

Darlington Theatre
Name of Property
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Darlington Co., S.C.
County and State

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Darlington Theatre

Other names/site number: Darlington Cinema

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 108 Pearl Street

City or town: Darlington State: SC County: Darlington

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A B X C D

<hr/>	
Signature of certifying official/Title:	Date
<hr/>	
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

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In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.	
_____	_____
Signature of commenting official:	Date
_____	_____
Title :	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ___ entered in the National Register
- ___ determined eligible for the National Register
- ___ determined not eligible for the National Register
- ___ removed from the National Register
- ___ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box.)

- Building(s)
- District

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Site

Structure

Object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

1. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION & CULTURE/theater

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Moderne

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Brick, concrete, stucco, metal, glass, terrazzo, wood

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

At its opening in January 1949, the Darlington Theatre held the distinction of being the only purpose-built movie theater in Darlington, South Carolina, a small town located in the state's northeastern Pee Dee region.¹ The theater features an austere aesthetic consistent with the Moderne style nationally popular during the midcentury era. Situated on Pearl Street two parcels west of its intersection with South Main Street, the three-story asymmetrical building faces south. The building is of masonry brick construction with a stucco façade. The theater's marquee is no longer extant. However, other exterior character-defining features—including a secondary, segregated entrance for Black patrons, a ticket booth, movie poster display cases, and terrazzo entry—remain intact. Inside, the building retains its historic layout including its concession stand, balcony staircase, bathrooms, and auditorium and balcony seating. The building reflects its historic function as an integral recreational landmark within Darlington's downtown commercial district. The neighborhood around the theater includes high-density, medium- and small-scale one-, two-, and three-story commercial and institutional buildings. Having changed relatively

¹ Spelling inconsistencies for the property abound throughout historical references. Though officially named the Darlington Theatre, the property was also often referred to as the "Darlington Theater." To confuse matters, the entity that operated both the Darlington Theatre and the Liberty Theatre a few blocks away carried the name of "Darlington Theaters, Inc." Later, the Darlington Theatre operated as the Darlington Cinema. The word "theatre" will be used as part of the property's formal name, i.e. "The Darlington Theatre." Otherwise, the term will be spelled "theater" when referring to this type of entertainment venue in the generic sense. While not formally defined, the Pee Dee is generally considered to include the following counties: Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon, Florence, Lee, Marion, Marlboro, and Williamsburg. The coastal counties of Horry and Georgetown are sometimes also considered part of the region. The region takes its name from the Pee Dee river system that flows through central North Carolina and northeastern South Carolina. Eldred E. Prince Jr., "Pee Dee River," *South Carolina Encyclopedia*, accessed September 27, 2023, <https://www.scencyclopedia.org/sce/entries/pee-dee-river/>.

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little since its opening in 1949, the Darlington Theatre retains historic integrity and conveys its associations with Moderne architecture and the history of post-World War II entertainment and recreation in Darlington, South Carolina.

Narrative Description

Begun in May 1948 and opened in January 1949, the Darlington Theatre building features an austere aesthetic representative of the Moderne architectural movement that experienced national popularity from the mid-1930s through the immediate post-World War II years [Photo 1, Figure 2].² Situated on Pearl Street two parcels west of its intersection with South Main Street, the L-shaped, three-story, 6,716-square-foot, brick masonry building stands in the largely commercial downtown area.³ With its minimally ornamented stucco facade and asymmetrical storefront, the theater stands out as an unusual Moderne addition to a streetscape comprised of late-nineteenth and earlier twentieth-century small- and medium-scale, one-, two-, and three-story commercial and institutional buildings [Photo 27]. The theater building has changed very little since its construction and since the end of its period of significance in 1973. The Darlington Theatre building retains integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association (discussed in greater detail below), and continues to convey its significant associations with Moderne architecture and the history of entertainment and recreation in Darlington.

South Elevation

The theater faces south and fronts Pearl Street. The property's asymmetrical facade consists of a dynamic storefront level surmounted by two austere stories characterized by horizontal and vertical fields defined by deep v-grooves in the stucco finish and four small windows [Photo 1]. A marquee that once extended from the façade above the entrance was removed at an undetermined time, but prior to 1988.⁴ On the west side of the elevation are two rectangular recesses for movie display posters. The westernmost recess is missing its glass and aluminum frame, exposing the brick wall [Photo 3]. To the east of those two poster recesses is the central recessed entrance, which features an exterior terrazzo floor laid in a curvilinear pattern that terminates into two pairs of single-lite, aluminum frame doors [Photo 2]. The doors are set at an angle that creates an offset entryway. Glass movie poster display cases with aluminum frames once flanked each side of the central entrance on the east and west facing walls, however only the eastern frame remains. The western frame has been removed, exposing wood framing behind it [Photos 2 & 3]. Adjacent to the central entrance is the three-sided ticket booth, which features

² "Construction on Darlington Theater Begins," *Florence Morning News*, May 26, 1948, 8; "Darlington Movie Plans Opening in Mid-November," *State*, September 26, 1948, 3; "New Darlington Theater Plans Opening Jan. 10," *State*, December 31, 1948, 11; "New Darlington Theater to Hold Official Opening," *State*, January 12, 1949, 9.

³ "108 Pearl St.," DDRA Darlington Downtown Revitalization Association, accessed July 26, 2023, <https://www.buildupdarlington.org/properties/detail/2738>. The main floor of the theater measures 5,000 square feet while the upstairs measures 1,700 square feet. The property's tax map number is 164-14-02-052.

⁴ Classified Advertisement, *Florence Morning News*, October 16, 1988, 82. At the time this advertisement ran, the building no longer featured its signature marquee, based on a photograph that accompanied the commercial real estate advertisement for the vacant former theater.

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vertical glazing [Photos 2 & 5]. At the east end of the elevation is the theater's former segregated entrance for Black patrons [Photo 5]. The segregated entrance's original door has been replaced with a six-panel pressed metal door. The theater's primary recessed entrance has a terrazzo floor laid in a rectilinear pattern [Photo 4].

The second and third stories are comprised of a field of stucco incised with v-grooves [Photos 1 & 6]. The resulting pattern is a central section of three vertically oriented rectangular panels, with a wider center panel, flanked on each side by four horizontal rectangular panels stacked on top of a square panel. Located on the second floor within the central field of rectangular panels is a pair of two-over-two-lite windows with concrete sills. These windows are not original, as they are not present on blueprints and artist's renderings from 1948 through 1949 [Figures 2 & 3], and they likely post-date 1989.⁵ The bottom two panes of the western window have been removed for the installation of a window HVAC unit set within a wood panel. The third story features two pairs of modern, stationary shutters installed over the theater's two original ventilators, which are located in the middle of the two narrow vertical rectangular stucco panels. The façade's stepped parapet roof features a simple concrete cornice. A small parapet wing protrudes from each side of the façade, slightly overlapping the rooflines of the two adjacent buildings.

East Elevation

Except for the roofline and a blank portion of the northern quarter of the second story, the theater's east elevation is largely obscured by a contiguous building to the east with which it shares a common wall [Figure 11].⁶ The visible parts of this elevation are red and brown brick laid in four-course American bond. Like its west elevation, the east elevation features a stepped parapet capped in camelback terra cotta tiles. The roof is made of a tarred membrane.

North Elevation

The building's north, or rear, elevation is made of red and brown brick laid in four-course American bond [Photo 23]. The elevation is comprised of the rear wall of the theater to the east, and the rear wall of the boiler room ell to the west. The boiler room is slightly shorter than the main volume of the building. The first floor of the theater section features a single doorway infilled with concrete block on the eastern end and a recessed single pedestrian doorway with a two-panel, red-painted wood door at the western end. Near the top of the theater section, between the two doorways, are two windows that are covered in five-v crimp metal panels. The boiler room features a single pedestrian doorway covered in plywood at its east end and a single window that has been filled with concrete blocks to the east of the doorway. A rusted galvanized gutter system with three downspouts runs the length of the rear elevation.

West Elevation & Boiler Room South Elevation

⁵ Classified Advertisement, *Florence Morning News*, October 16, 1988, 82; Classified Advertisement, *Florence Morning News*, January 15, 1989, 74. Based on the illustrated advertisement from October and the subsequent advertisement run in January 1989 the windows were installed sometime after mid-January 1989.

⁶ Google Earth image is provided to illustrate this elevation, as the perspective could not be captured through ground photography.

