³ He has numerous buildings listed in the WHPD, all of which are in the Milwaukee area. Several are Period Revival style houses in National Register-listed districts. The WHPD also lists two unevaluated Dick-designed buildings, the Quality Biscuit Co. building (AHI #104699) and the George Seelman and Sons building (AHI #10953), as well as several properties that are indicated as being not eligible.

⁴² Valentine, 57-60.

⁴³ Valentine, 56.

⁴⁴ Valentine, 51-52

⁴⁵ Valentine, 60, 103.

⁴⁶ Valentine, 68.

⁴⁷ Valentine, 51-52.

⁴⁸ "Theatre Architects," *Exhibitors Herald World*, October 25, 1930.

⁴⁹ "Theatre Architects."

⁵⁰ Jan Jennings, *Cheap and Tasteful Dwellings: Design Competitions and the Convenient Interior, 1879-1909* (Knoxville, Tenn.: University of Tennessee Press, 2005), 88-89.

⁵¹ Jennings, 89.

⁵² Yance, "Milwaukee Architect- Herman W. Buemming," Historic Milwaukee Incorporated, accessed May 24, 2016, <http://oldmilwaukee.net/blog/?p=1448>.

⁵³ "Gustave A. Dick, 63, Dies at Milwaukee," *LaCrosse Tribune*, July 11, 1935.

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Alexander Bauer (1887-1945) was born and raised in Milwaukee and attended the school of engineering at the University of Wisconsin.⁵⁴ When Bauer ended his partnership with Gustave Dick, he continued the firm under his own name. Aside from theaters, Bauer's obituary lists his other Milwaukee buildings as the Wendler and Fass funeral homes and the Gaenslen School for Crippled Children (under partnership with Alexander Eschweiler). No properties in the WHPD are attributed to Bauer individually.

Comparison Properties

Three other Racine movie theaters have been recorded in the WHPD, including the 1966 Wrightian-style Golden Rondelle (AHI #10937), the 1928 Art Deco-style Uptown (Majestic) Theatre (AHI #11481), and the 1928 Mediterranean Revival-style Granada Theatre (AHI #10770). Of these, the Uptown (Majestic) Theatre is listed in the National Register for its significant Neo-Gothic interior, with the WHPD record noting that the exterior is "insignificant and altered." The Golden Rondelle is entered as potentially eligible. The Granada Theatre was determined not eligible due to loss of integrity in the auditorium. The Granada is the most appropriate comparison property, as it was built as a neighborhood theater in the same year and architectural style as the Capitol Theatre.

The exterior of the Granada Theatre (Figure 22) is much more elaborate than the Capitol Theatre. Although the Granada Theatre is entirely missing its original marquee, the facade features more pronounced Mediterranean Revival details. Among these are ornate terra cotta applications, including frieze panels with theatre scenes, cartouche reliefs, engaged Corinthian columns, and finials along the parapet. The facade also include balconettes on two second story windows, and decorative brickwork applied in a diamond pattern. The interior contains some decorative plasterwork and interesting elements, such as a grand fireplace, however the auditorium seating and the proscenium stage has been completely removed. In comparison, the Capitol Theatre's expression of Mediterranean Revival is more restrained. The exterior uses decorative tile and brickwork, but incorporates fewer classical details, aside from pilasters and motifs above arched windows. The interior of the Capitol Theatre, while still having the rough appearance of a movie theater, lost its most impressive architectural features after being twinned, and therefore has a similar diminished level of integrity as the Granada Theatre.

Evaluation

Neighborhood theaters from the 1920s are often iconic structures expressing exotic architecture and located in places accessible by pedestrians and public transportation. The Capitol Theatre was no exception to this historical trend, however due to the loss of integrity, it does not demonstrate historic associations with entertainment/recreation and architecture.

The Capitol Theatre was erected on a primary transportation thoroughfare in West Racine and near a prominent intersection. Here, the building would have been highly visible and attracted patrons with its Mediterranean Revival-style design and flashy marquee. Historically, the marquee was a broad overhanging structure with numerous lighting elements. It has been modified a narrower marquee with fewer lights and patterns. Even more outstanding than the marquee was a prominent blade sign that extended vertically from the top of the marquee past the facade parapet. This sign featured a capitol dome motif, chaser lights extending downward, and "CAPITOL" spelled out in large letters. The iconic sign was in use until the 1980s, and its removal has greatly changed the appearance of the building. The interior of the theater has also been substantially altered. The auditorium was twinned in the 1970s, which allowed for continued use of the building, but also damaged and removed elements of the building's 1928 design, including plasterwork, stenciling and removed the organ. This ultimately changed the patrons'

⁵⁴ "Bauer, Theater Designer, Dies, Collapses at Meeting," *Milwaukee Journal*, December 13, 1945.

Capitol Theatre/Park I and II Theater, 3015-3021 Washington Avenue, Racine, Racine County

experience of the space and it no longer effectively conveys the feeling or association of a 1920s neighborhood movie palace.

The Capitol Theater building also has historic commercial associations, with two storefronts at street level, and offices historically on the second story. However, the building is located in a commercial corridor and does not individually demonstrate historic significance for its business associations. Therefore, the Capitol Theatre is recommended not eligible for the National Register under *Criterion A*.

The longest owners and managers affiliated with the Capitol Theatre were Max and Florence Krofta. Max Krofta was active in the local business community, as well as regional and national theater business associations, however there is no evidence that his or Florence's contributions had historic significance. Therefore, the Capitol Theatre is recommended not eligible for the National Register under *Criterion B*.

The loss of historic integrity in the areas of design, materials, and workmanship has impacted the architectural character of the building. The appearance of the Capitol Theatre's façade may be evocative of the Mediterranean Revival style, but there are numerous alterations that reduce its architectural significance. The modified marquee and removal of the blade sign have drastically altered the character-defining features of the 1920s theater building. Furthermore, the altered storefronts, and removal of decorative tilework on the upper portion of the façade pavilion diminishes the exterior integrity of the building. When compared to the façade of the Granada Theatre, another Mediterranean Revival theater built in 1928, the Capitol Theatre does not convey the style as effectively. Furthermore, the interior of the Capitol has been subdivided with the partition walls and new ceiling damaging the original plasterwork and obscuring the original proscenium arch and organ chambers. The interior of the Granada Theatre has similarly been altered, by removal of its auditorium seating and reconfiguration of interior spaces, resulting in a determination of not eligible in 2014. Both of these theaters are in stark contrast to the National Register-listed Uptown (Majestic) Theatre, another Racine neighborhood theater that features a fully intact Period Revival interior. Because of these changes to architectural integrity, the Capitol Theatre is not a distinctive example of a Mediterranean Revival style theater and is recommended not eligible under *Criterion C*.