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The building's west elevation is also laid in four-course American bond red and brown brick. The west elevation features an ell on its northern aspect that accounts for the theater's former boiler room [Figure 12].⁷ A tall chimney projects from the roof of the boiler room. This boiler room's second story west elevation features a field of concrete block infill. The boiler room's south elevation is composed of solid brick masonry. Topped with camelback terra cotta tiles, the theater's parapet projects slightly above the contiguous two-story building to the west, with which it shares a common wall.

Interior

The theater's interior retains its historic character and floor plan [Figures 3-5]. The theater's north-facing lobby retains its original concession stand [Photo 7], curvilinear staircase leading to the balcony level [Photo 10], and doors leading into the auditorium [Photo 8], the ladies' restroom and lounge [Photo 9], a storage room contiguous to the staircase to the balcony [Photo 11], and men's restroom. The theater's auditorium faces north toward the remnants of a raised proscenium stage that has collapsed due to rot. No proscenium arch or movie screen remains, and the theater's rear masonry wall is devoid of any finishes. The format of the theater's staggered auditorium seating consists of a wide central section of seven chairs flanked by sections of three chairs located across aisles to the west and east [Photos 14-17]. The floor is concrete. The balcony level, originally designed for Black patrons, retains its seating, a tubular safety railing, and wood floors [Photos 19-21]. Seating on both levels retains its historic Moderne aesthetic, with curved, streamline armrests. The original ceiling height of the theater's auditorium is visible where a subsequently installed drop ceiling has deteriorated [Photo 22]. No original historic decorative treatments remain, although the plaster walls retain fiberglass acoustical panels installed in 1965. Due to safety concerns, neither the former boiler room nor projection room were accessible during site visits.⁸

Integrity

The Darlington Theatre retains integrity of location as the building has not been moved from the site on which it was constructed and from which it historically operated. The property retains integrity of setting, as it remains proximal to historic governmental and commercial buildings present during its time in service as a movie theater. Except for missing its marquee, the building's exterior retains all architectural facets that convey the building's design as a Moderne style theater, including the scored stucco façade, asymmetrical storefront level, terrazzo flooring, ticket booth and movie display cases, and a segregated entrance for Black moviegoers. Despite moderate changes, including the addition of a drop ceiling, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning duct work, and fiberglass acoustical tiles, the building nonetheless retains integrity of design and materials. Its retained design includes elements germane to its years as a segregated recreational facility in the Jim Crow South, namely its secondary entrance, staircase, and balcony. The retention of so much of the building's physical fabric continues to convey its

⁷ Google Earth image is provided to illustrate this elevation, as the perspective could not be captured through ground photography.

⁸ The surviving blueprints for the Darlington Theatre do not offer details about the second-story layout of the theater beyond the balcony seating and the continuation of the lobby staircase that accessed it. [Figures 3-5]. Consequently, the historic character of the building's projection room and bathroom accommodation for Black patrons, if there were any, remains speculative.

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feeling and association as a mid-20th-century movie theater. Despite a heightened level of deterioration in some of the wooden aspects of the theater's interior due to roof failure and high moisture conditions, the overall integrity of the building remains intact.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

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ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION
ARCHITECTURE

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Period of Significance

1949-1973

Significant Dates

1949

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Stillwell, Erle G.
R.K. Stewart & Son

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Darlington Theatre is significant at the local level under Criterion A: Entertainment/Recreation and Criterion C: Architecture, with a period of significance of 1949-1973. The period of significance starts with the theater's opening in 1949 and ends in 1973, during an extended temporary closure. Although the theater re-opened in 1975 and operated until 1983, its history within the last fifty years is not exceptionally significant. This rare example of Moderne architecture in Darlington played an important role in local entertainment and recreation from 1949 until 1973. Upon its debut in January 1949, the Darlington Theatre stood as the city's first purpose-built movie theater. The design blends a Moderne aesthetic predicated on decorative austerity with design facets peculiar to maintaining the status quo of Jim Crow segregation. Despite its originally segregated policies, the Darlington Theatre was an important source of local entertainment during its years of operation, open to Black and white residents alike and serving as the town's only movie theater after 1956. It was temporarily shut down in 1973 following theater managers' challenges to state Blue Laws and obscenity laws, with owners seeking to maximize profits by opening seven days a week and adding adult-themed movies to

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its late-night offerings. The Darlington Theatre bears the distinction of being the sole surviving historic movie theater in Darlington as well as one of the best expressions of Moderne architecture in Darlington.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The Darlington Theatre is significant at the local level under Criterion A: Entertainment/Recreation and Criterion C: Architecture, with a period of significance of 1949-1973. The period of significance starts with the theater's opening in 1949 and ends in 1973, during an extended temporary closure. Although the theater re-opened in 1975 and operated until 1983, its history within the last fifty years is not exceptionally significant. This rare example of Moderne architecture in Darlington played an important role in local entertainment and recreation from 1949 until 1973. Upon its debut in January 1949, the Darlington Theatre stood as the city's first purpose-built movie theater. The design blends a Moderne aesthetic predicated on decorative austerity with design facets peculiar to maintaining the status quo of Jim Crow segregation. Despite its originally segregated policies, the Darlington Theatre was an important source of local entertainment during its years of operation, open to Black and white residents alike and serving as the town's only movie theater after 1956. It was temporarily shut down in 1973 following theater managers' challenges to state Blue Laws and obscenity laws, with owners seeking to maximize profits by opening seven days a week and adding adult-themed movies to its late-night offerings. The Darlington Theatre bears the distinction of being the sole surviving historic movie theater in Darlington as well as one of the best expressions of Moderne architecture in Darlington.

Darlington Background

The seat of Darlington County, the city of Darlington is located within South Carolina's Pee Dee region, which draws its name from a principal river system that drains the northeastern portion of the state and empties into the Atlantic Ocean at Winyah Bay, near Georgetown, S.C.⁹ The city's current population is about 5,900 people. The town was founded in 1785 when former residents of the Mechanicsville and Cuffey Town settlements erected a courthouse on a bluff overlooking Swift Creek, which runs through the northwest side of today's downtown Darlington.¹⁰ Under the new town's plan, the courthouse and public square acted as a hub for development and the major transportation routes of Main, Pearl, and Cashua streets. Like other rural towns throughout South Carolina, Darlington grew under an agricultural economy based on the production of cotton through enslaved labor. By 1856, Darlington was connected to other parts of the state through rail service, but within a decade, Federal forces destroyed the town's depot and trestles during the waning months of the Civil War. Immediately following the war, Darlington became the headquarters of the Third Separate Brigade of the Military District of South Carolina and a local headquarters for the Freedmen's Bureau. Not long thereafter, in 1866 a major fire destroyed

⁹ For more on the Pee Dee River, see Eldred E. Prince, Jr., "The Pee Dee River," *South Carolina Encyclopedia*, <https://www.scencyclopedia.org/sce/entries/pee-dee-river/>.

¹⁰ Alexia Jones Helsley, "Darlington," *South Carolina Encyclopedia*, last updated July 21, 2022, <https://www.scencyclopedia.org/sce/entries/darlington/>.

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the county courthouse and a significant portion of the town square. The Federal government's removal of soldiers in 1871 and the ultimate end of Reconstruction by 1877 ended a brief but notable period of local Black political power and activity. By the 1880s, Darlington had largely returned to its antebellum status quo in which white citizens circumscribed the lives of their Black counterparts.¹¹

After reasserting political control over the county, many white Darlingtonians financially rebounded, experiencing prosperity from cotton production during the remainder of the nineteenth century. However, by 1899, bright leaf tobacco supplanted cotton as the area's cash crop. Following this shift, Darlington ultimately became South Carolina's largest tobacco market.¹²

Darlington experienced significant changes during this crop transition and from the introduction of new industries into the area. Construction at the turn of the twentieth century resulted in several notable additions to the townscape. In November 1901, a new town hall and opera house—designed by architect Frank P. Milburn, noted for his work with the South Carolina State House—opened to patrons eager to attend shows; this building later housed the Liberty Theatre and is no longer extant. A year later, in 1902, white students attending the segregated St. John's School benefited from new facilities. In 1904, residents witnessed the debut of a new courthouse. But, this spate of infrastructural improvement proved fleeting, as a little more than a decade later, an agricultural recession during the First World War ushered in a period of economic hardship. With farmers leaving the fields for greater opportunity elsewhere, a considerable number of rural workers migrated to Darlington to pursue jobs in various manufacturing and processing plants. Between 1920 and 1930, Darlington's population grew 19% from 4,669 to 5,556 residents—with many of the new arrivals working in the town's three lumber companies, its school desk factory, its canning factory, its Coca Cola and Pepsi bottling plants, its cotton mill, and its tobacco stemmery. By the onset of the Great Depression in the fall of 1929, the town also boasted paved streets, restaurants, and a handful of new churches. Although a major fire in March 1930 destroyed all the buildings on the south side of the town square, business leaders quickly rebuilt the charred stretch, erecting eleven new replacements. Federal relief through the Works Progress Administration produced further landmark buildings, including a county jail, a National Guard Armory, and a new gymnasium.¹³ In 1938, the construction of the Dixie-Vortex (later rebranded as Dixie Cup) plant added a Moderne and Art Deco-inspired factory to the landscape.¹⁴ On the eve of the United States' entry into World War II, Darlington had evolved into a town with notable buildings and recreational amenities that included playgrounds, a city park, a country

¹¹ Staci Richey, "Southeast Darlington Historic Resource Survey," Columbia, SC: Access Preservation, August 31, 2022, 5, 7-8.