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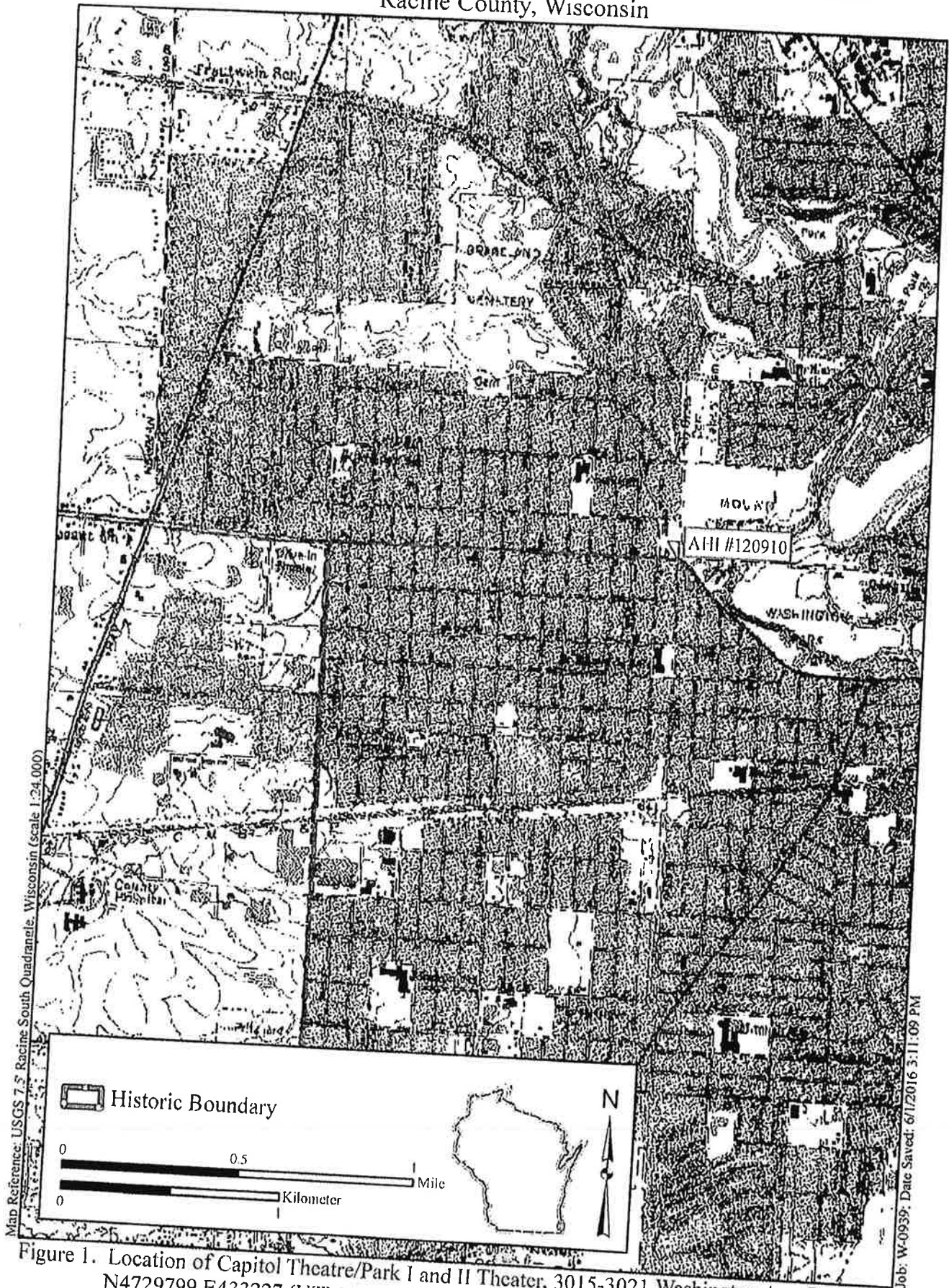


Figure 1. Location of Capitol Theatre/Park I and II Theater, 3015-3021 Washington Ave, Racine, N4729799 E433227 (UTM16N)

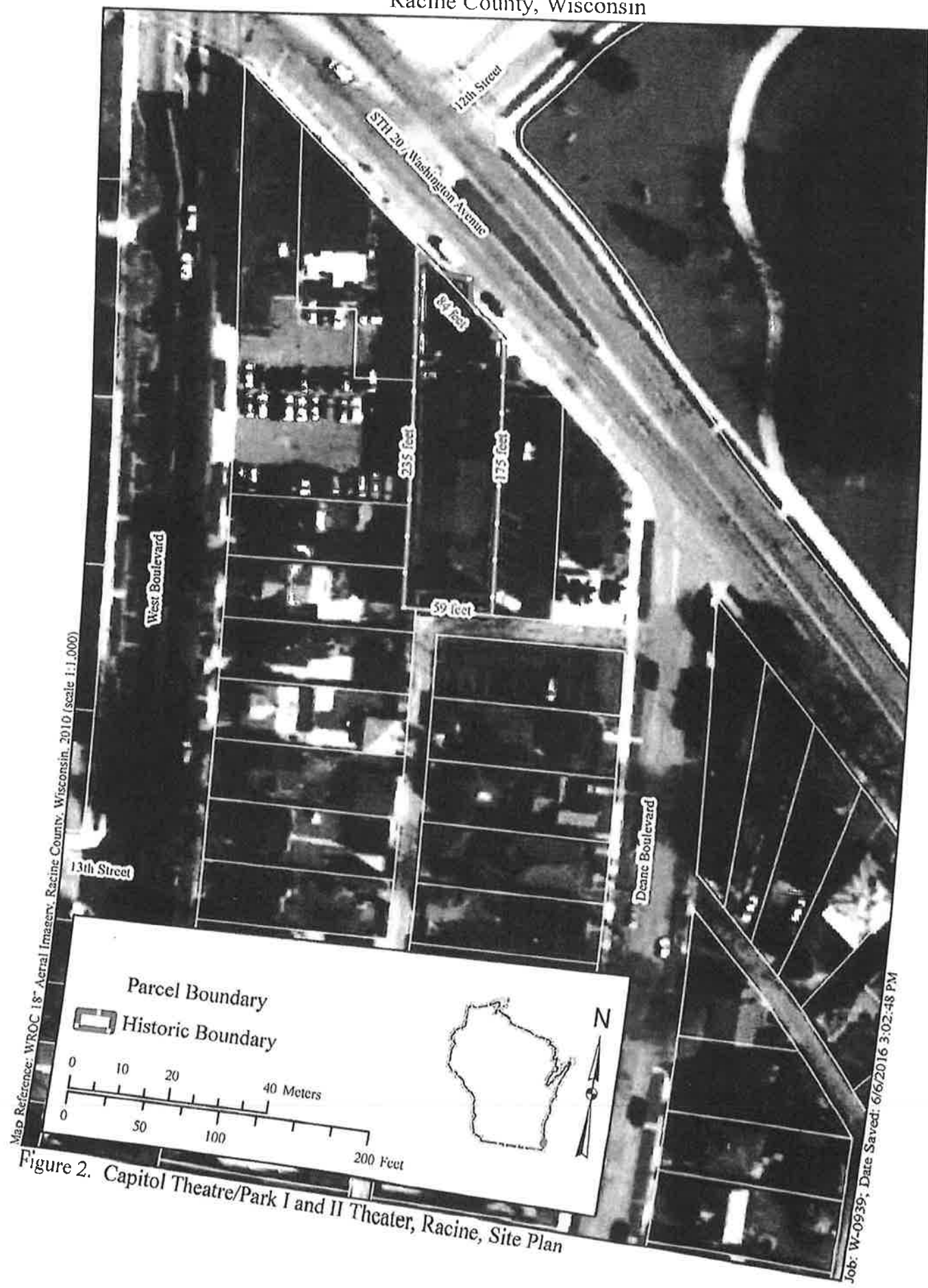
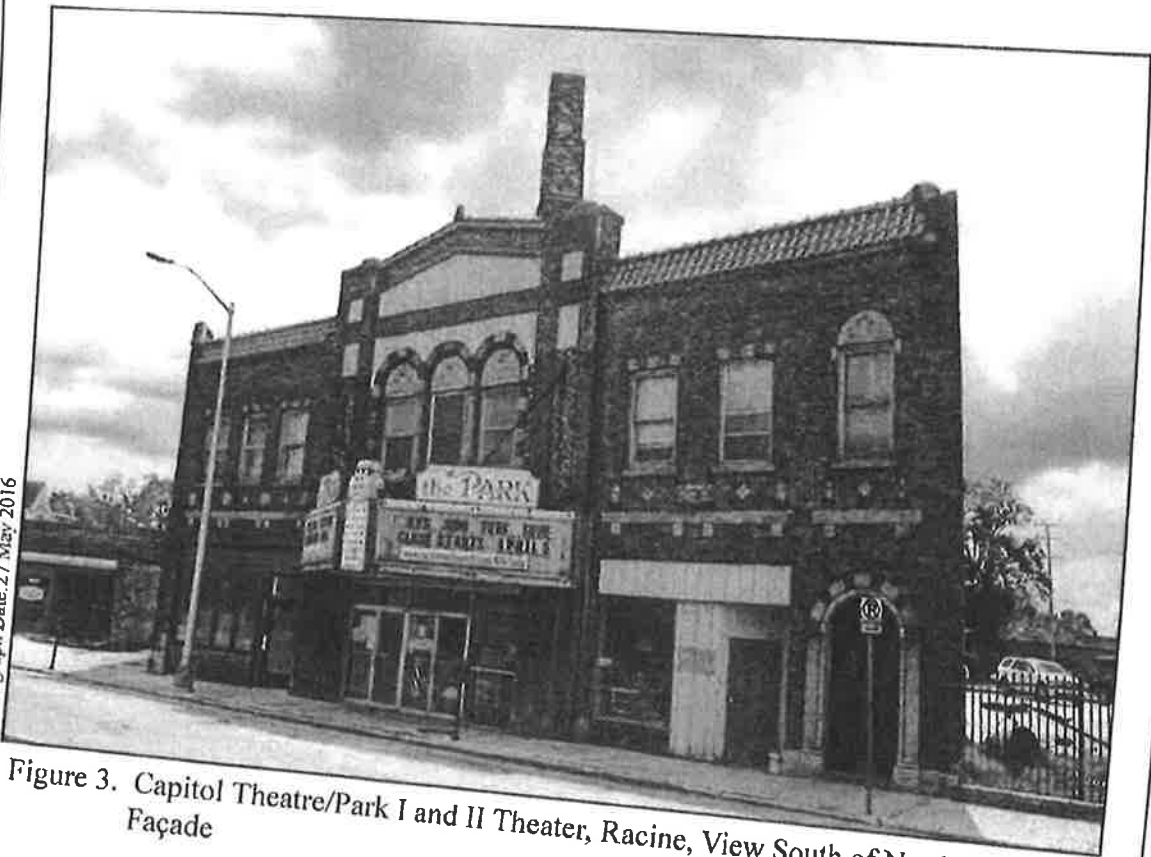