¹² "History of Darlington," City of Darlington South Carolina, accessed July 13, 2023, <https://www.cityofdarlington.com/history-of-darlington/>.

¹³ Richey, "Southeast Darlington Historic Resource Survey," 13, 18. "Darlington Seeks to Preserve Its Landmarks," *Florence Morning News*, "Discover Darlington" section, p. 14-15.

¹⁴ "History of Darlington," City of Darlington South Carolina. "New Darlington Plants Plans Open on March 1," *Florence Morning News*, February 25, 1938, p. 6.

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club for golf, and social clubs.¹⁵ For many residents, attending motion picture shows ranked among the most popular of recreational attractions.¹⁶

Criterion A: Entertainment/Recreation

Movie going had been a favorite pastime for many Darlington residents and visitors as early as 1909, when the city's first theater, the Bijou, opened. A host of successor movie houses followed, many of which operated out of renovated spaces under new names, as was the trend throughout the nation in the early 20th century. These earlier theaters presumably either offered segregated seating to Black patrons similar to what was later found at Darlington Theatre or excluded African Americans altogether. One exception was a theater that operated elsewhere on Pearl Street for a time and catered to Black residents.¹⁷ Although movie going was a popular form of recreation, Darlington's population was too small to support multiple theaters, and by 1935 the town boasted only one theater—the Liberty Theatre (demolished in 1965), a popular 639-seat venue housed at the corner of Orange and North Main streets. The Liberty opened in the historic City Hall/Opera House in 1915, and in 1935 the Wilby-Kincey Theatres corporation purchased partial interest in the Liberty and consolidated it into its regional chain of over 1,500 theaters.¹⁸ However, in mid-April 1948, Sam Irvin [Figure 8], president of Darlington Theatres, Inc.—the partner corporation that managed the Liberty—announced the future construction of a new, purpose-built theater that would be located at 108 Pearl Street.¹⁹ This exciting project was a natural business move for Darlington Theatres, Inc., which enjoyed brisk patronage at the Liberty following a comprehensive remodeling of the building shortly after its acquisition in 1935. For Wilby-Kincey, Darlington's post-World War II population increase, which experienced 6.1% growth from to include 6,615 residents by 1950, promised greater movie patronage to support a second theater.²⁰

¹⁵ Richey, "Southeast Darlington Historic Resource Survey," 18.

¹⁶ Rubye Arnold, "Veteran Darlington Movie Operator Sees Business Grow into Giant Over Forty Years," *Florence Morning News*, January 8, 1950, 3B.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ "Darlington Theater Linked with Chain," *State*, August 19, 1935, 3; "Veteran Darlington Movie Operator Sees Business Grow into Giant Over Forty Years," *Florence Morning News*, January 8, 1950, 3B; "Demise of A City Hall Brings Mixes Emotions to Darlington," *Florence Morning News*, February 28, 1965, 5.

¹⁹ "Sam Irvin to Manage Darlington Theater," *State*, December 7, 1947, 12; "New Theatre at Darlington Soon to Be Constructed," *Florence Morning News*, April 17, 1948, 7. In 1947, Columbia, S.C. movie theater franchise owner and war veteran Sam Irvin, and his father, Warren Irvin, the district manager for Wilby-Kincey's South Carolina and North Carolina properties, purchased the Liberty Theatre from George Hendrickson, owner of Darlington Theatres, Inc. Shortly thereafter, in January 1948, Sam Irvin relocated from Columbia to Darlington to assume the theater's management.

²⁰ "Remember When: Partners in 'Show Biz' Take a Nostalgic Look Back," *State*, May 30, 1976, 2B; "Spotlight On: Darlington & Liberty Theaters," Darlington County Historical Commission & Museum, accessed July 22, 2023, <https://dchcblog.net/2017/06/10/spotlight-on-darlington-liberty-theaters/>; "Liberty Theatre," Cinema Treasures, accessed July 22, 2023, <https://cinematreasures.org/theaters/39646>; Helsley, "Darlington"; "1950 Census: Population of South Carolina by Counties, April 1, 1950," United States Census Bureau, accessed July 13, 2023, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1950/pc-02/pc-2-14.pdf>. Between 1940 and 1950, Darlington County experienced a 10.6% increase (from 49,198 residents to 50,003 residents) while the town of Darlington experienced a 6.1% increase (from 6,236 residents to 6,615 residents).

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The new Darlington Theatre would offer an entirely modern experience thanks to its design rendered by architect Erle G. Stillwell, renowned for his substantial portfolio of Wilby-Kincey theaters, whose designs ranged from Eclectic Revival to Art Deco to Streamline Moderne. In fact, at the time Irvin made his announcement of the new theater's pending construction, Stillwell was engaged in the construction of "three deluxe theaters in Charlotte, Columbia, and Greenville."²¹ Under Stillwell's instruction, Darlington's first purpose-built movie theater would reflect the Moderne style [Figure 2] and feature the "most modern equipment," including "the most modern cooling plant," "plastered walls, concrete floors, [and a] wood stage" in addition to "a spacious and modern ladies lounge on the main floor."²² Staggered seating would ensure optimum viewing for up to 618 patrons, among whom would be Black moviegoers segregated to the "balcony for Negro patrons"—a feature common during Jim Crow segregation. There were 468 seats in the auditorium and 150 in the balcony, an arrangement that highly favored white patronage, despite whites making up only 55% of the county's population in 1950.²³

With construction by Greensboro, North Carolina builder R.K. Stewart & Son "progressing rapidly" by September, Irvin projected the completion of the much-anticipated addition to Darlington's movie scene for mid-November 1948.²⁴ But delays pushed the opening until January 16, 1949, when eager guests flocked to the newly opened Darlington Theatre for a showing of *Every Girl Should Be Married*, starring Cary Grant and Betsy Drake [Figures 6-7].²⁵ Following the Darlington Theatre's debut, the city boasted two theaters offering first-run movies, with both venues conveniently located downtown. However, not long thereafter, Darlingtonians enjoyed yet another addition to the local theater scene—albeit with an entirely different format. At the opening of the Dual Highway Drive-In Theatre (not extant) on South Main Street in mid-September 1949, Darlington joined other towns throughout the state that offered motion pictures viewed from the comfort of patrons' cars. It is not clear to what extent the 150-car-capacity drive-in theater competed with the air-conditioned Darlington and Liberty theaters located a mile away. However, the open-air movie venue provided a unique local outlet for silver screen enthusiasts for a decade before it closed in mid-1959.²⁶

Following the debut of the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing's (NASCAR) Darlington Raceway in 1950, the Darlington Theatre and (and most likely the Liberty and the

²¹ "New Theatre at Darlington Soon to Be Constructed," *Florence Morning News*, April 17, 1948, 7.

²² "Construction on New Darlington Theater Begins," *Florence Morning News*, May 26, 1948, 8; "New Darlington Theatre to Open in November," *Florence Morning News*, September 23, 1948, 4.

²³ Ibid.; Robert R. Weyeneth, "The Architecture of Racial Segregation: The Challenges of Preserving the Problematical Past," *The Public Historian*, Vol. 27, No. 4, (Fall 2005), 19-20; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census Population: 1960. Supplementary Reports, Series PC(S1)-52*, "Negro Population, by County: 1960 and 1950," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966), 49.

²⁴ "New Darlington Theatre to Open in November," *Florence Morning News*, September 23, 1948, 4.