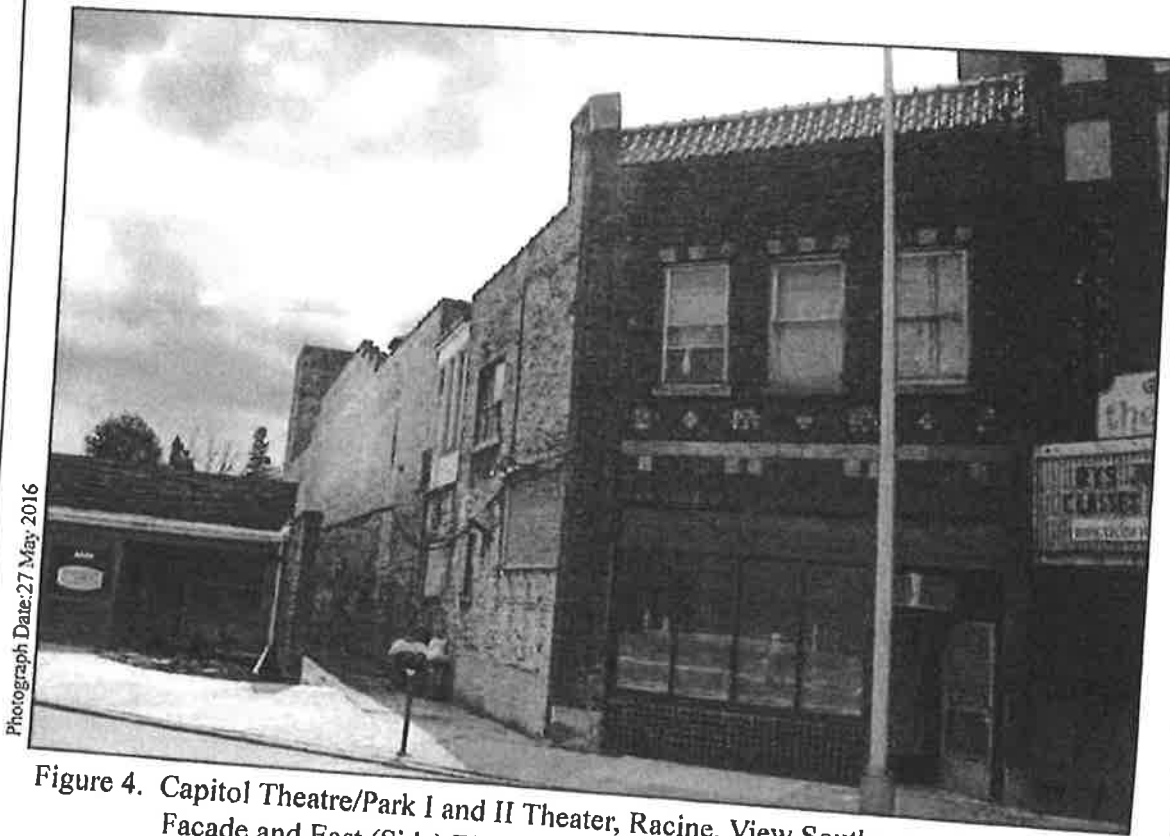
Figure 2. Capitol Theatre/Park I and II Theater, Racine, Site Plan



Photograph Date: 27 May 2016

Figure 3. Capitol Theatre/Park I and II Theater, Racine, View South of North (Front) Façade

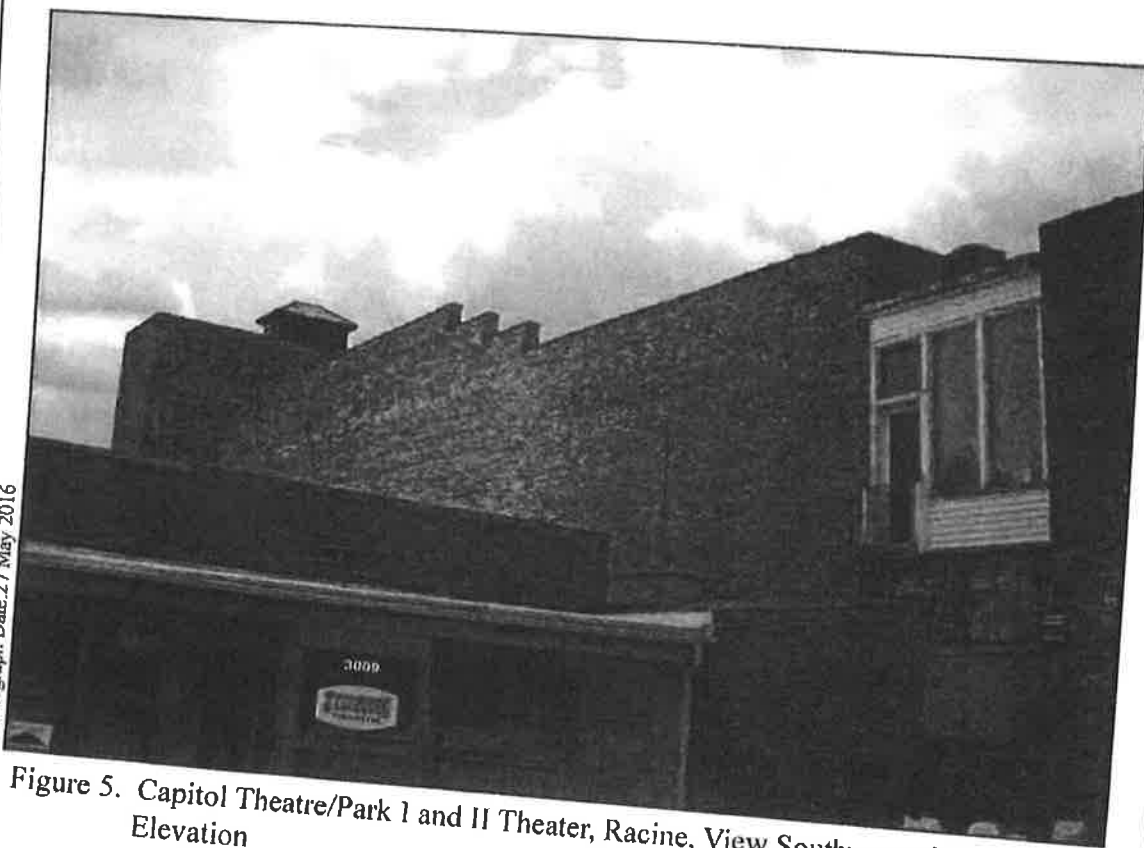
Washington Avenue / STH 20 - Roosevelt Avenue to West Boulevard
Racine County, Wisconsin



Photograph Date: 27 May 2016

Figure 4. Capitol Theatre/Park I and II Theater, Racine, View Southwest of North (Front) Façade and East (Side) Elevation

Washington Avenue / STH 20 - Roosevelt Avenue to West Boulevard
Racine County, Wisconsin



Photograph Date: 27 May 2016

Figure 5. Capitol Theatre/Park I and II Theater, Racine, View Southwest of East (Side)
Elevation

Photograph Date: 27 May 2016

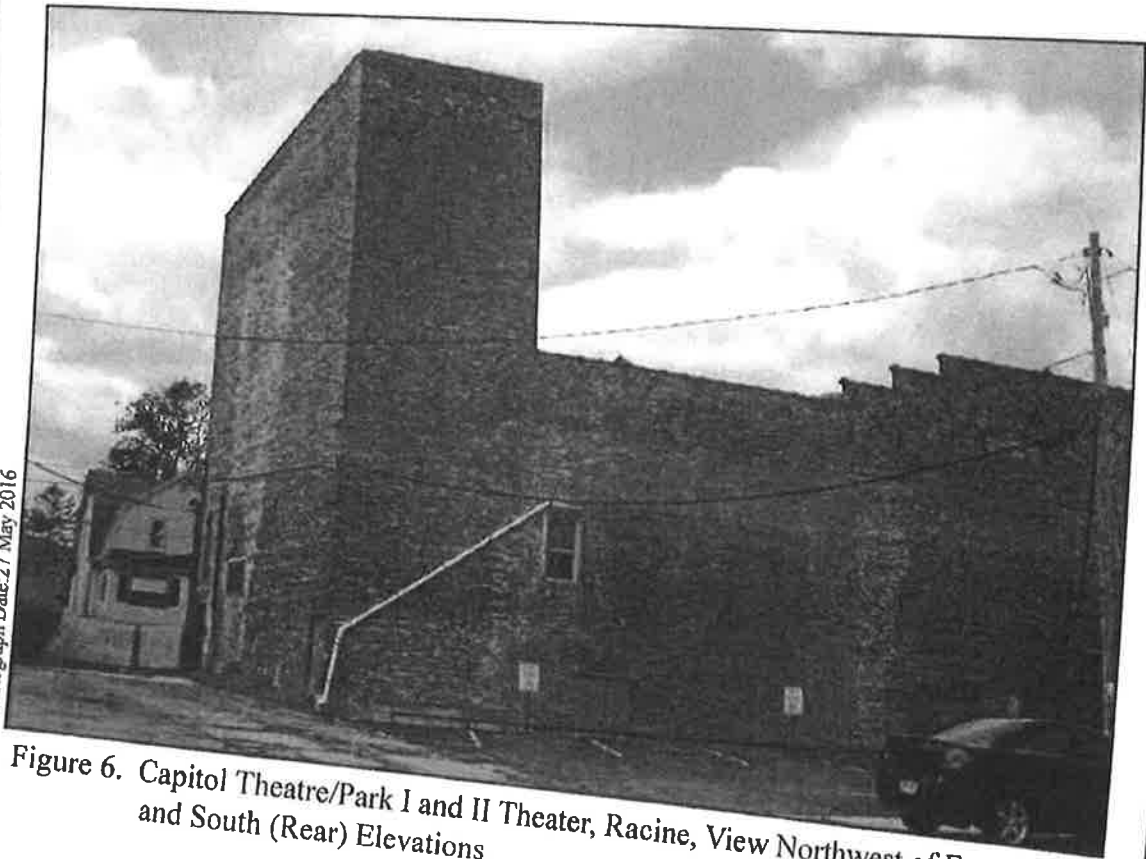


Figure 6. Capitol Theatre/Park I and II Theater, Racine, View Northwest of East (Side) and South (Rear) Elevations

WASHINGTON AVENUE / STH 20 - ROOSEVELT AVENUE TO WEST BOULEVARD
RACINE COUNTY, WISCONSIN

Photograph Date: 27 May 2016

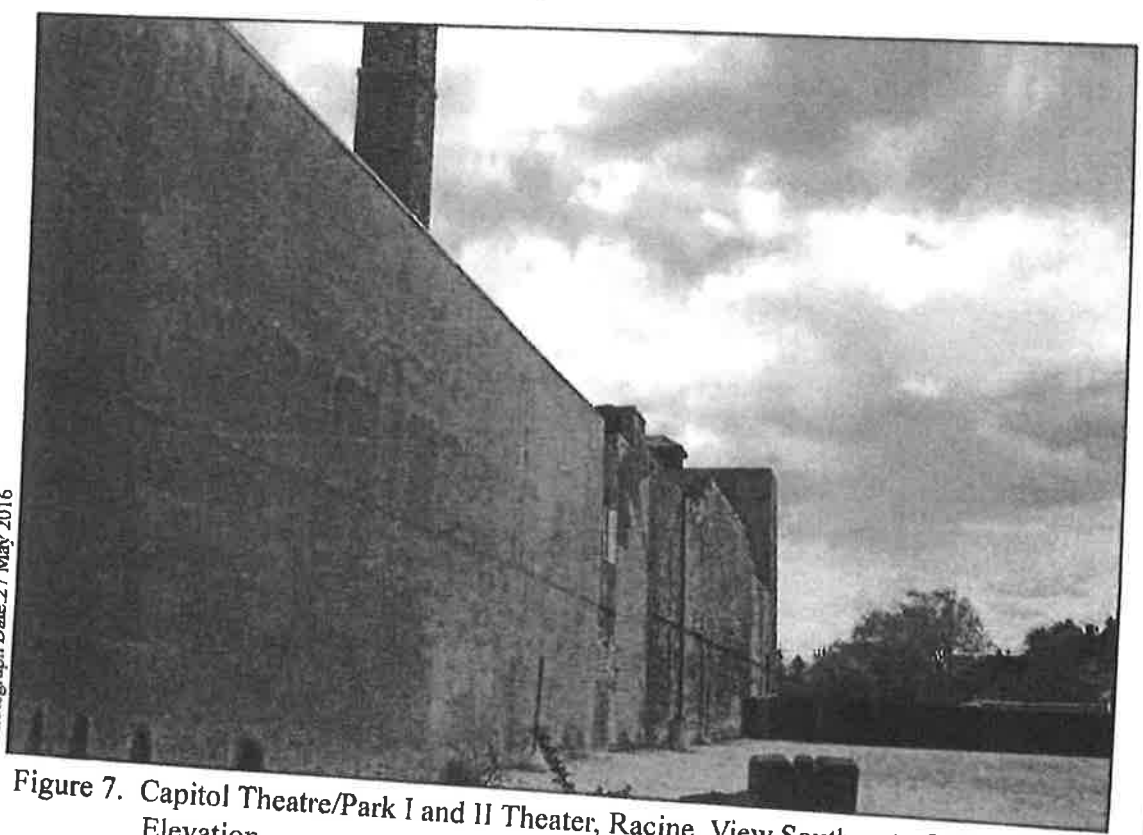
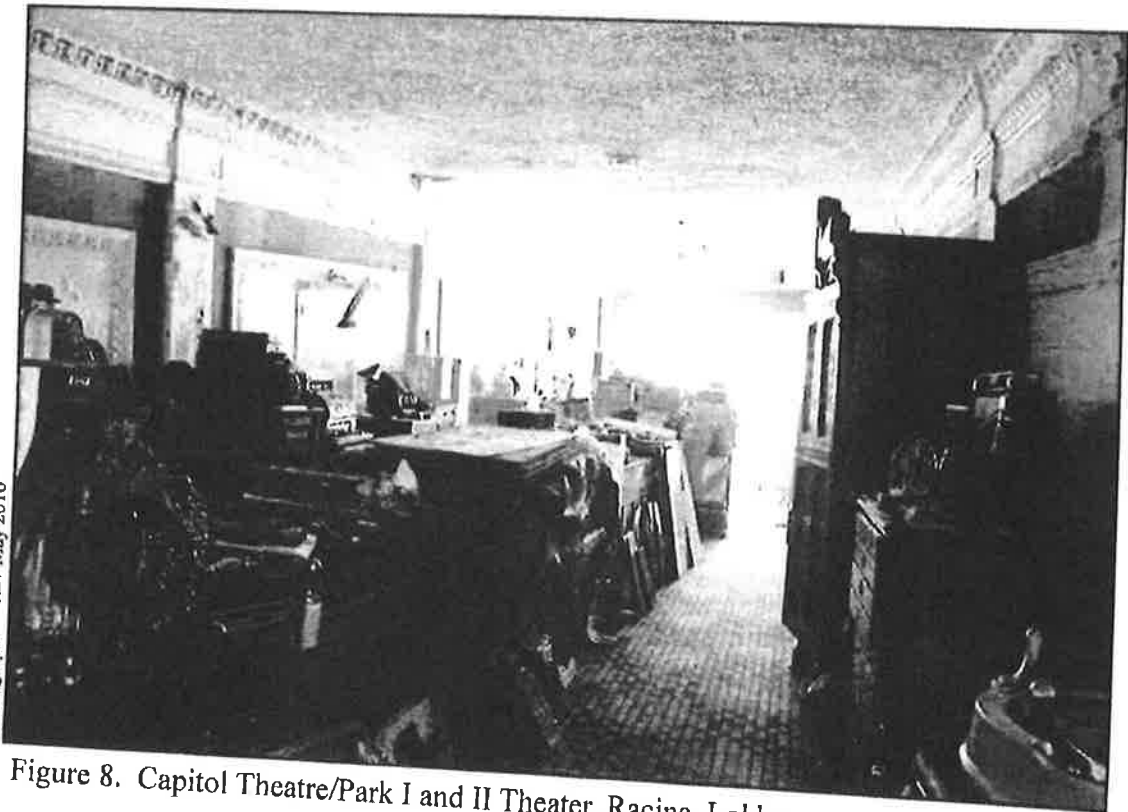