²⁵ "New Theatre to Open in Darlington," *Florence Morning News*, December 30, 1948, 9; Advertisement, *Columbia Record*, January 15, 1949, 2; Advertisement, *State*, January 16, 1949, 9B.

²⁶ "The New - - Dual Highway Drive-In Theatre," *Florence Morning News*, September 13, 1949, 10; "Lots of Picture Shows in Pee Dee History," *Florence Morning News*, April 20, 2014, p. 6; "Dual Highway Drive-In," Cinema Treasures, accessed December 22, 2023, <https://cinematreasures.org/theaters/33511>. The Dual Highway Drive-In operated at 1212 South Main Street, approximately one mile from the Darlington Theatre.

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Dual Highway Drive-In theaters) proved popular with sports fans that descended upon the town each Labor Day weekend. During the earlier years of the Darlington Theatre, Sam Irvin would open it and the Liberty Theatre to race fans beginning at midnight.²⁷ Though primarily a draw for moviegoers, the Darlington Theatre served other important purposes throughout the year. For instance, each December the venue welcomed Black and white crowds who attended Yuletide benefit concerts performed by local Black church choirs that sang “Negro spirituals” for the annual tuberculosis seal drive.²⁸ Income from and attendance at the 1954 concert eclipsed all previous events in the annual program’s thirty-one years of operation, which began at the Liberty Theatre. It remains unclear if the Darlington Theatre’s management segregated audiences at these non-movie events. But, based on the integration of other private and public institutions, seating at the theater likely remained segregated in some form until the 1960s, and possibly as late as 1970.²⁹

As a major local entertainment venue, the Darlington Theatre became a flashpoint for challenges to state and local obscenity laws, as well as Blue Laws, which regulated commercial and entertainment activities on Sundays. In 1959, Darlington Theatres, Inc., under president Sam Irvin and vice-president Jack D. Fuller, challenged legal restrictions on Sunday movie operations in an effort to expand entertainment options for its clientele throughout the week.³⁰ The fracas continued well after Darlington Theaters, Inc. sold its venue to C. Pope Gantt in October 1961 with Blue Law bickering frequently making headlines until 1969. At that time, Darlington’s city council cleared the theater—by then called Darlington Cinema and owned by Lewis Watkins—to operate on Sundays provided the shows offered were clearly rated “G” for general audiences or “M” for mature.³¹

²⁷ Daniel S. Pierce, “Darlington Raceway,” *South Carolina Encyclopedia*, accessed July 22, 2023, <https://www.scencyclopedia.org/sce/entries/darlington-raceway/>; “Darlington Bulging with Race Fans,” *State*, September 5, 1955, 2. Hometown contractor Harold Brasington broke ground for Darlington Raceway in 1949. The then-1.25-mile, egg-shaped track, which came to be known as “The Lady in Black” hosted its first race on Labor Day, September 4, 1950. Darlington Raceway, which holds the distinction of being the oldest superspeedway that hosts NASCAR events, historically has drawn visitors from throughout the United States to the rural town.

²⁸ “Annual Negro Spirituals Concert Set at Darlington,” *State*, December 9, 1951, 9.

²⁹ Integration of local businesses likely occurred around the same time as school integration. In 1964, thirty Black students in Darlington County transferred without incident into formerly all-white schools for the new school year. Of this number, nine enrolled in Darlington city schools. Although a step forward, it would not be until 1970 that substantial integration occurred within the local school system. “More S.C. Schools Integrate,” *State*, September 2, 1964, 1B; “Court Orders Schools Integrated in Darlington,” *Greenville News*, July 14, 1964, 6; Richey, “Southeast Darlington Historic Resource Survey,” 21; “Many Whites in Darlington Say They Will Defy the Plan,” *State*, February 15, 1970, p. 6B.

³⁰ “Sunday Movies Being Sought in Darlington,” *Florence Morning News*, May 3, 1956, 1; “Sunday Movies Still Banned at Darlington,” *The State*, June 8, 1956; “Darlington Sues to Cancel Lease on Two Theaters,” *State*, June 11, 1956, 13; “Hearing on Darlington Issue is Held,” *State*, June 22, 1956, 36; “Judge Studies Theater Fight at Darlington,” *Florence Morning News*, June 23, 1956, 10.

³¹ “Changes Management,” *Florence Morning News*, September 24, 1967, 6; “Darlington Show Now Re-Opened,” *Florence Morning News*, February 6, 1969, 1B; “Darlington Movie Owner Again Charged,” *State*, August 3, 1959, p. 13; “Darlington Theater Ends Fight for Time Being,” *State*, August 5, 1959, 13; “Three Judge Court to Hear Arguments,” *State*, August 26, 1959, 13; “Judge Rules Blue Laws Useable as Ban on Movies,” *State*, December 23, 1959, 15; “U.S. Court Confirms ‘Blue Law,’” *Columbia Record*, September 23, 1961; “Darlington Theater Sold,” *State*, October 8, 1961, 12. A farmer and businessman, Gantt was also the owner of the Victory Theatre in the small

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At the same time as the theater's Blue Law controversies were finally ending, the business became embroiled in additional legal turmoil that eventually resulted in its being shut down for multiple years. Like many other movie theaters of the time, screenings at the Darlington in the late 1960s and 1970s increasingly included racier films that sparked vocal criticism from local residents fearful of slumping community morality. Management for the Darlington Cinema billed movies that appealed to "typical," more mainstream audiences, while offering other motion pictures that pushed legal limits. Some citizens voiced opposition over nationally popular movies such as Dustin Hoffman and Anne Bancroft's PG-rated *The Graduate* [1967], Frank Sinatra's *The Detective* [1968], and *The Fox* [1970], an R-rated cinematic interpretation of D.H. Lawrence's book by the same name. They argued, if left unchecked, the moral pillars on which their community stood would be irrevocably undercut. But more R-rated shows continued to be offered, and more liberal Darlington Cinema patrons cast their *de facto* ballots on morality issues by attending shows for "adults-only" films such as *Good Morning . . . and Goodbye!* [Figure 9].³²

The theater finally pushed local sensibilities too far though in September 1970, when owner Lewis Watkins announced screenings of pornographic actor John Holmes' film *Anomalies: A World of Dreams*, thereby introducing much of the Darlington community to the world of X-rated cinema. City officials soon after declared the movie obscene, confiscated Watkins's reels of the film from the theater, and had the sheriff lock them in a vault. They further challenged Watkins to show why Darlington's only theater should not lose its license.³³ For the next two years, Watkins clashed with officials over South Carolina obscenity laws in proceedings that went as far as the state supreme court. Despite an indictment and sentencing in 1973, Watkins never served time.³⁴ The legal battle resulted in the temporary closure of the Darlington Cinema temporarily from 1973 until mid-1975, interrupting a nearly twenty-five-year history of serving as a popular recreational destination in Darlington, and marking the end of the theater's period of significance.³⁵

town of Wagener, South Carolina. "Darlington Voters to Face Issue of Sunday Movies," *State*, October 25, 1962, 8B; "Darlington May Relax Blue Laws," *Florence Morning News*, May 22, 1965, 1.

³² "Adult Film Hassle Erupts in Darlington City Council," *The State*, April 4, 1968, 21A; "Closed Theatre Does Well," *State*, January 20, 1969, 1B; "Readers Seek Better Local Movies," *Florence Morning News*, January 22, 1969, 13.

³³ "Anomalies: A World of Dreams," International Movie Database, accessed July 30, 2023, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0210529/?ref=nr_sr_srsrg_1_tt_8_nm_0_q_anomalies. *Anomalies* advertisement, *Florence Morning News*, September 24, 1970, p. 2. "Hearing is Today on Darlington Film," *State*, October 8, 1970, 6B. "Too Much," *Orangeburg Times and Democrat*, October 9, 1970, p. 1.

³⁴ "S.C. Obscenity Law Upheld," *Columbia Record*, November 27, 1973, 1; "Darlington Judge Accused of Irregularities," *State*, April 17, 1975, 11B; "Judge Complies with Six Sentences," *Columbia Record*, July 25, 1975, 11B. In April 1975, South Carolina Attorney General Daniel R. McCleod accused Darlington County Judge D. Carl Cook with illegally amending or modifying seventeen sentences levied between 1973 and 1974, of which Watkins July 1, 1973 sentence was included. The defendants were instructed to appear for a hearing in May 1975.