Figure 7. Capitol Theatre/Park I and II Theater, Racine, View Southeast of West (Side) Elevation



Photograph Date: 27 May 2016

Figure 8. Capitol Theatre/Park I and II Theater, Racine, Lobby



Photograph Date: 27 May 2016

Figure 9. Capitol Theatre/Park I and II Theater, Racine, Lobby Wall Detail

Washington Avenue / STH 20 - Roosevelt Avenue to West Boulevard
Racine County, Wisconsin



Photograph Date: 27 May 2016

Figure 10. Capitol Theatre/Park I and II Theater, Racine,
Foyer

Washington Avenue / STH 20 - Roosevelt Avenue to West Boulevard
Racine County, Wisconsin



Photograph Date: 27 May 2016

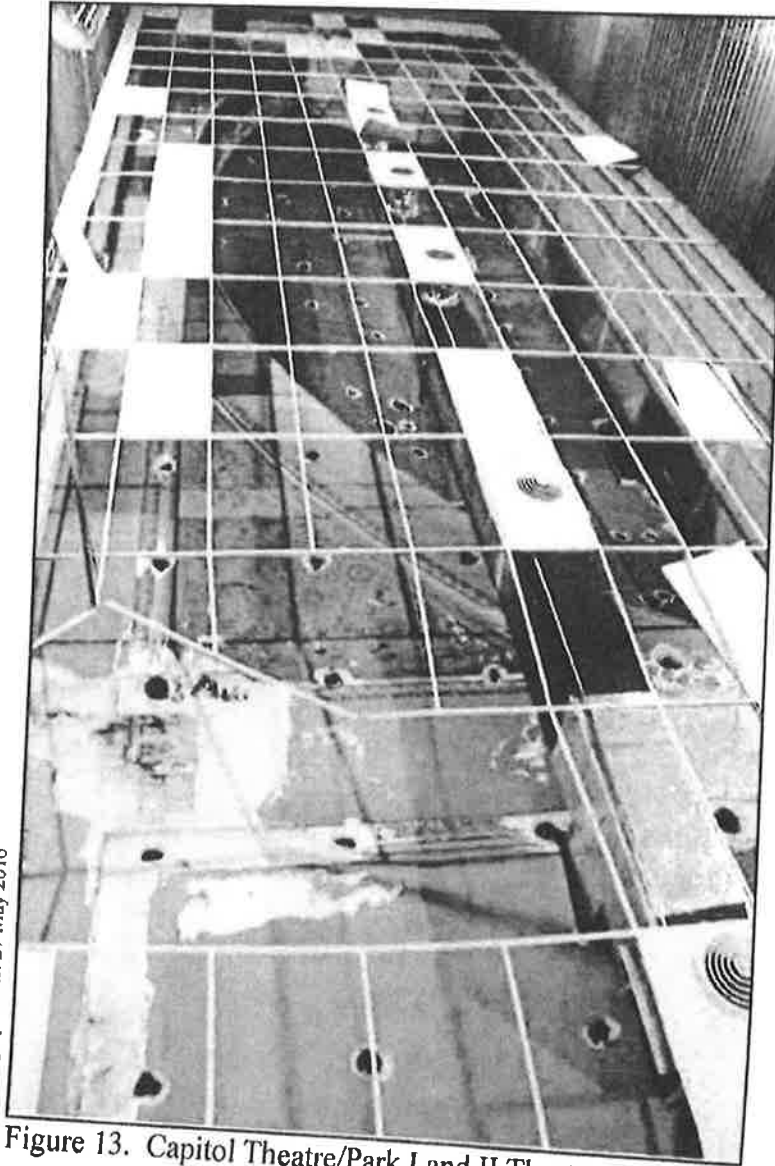
Figure 11. Capitol Theatre/Park I and II Theater, Racine,
View Toward Front of Screening Room

Washington Avenue / STH 20 - Roosevelt Avenue to West Boulevard
Racine County, Wisconsin



Photograph Date: 27 May 2016

Figure 12. Capitol Theatre/Park I and II Theater, Racine, View Toward Rear of Screening Room



Photograph Date: 27 May 2016

Figure 13. Capitol Theatre/Park I and II Theater, Racine,
Auditorium Ceiling

WisDOT ID 2440-09-00
Washington Avenue / STH 20 - Roosevelt Avenue to West Boulevard
Racine County, Wisconsin