³⁵ Movie Advertisement, *Florence Morning News*, July 3, 1975, 7; Movie Advertisement, *Florence Morning News*, November 15, 1972, 3. There are no advertisements found for the Darlington Cinema from the later fall of 1972 until early July 1975 in *The Florence Morning News*, which historically ran daily advertisements for all movie theaters in Florence and surrounding towns, including Darlington. This absence and the fact that no reporting

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The Darlington Cinema permanently closed by mid-1983, and the building was subsequently put to several uses including a wholesale store (2002), temporary city council chambers (2005), and lastly as an interdenominational church known as Strong Tower Ministries (2007- 2013). Based on a lack of any newspaper advertisements after 2013 and the physical condition of the building, the property has been vacant for the last decade.³⁶ The theater's permanent closure in 1983 marked the end of forty-two years during which residents and visitors to Darlington enjoyed frequent entertainment at 108 Pearl Street. No longer able to attend the town's only purpose-built movie theater, patrons had to travel ten miles southeast to the city of Florence for their motion picture entertainment. The business's shuttering also ended a period in which the medium of movies offered not only an outlet for juvenile and adult entertainment but also fertile ground for moralistic and economic battles that played out among civic leaders and elected officials attempting to temper changes in what people wanted to view and when they could see it.

Criterion C: Architecture

The Darlington Theatre is significant under Criterion C as the city's only extant example of a historic movie theater and as one of the best and only examples of Moderne architecture in Darlington.

The Modernism movement began in Europe as a philosophical reaction to the social chaos engendered during World War I, and Modernist architecture evolved during the period between the First and Second World Wars as a reaction to traditional building theory and expression. Designers introduced Modernistic architecture to the United States in the early 1920s. This new approach to design embraced simplicity and functionalism while eschewing conventional construction methods, building materials, and traditional aesthetics. The new approach to architecture and construction valued structural steel, reinforced concrete, often polychromic surfaces, and sheet glass—tenets of the new age in which the future was prioritized over reverence for past aesthetic movements. Ultimately, the Modernist movement shifted from its earlier expression known as Art Deco—characterized by verticality and stylized decorative motifs—to the Moderne or Streamline Moderne movement that retained the smooth facades of some Art Deco buildings but tended to feature asymmetrical facades, flat roofs, modest decorative ledges, and rounded corners, and sheet glass and glass block windows, with occasional metal banding. The result was buildings that championed the twentieth-century's obsession with speed, machinery, and efficiency.³⁷

involved the theater suggests that shuttered during the later years of Watkins's clash with the law over adhering to state obscenity laws.

³⁶ Movie Advertisement, *Florence Morning News*, July 10, 1983; Classified Advertisement, *Florence Morning News*, October 16, 1988, 82; Advertisement, *Florence Morning News*, October 26, 2002, 15; Public Hearing Notice, *Florence Morning News*, September 21, 2005, 26; Obituary, *Florence Morning News*, October 12, 2007, 10; "Church News," *Florence Morning News*, April 13, 2013, 7. The date of mid-1982 has been assigned as the closure date for the Darlington Cinema, as there is no reference to the theater's operation after July 10, 1983.

³⁷ John Sherrer, "George R. Price House *National Register of Historic Places Nomination*, Columbia, SC: South Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1997; Mary Watson Edmonds, et. al, *Saluda Theatre National Register of Historic Places Nomination*, Columbia, SC: South Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1993; Regina Koger Monteith, *Carver Theatre National Register of Historic Places Nomination*, Columbia, SC: South

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Construction of Darlington's first purpose-built theater, with its austere stucco façade and asymmetrical storefront, introduced the Moderne style to a downtown commercial district largely defined by late nineteenth and early twentieth-century one-, two-, and three-story brick facade masonry buildings. A handful of historic buildings downtown feature remnants of efforts to modernize storefronts through the addition of glass block, aluminum banding, and plate glass and Vitrolite storefronts. However, none of these efforts represents the Moderne style and all fail to obscure their building's original, pre-1940s architectural styles [Figure 13]. There are only two other known high-style examples of Moderne architecture in Darlington.³⁸ The 1938 Dixie-Vortex Company at 126 Avenue A is a large, one-story, brick industrial building with Moderne and Art Deco detailing [Figure 14].³⁹ While the building retains its minimal decorative features, its windows are bricked in, and it has multiple large additions. The other example is the former Darlington National Guard Armory at 300 Sanders Street, now the Harmon Baldwin Recreation Center [Figure 15]. The three-story brick building was constructed by the Works Progress Administration and completed in 1940.⁴⁰ Both buildings represent local Moderne architecture but are quite different from the theater in terms of their overall appearance due to differences of scale, massing, materials, and use.

Executive leadership within the Wilby-Kincey Theatres Corporation and the company's resident architect, Erle G. Stillwell, were responsible for the Darlington Theatre's Moderne design. Stillwell's relationship with the corporation began in 1934. Stillwell, based in Henderson, North Carolina, enjoyed widespread acclaim in planning modern cinemas throughout North Carolina, South Carolina, and parts of Alabama, Tennessee, and Georgia. Like the Darlington Theatre, many of Stillwell's other theaters were among the only examples of Modern architecture found in small towns. Crafting buildings in the Art Deco and Moderne styles, Stillwell ensured that his creations embraced the latest in aesthetics, the most modern building materials for durability and fireproofing, and modern conveniences like air conditioning and, in some instances, amplification devices for hearing-impaired patrons. He often relied on contrasting colors for interiors, terrazzo floors, fanciful marquees employing vertical emphasis amplified through neon lighting, and sleek materials such as aluminum and plate glass amid facades rendered in concrete. Due to the materials his designs involved, Stillwell could tailor construction costs to the wherewithal of his clients.⁴¹

Stillwell's design for the Darlington Theatre embraced the austerity of design inherent in the Moderne style. The design incorporated modern amenities and styling in a plan that nonetheless was largely inexpensive to execute. Typical of Moderne architecture, the building's façade is

Carolina Department of Archives and History, 2003; Mary Ruffin Hanbury, *Gem Theatre National Register of Historic Places Nomination*, Raleigh, NC: North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office, 2019.

³⁸ A careful review of the city-wide surveys from 1986 and 2002, the Southeast Darlington survey in 2022, and a windshield survey of the downtown commercial core using Google Street View did not reveal any other intact and extant examples of Moderne architecture in Darlington apart from the Dixie-Vortex Company and the Darlington National Guard Armory.

³⁹ Richey, "Southeast Darlington Historic Resource Survey," 31.

⁴⁰ "Dedicate New Darlington Armory Today," *State*, October 20, 1940.

⁴¹ William Mitchell, *Buildings as History: The Architecture of Erle Stillwell, A Descriptive Catalogue of His Drawings in the Henderson County Public Library*, (Henderson County Public Library, 2006), 135.

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devoid of any kind of involved detailing, as its aesthetic relied on the austerity achieved through undecorated fields of vertical and horizontal panels, separated by a deep v-groove struck through the stucco on the building's second and third stories. For exterior flair, Stillwell relied on the building's façade-width marquee and four display cases for movie posters. The geometric glass ticket box and terrazzo flooring characterize the theater's entrance. Although the terrazzo is muted gray, cream, and sandy brown in its color scheme, it is a modern, high-finish material consistent with the Moderne aesthetic. To accommodate local whites' segregation customs, Stillwell created a separate entrance for Black patrons that he located to the east of the ticket booth. The property's Moderne features continue on the interior, with curved walls leading into the women's lounge and restroom and the men's restroom, in addition to thick curved quarter-walls enhancing the balcony staircase. Within the auditorium, Stillwell continued a restrained Moderne aesthetic by incorporating seating with curved armrests and delicate aisle lighting hoods at every other aisle. Although the same seating style was used within the balcony section, this area was originally intended for Black moviegoers. Six paired vertical sections and a solitary vertical section of simple wood molding were the only detail afforded the auditorium walls. The effect today is largely obscured by fiberglass acoustical panels that a later theater owner installed over the auditorium walls in April 1965 during upgrades to the venue's air conditioning system.⁴² Despite this later alteration and the loss of the marquee, most of the exterior and interior Moderne architectural features of the Darlington Theatre remain intact.

The Darlington Theatre is a remarkably intact Moderne movie theater, representing a locally important example of its style and type. The building retains many Moderne design features on its exterior and interior, especially its struck stucco façade and streamline interior detailing. Additionally, the building retains the key features of a movie theater, including its ticket box, lobby, auditorium seating, and balcony. As one of Darlington's strongest example of Moderne architecture and its sole surviving movie theater, the Darlington Theatre represents an important and rare part of the city's architectural history.

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

Erle G. Stillwell

A native of Hannibal, Missouri, Erle [also written as Earle] Gulick Stillwell (1885-1978) moved to Hendersonville, North Carolina during his teenage years. He later studied architecture at Cornell University. After returning to Hendersonville, Stillwell became highly successful in real estate speculation and architecture in the 1920s, particularly with "higher class residential type" building designs in his affluent mountain community.⁴³ Fortune proved fleeting, however, as Stillwell fell into debt during the early years of the Great Depression. Ultimately, an association Stillwell developed in 1934 with the Wilby-Kincey Company, co-owned by Paramount Pictures, saved the struggling architect's career as he began designing movie theaters at a time during

⁴² "Theater Renovated," *The Columbia Record*, April 27, 1965, 12B.

⁴³ "Stillwell, Erle G. (1885-1978)," *North Carolina Architects & Builders: A Biographical Dictionary*, accessed July 17, 2023, <https://ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu/people/P000467>; "Many New Businesses Set Up at Hendersonville Year," *News of Henderson County*, July 22, 1921, 1.

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which these places were highly popular, public venues that offered a respite from the harsh economic times. Indeed, Wilby-Kincey-based commissions proved “the salvation of his practice.”⁴⁴

The talented architect developed an impressive portfolio of commissions before World War II that included construction of the Carolina, an Italian Renaissance style theater (1933) and remodeling of the Queen theater (1934), both in Hendersonville; the Sumter Theatre, constructed and designed in the Art Deco style within Sumter, South Carolina’s remodeled ca.1893 city hall building (1936); Durham, North Carolina’s Streamline Moderne style Center Theatre (1938); Monroe, North Carolina’s Moderne style Center Theatre (1940); the remodeling of Burlington, North Carolina’s Paramount Theatre into an “ultra modern” facility “fashioned along architectural lines similar to those in Durham and High Point” (1940);⁴⁵ the Varsity (1941), Raleigh, North Carolina’s Moderne style, state-of-the-art, fireproof theater that “contain[ed] an unusual feature, a space in which invalids in wheel chairs [could] be rolled.”⁴⁶ In Columbia, South Carolina’s capital city, Stillwell designed the Palmetto Theatre (1937), a 1,600-seat venue that featured special equipment for the hearing impaired and a stage for live performances [Figure 10].⁴⁷ Following World War II, Stillwell continued to add to his theater repertoire throughout the Southeast. Among his myriad commissions were Knoxville, Tennessee’s the Knox, a \$1,000,000 venue capable of accommodating 1,500 to 2,000 viewers (1946), and Winston-Salem, North Carolina’s Moderne-style Winston Theatre (1949).⁴⁸ As they had since his initial work for Wilby-Kincey in 1936, Stillwell’s post-World War II designs reflected prevailing trends in segregation with Black and white patrons separated through distinct entrances and between main floors and balconies. In Durham, North Carolina, the Center Theatre (1938) featured two balconies—one for each race—reportedly with “no discrimination in quality and appointments.”⁴⁹ While seemingly promoting parity between Black and white patrons, such “amenities” in practice typically favored the status quo of white supremacy with Caucasian moviegoers enjoying greater numbers of better seats.

⁴⁴ Mitchell, *Buildings as History: The Architecture of Erle Stillwell*, X.

⁴⁵ “Two Modern Theaters Help Supply Entertainment Needs,” *Times-News*, April 17, 1935, 18; “Theater Stands on Site of First Opera House,” *Sumter Daily Item*, August 28, 1936, 1; “New Center Theatre to Open Its Doors Tonight,” *Durham Sun*, December 16, 1938, 3A; “Construction Work to Stat [sic],” *Daily Times-News*, January 4, 1940, 7; “Transfer of Theatre Building is Announced,” *Times-News*, August 22, 1934, 1; “Theaters Buy Henderson Lot: Plans to Construct New Building There in Near Future,” *Asheville Citizen-Times*, July 13, 1947, 10D; “Theater is Planned on Lyric Corner,” *Knoxville News-Sentinel*, April 10, 1946, 12; “About the Dowd Theatre: The Heart of Historic Downtown Monroe,” City of Monroe Down Center Theatre, accessed July 17, 2023, <https://dowdcentertheatre.com/about/>.

⁴⁶ “Contracts Let on New Theater,” *News and Observer*, May 25, 1941, 12.

⁴⁷ “Liberty Theatre,” Cinema Treasures. Wilby-Kincey Theatres ultimately established an impressive footprint in Columbia with its ownership of the Palmetto (1937), Carolina (1941), and Strand (1936) theaters along Main Street. It added The State Theatre later before divesting itself of properties.

⁴⁸ “Winston Theatre Will Have Grand Opening Tonight,” *Winston-Salem Journal*, April 13, 1949, 15.

⁴⁹ “New Center Theatre to Open Its Doors Tonight,” *Durham Sun*, December 16, 1938, 3A; Elizabeth Guffey, “Knowing Their Space: Signs of Jim Crow in the Segregated South,” *Design Issues*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Spring 2012): 41-60.

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The State (Columbia, SC)
The Sumter Daily Item (Sumter, SC)
The Sunday Record (Columbia, SC)
The Times-News (Darlington, SC)
The News and Press (Darlington, SC)
The Winston-Salem Journal (Winston-Salem, NC)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
 previously listed in the National Register
 previously determined eligible by the National Register
 designated a National Historic Landmark
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
 recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

State Historic Preservation Office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency
 Local government
 University
 Other

Name of repository: Darlington County Historical Commission and Museum;
Henderson County Public Library, Henderson, North Carolina

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Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property 0.168

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 34° 18.154'N | Longitude: 79° 52.300'W |
| 2. Latitude: 34° 18.174'N | Longitude: 79° 52.314'W |
| 3. Latitude: 34° 18.166'N | Longitude: 79° 52.331'W |
| 4. Latitude: 34° 18.164'N | Longitude: 79° 52.330'W |
| 5. Latitude: 34° 18.167'N | Longitude: 79° 52.323'W |
| 6. Latitude: 34° 18.166'N | Longitude: 79° 52.322'W |
| 7. Latitude: 34° 18.168'N | Longitude: 79° 52.318'W |
| 8. Latitude: 34° 18.150'N | Longitude: 79° 52.305'W |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary for the Darlington Theatre is indicated by the attached lat/long map, which reflects the boundary of the historic and current tax parcel. It is generally an L-shape with a long end that runs mostly north-south and corresponds to the footprint of the building at 108 Pearl St. The shorter end extends west about forty feet from the outer wall of the boiler room across a parking lot and terminates at a brick retaining wall.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries encompass the entire historic property and include the extant resource.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: John Sherrer, Project Consultant

organization: Rogers Lewis Jackson & Mann, LLC

street & number: 1901 Main St. Suite 1200

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Darlington Co., S.C.
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city or town: Columbia state: SC zip code: 29201

e-mail: vintagepalmettopreservationsc@gmail.com

telephone: 803-528-1677

date: August 10, 2023

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered, and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Darlington Theatre

City or Vicinity: Darlington

County: Darlington

State: SC

Photographer: Jane Campbell

Date Photographed: April 11, 2023

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 24 South façade

Darlington Theatre

Darlington Co., S.C.
County and State

Name of Property

- 2 of 24 South façade, detail of entry pavilion
- 3 of 24 South façade, detail of movie poster display cases
- 4 of 24 South façade, detail of entry pavilion terrazzo
- 5 of 24 South façade, detail of segregated entrance for Black patrons
- 6 of 24 South façade, detail of fenestration of second and third stories
- 7 of 24 Lobby, looking west, general conditions
- 8 of 24 Lobby, looking south
- 9 of 24 Lobby, looking north, detail of north door of auditorium
- 10 of 24 Lobby, looking south, detail of balcony stairs
- 11 of 24 Lobby, looking south, detail of women's lounge entrance
- 12 of 24 Ticket booth, interior, looking east
- 13 of 24 Main entrance, looking east
- 14 of 24 Auditorium, looking west
- 15 of 24 Auditorium, looking northwest
- 16 of 24 Auditorium, looking west
- 17 of 24 Auditorium, looking east, seat detail
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Darlington Theatre
Name of Property

Darlington Co., S.C.
County and State

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Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations 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.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