Photograph Date: 27 May 2016

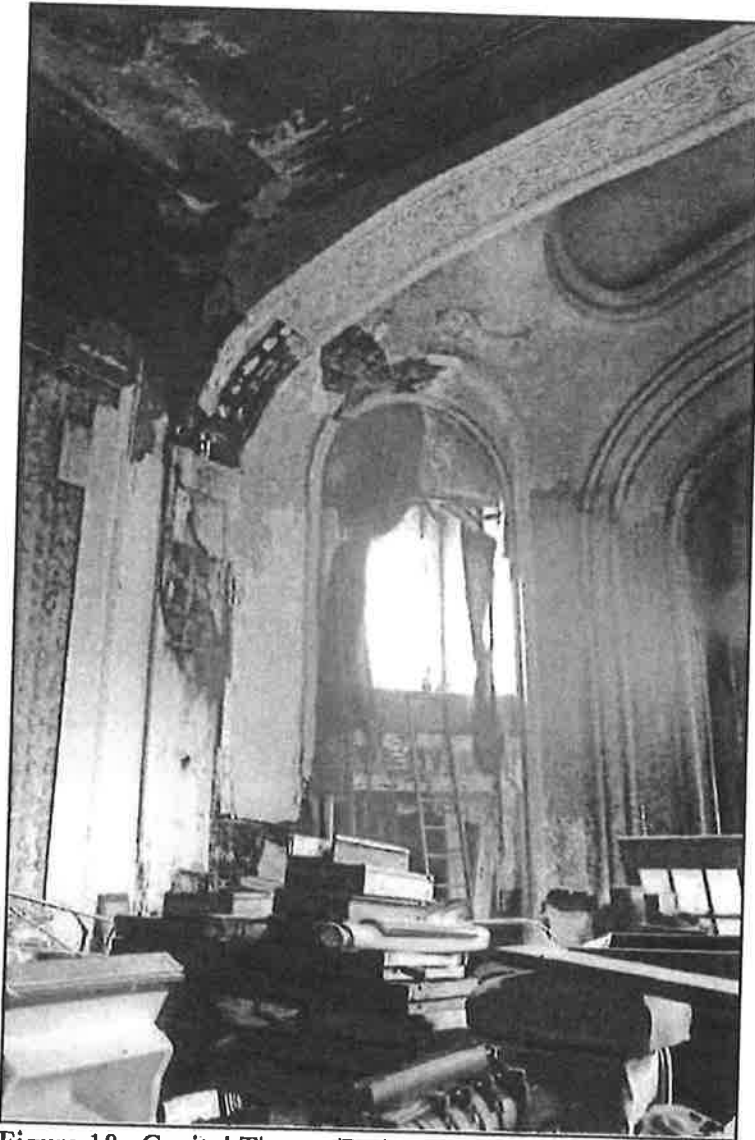
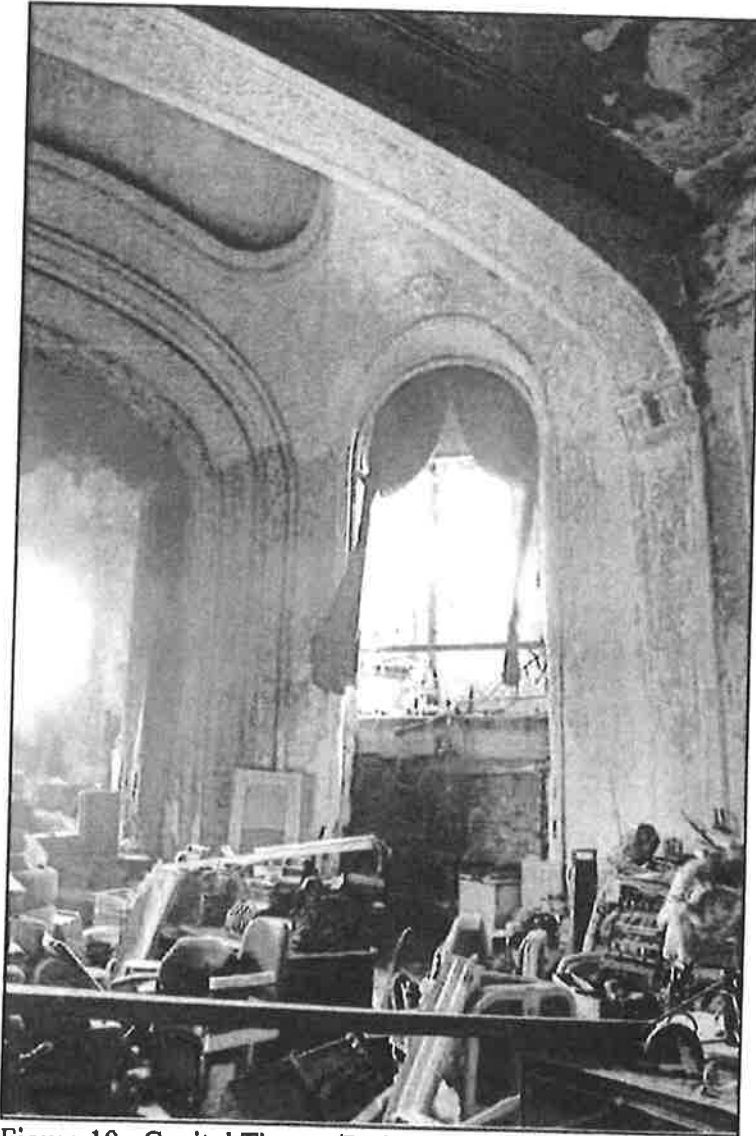
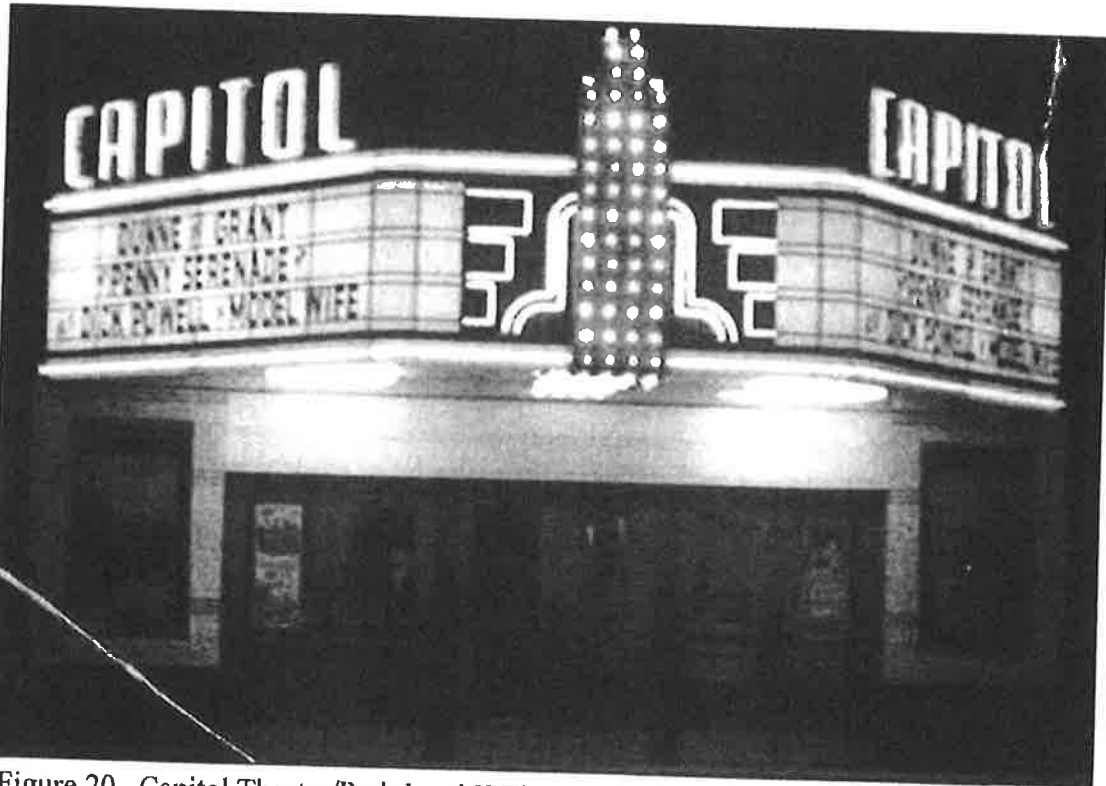


Figure 18. Capitol Theatre/Park I and II Theater, Racine,
Stage Right Opera Box



Photograph Date: 27 May 2016

Figure 19. Capitol Theatre/Park I and II Theater, Racine,
Stage Left Opera Box



Photograph Credit: cinematreaasures.org

Figure 20. Capitol Theatre/Park I and II Theater, Racine, Marquee in 1941

Washington Avenue / STH 20 - Roosevelt Avenue to West Boulevard
Racine County, Wisconsin

Photograph Credit: "Marcus Closes Theater," Racine Journal Times, September 12, 1987



Figure 21. Capitol Theatre/Park I and II Theater, Racine,
Original Marquee and Blade Sign

WisDOT ID 2440-09-00
Washington Avenue / STH 20 - Roosevelt Avenue to West Boulevard
Racine County, Wisconsin