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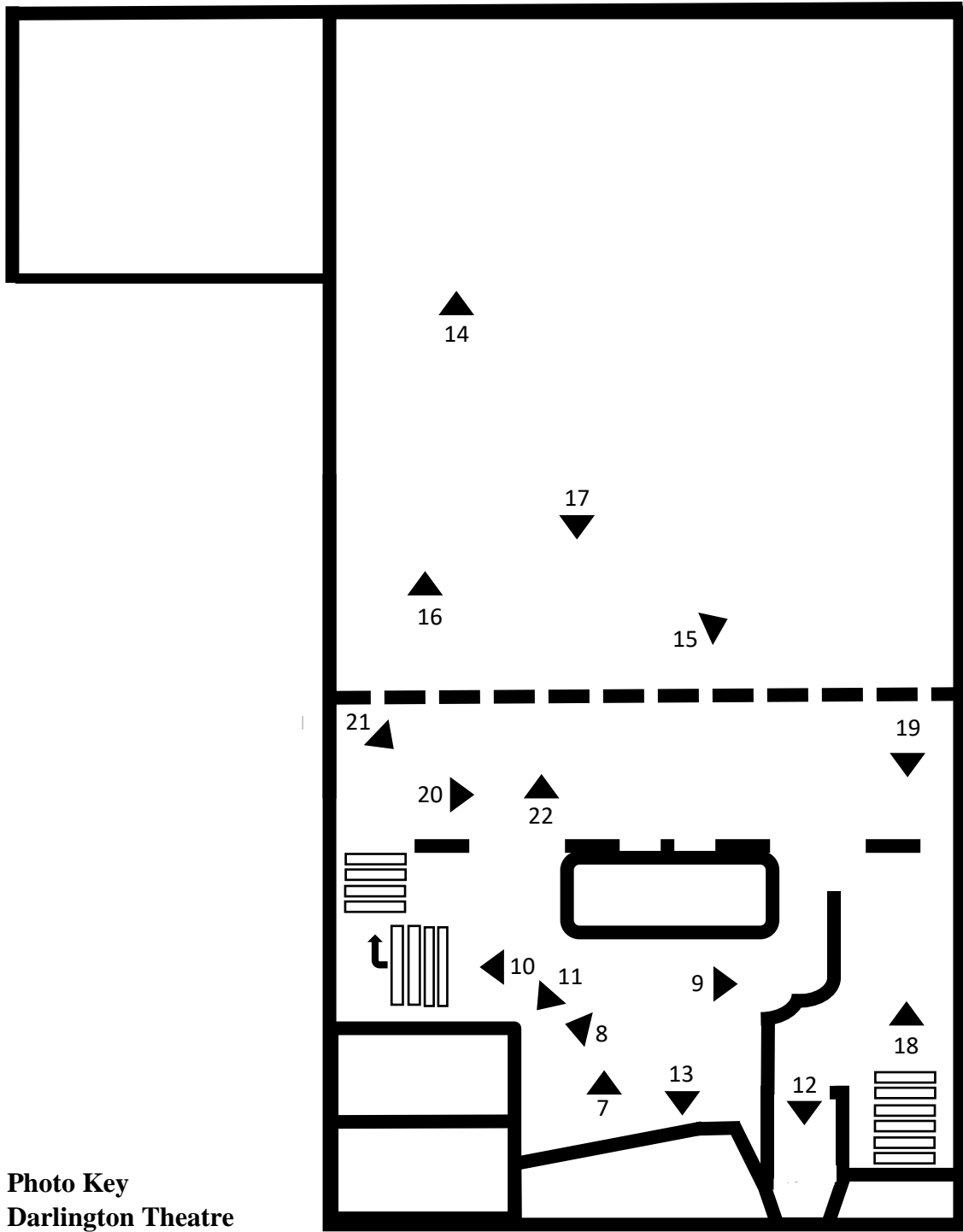
- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

DRAFT

24

23



**Photo Key
Darlington Theatre**



Not to Scale

Pearl St.

Darlington Theatre - Tax Map



Darlington Theatre NRHP Boundary Map

108 Pearl St., Darlington, Darlington County, SC



Lat/Long Coordinates	
1. Latitude: 34° 18.154'N	Longitude: 79° 52.300'W
2. Latitude: 34° 18.174'N	Longitude: 79° 52.314'W
3. Latitude: 34° 18.166'N	Longitude: 79° 52.331'W
4. Latitude: 34° 18.164'N	Longitude: 79° 52.330'W
5. Latitude: 34° 18.167'N	Longitude: 79° 52.323'W
6. Latitude: 34° 18.166'N	Longitude: 79° 52.322'W
7. Latitude: 34° 18.168'N	Longitude: 79° 52.318'W
8. Latitude: 34° 18.150'N	Longitude: 79° 52.305'W