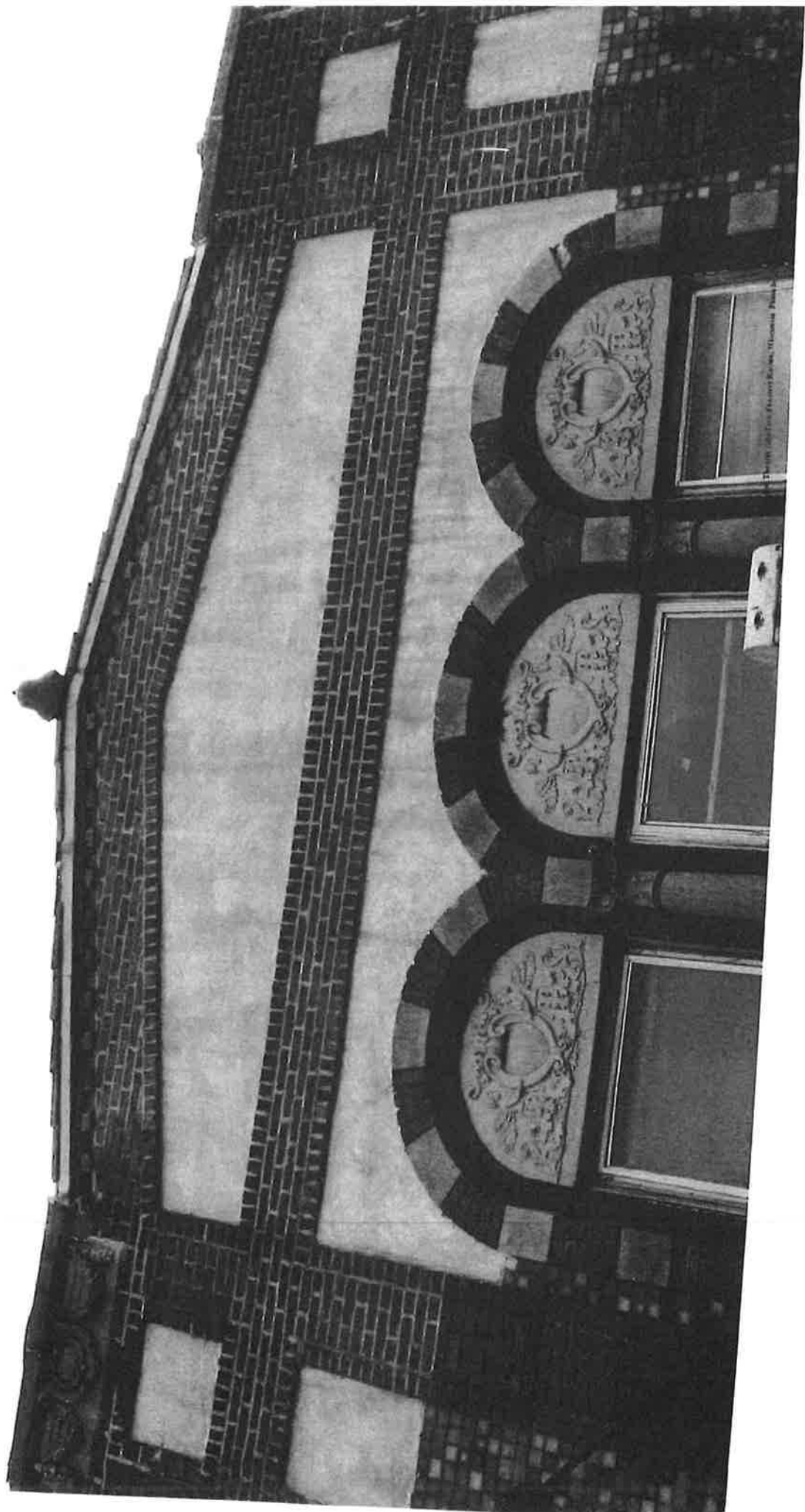
Photograph Date: 27 May 2016

Figure 22. AHI #10770, Granada Theatre, Racine



Photograph Date: 27 May 2016

Figure 15. Capitol Theatre/Park I and II Theater, Racine,
Wall Detail



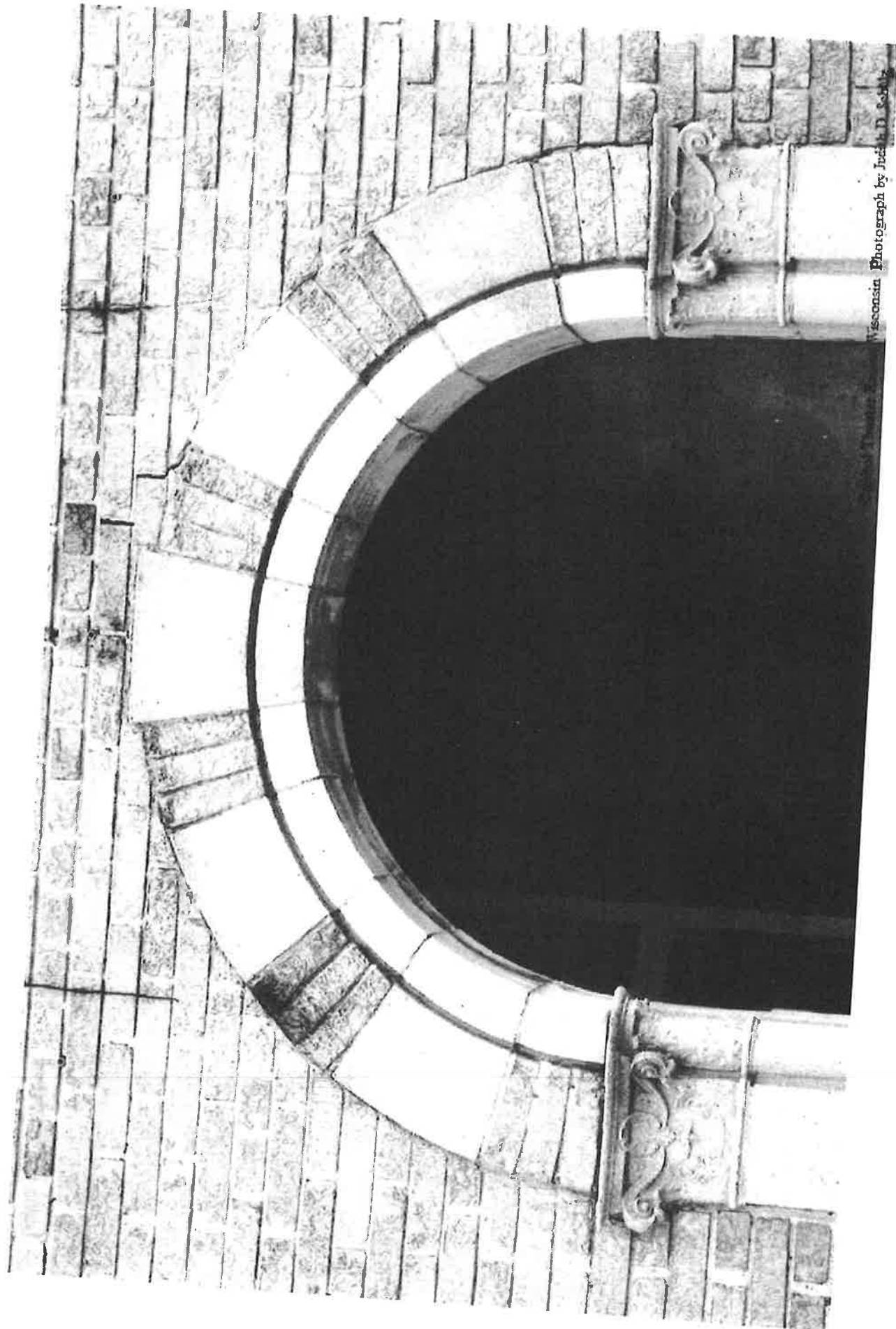


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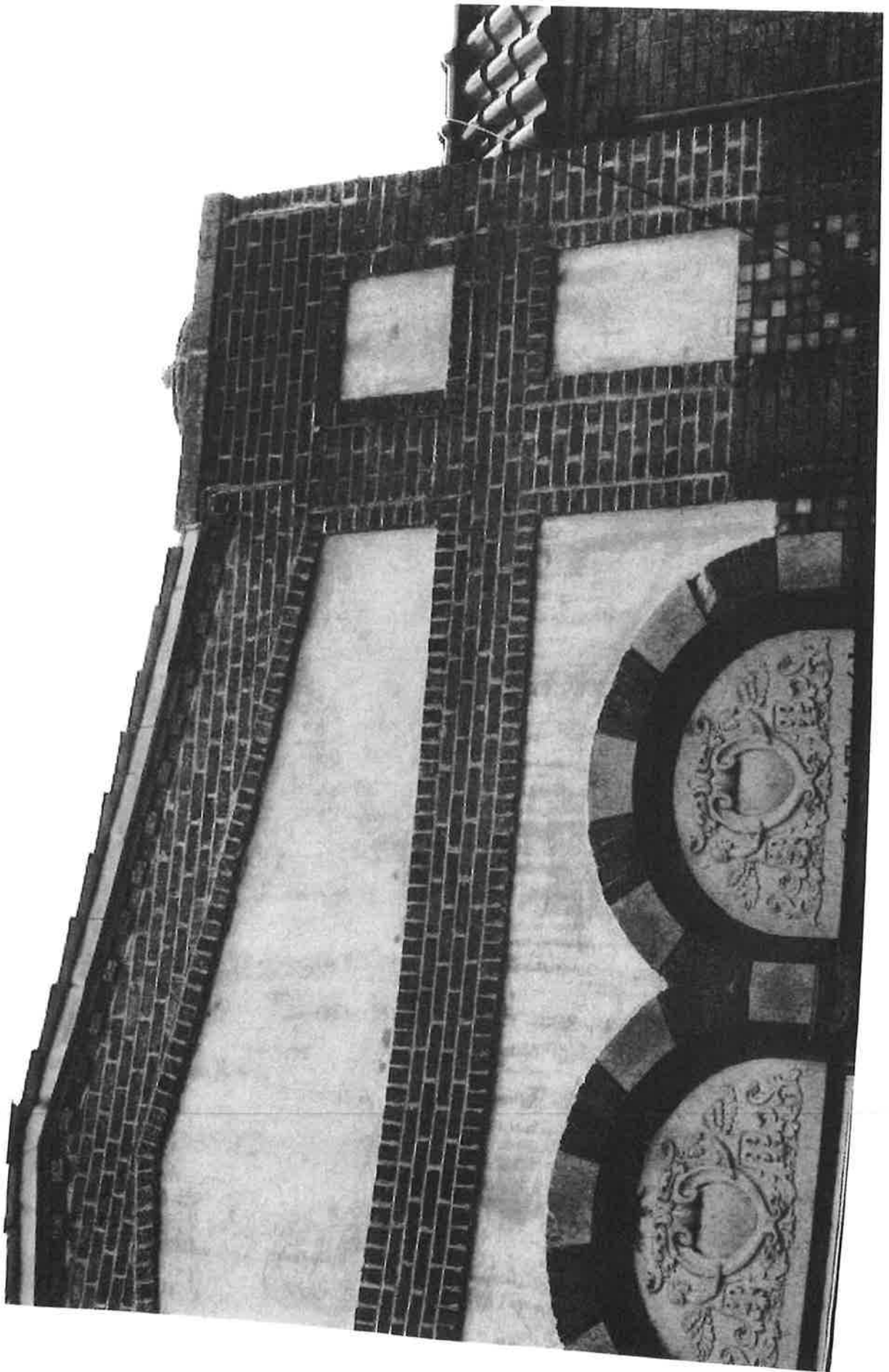
PARK

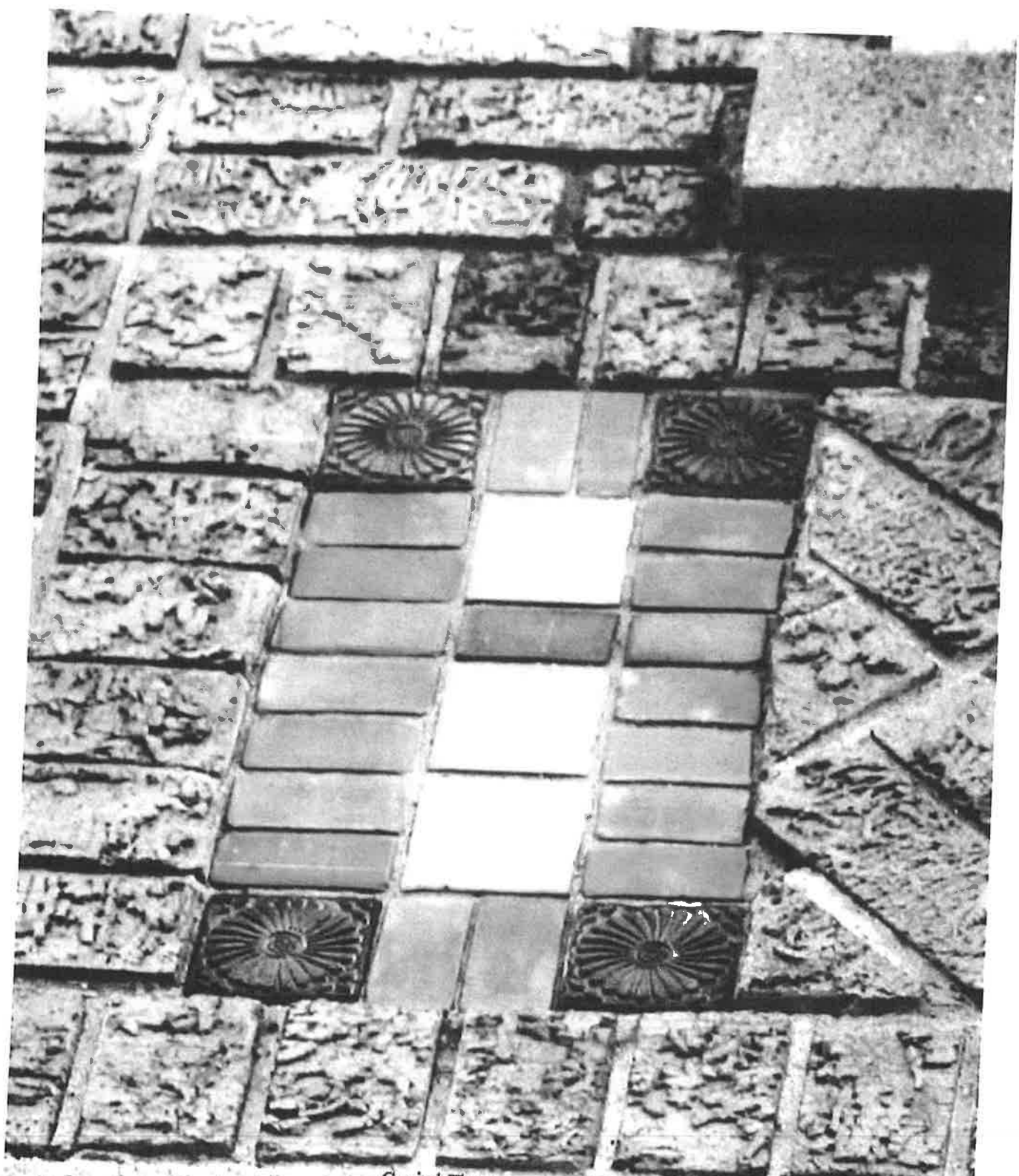
THE PARK THEATRE
CLOSURE FROM 1915

Black & White Photo



Wisconsin Photograph by Judith D. Sisk





Capitol Theater Racine Wisconsin Photograph by Judith D. Schulz