Darlington Theatre - Regional Map

108 Pearl St., Darlington, Darlington County, SC



Google Earth

Image Landsat / Copernicus

Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3



Photo 4



Photo 5



Photo 6



Photo 7



Photo 8



Photo 9



Photo 10



Photo 11



Photo 12

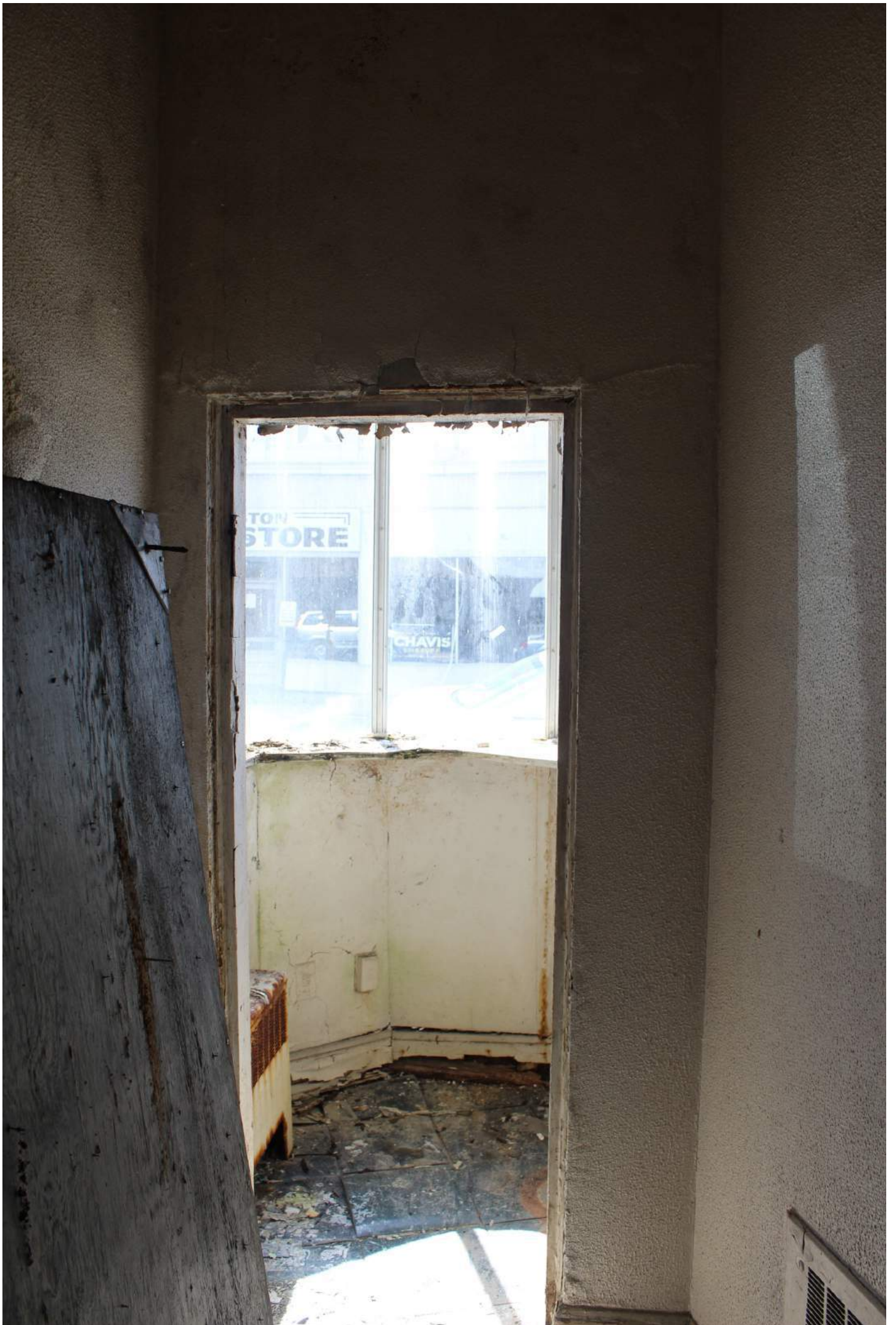


Photo 13



Photo 14



Photo 15



Photo 16



Photo 17



Photo 18

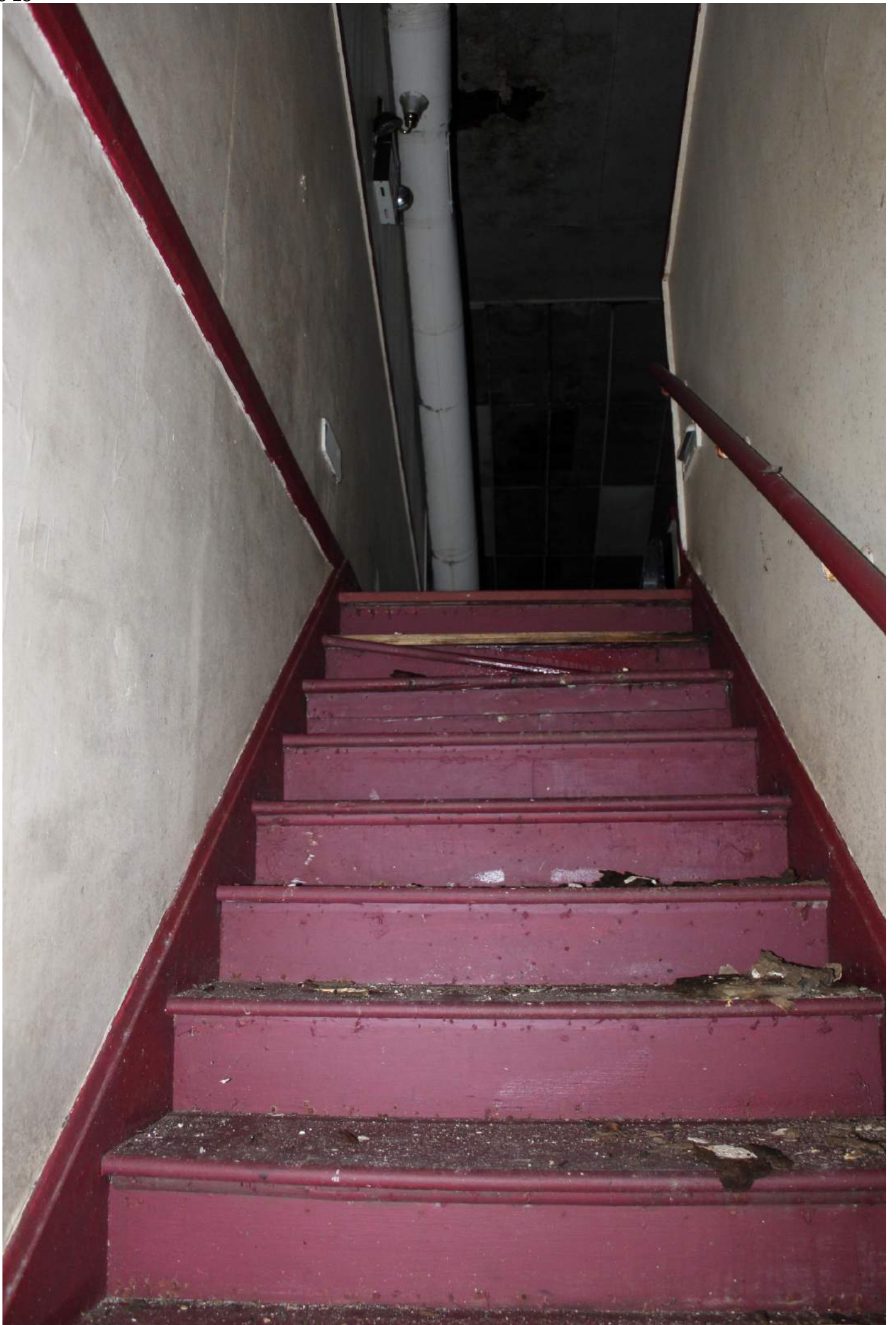


Photo 19



Photo 20



Photo 21



Photo 22



Photo 23



Photo 24



Figure 1



City Hall and Theatre, Darlington, S. C. Pub by The Book and Toy Co.

Figure 2

DARLINGTON, SOUTH CAROLINA THURSDAY, JULY 15, 1948

ARCHITECT'S PRESPECTIVE OF DARLINGTON THEATRE

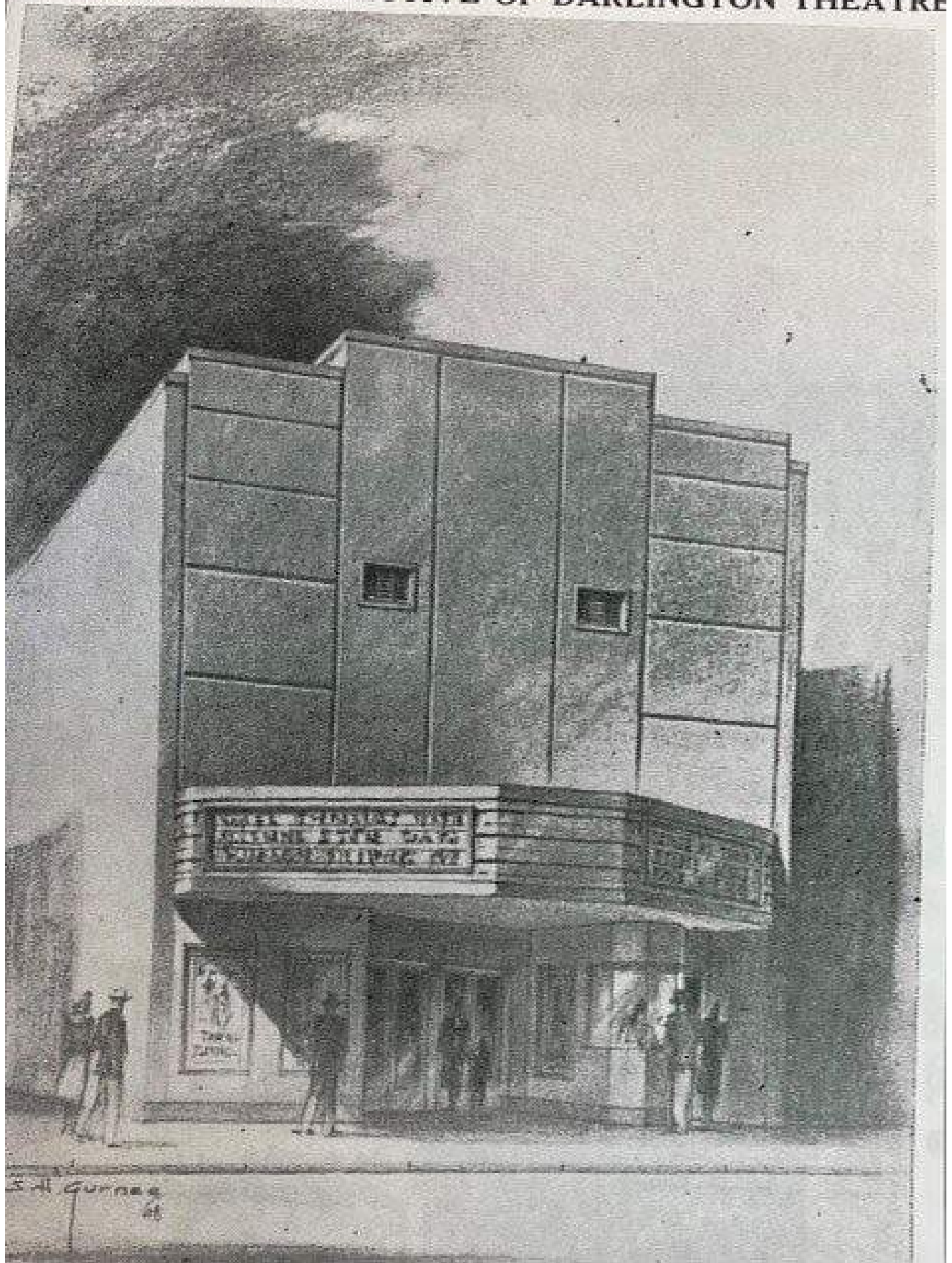


Figure 4

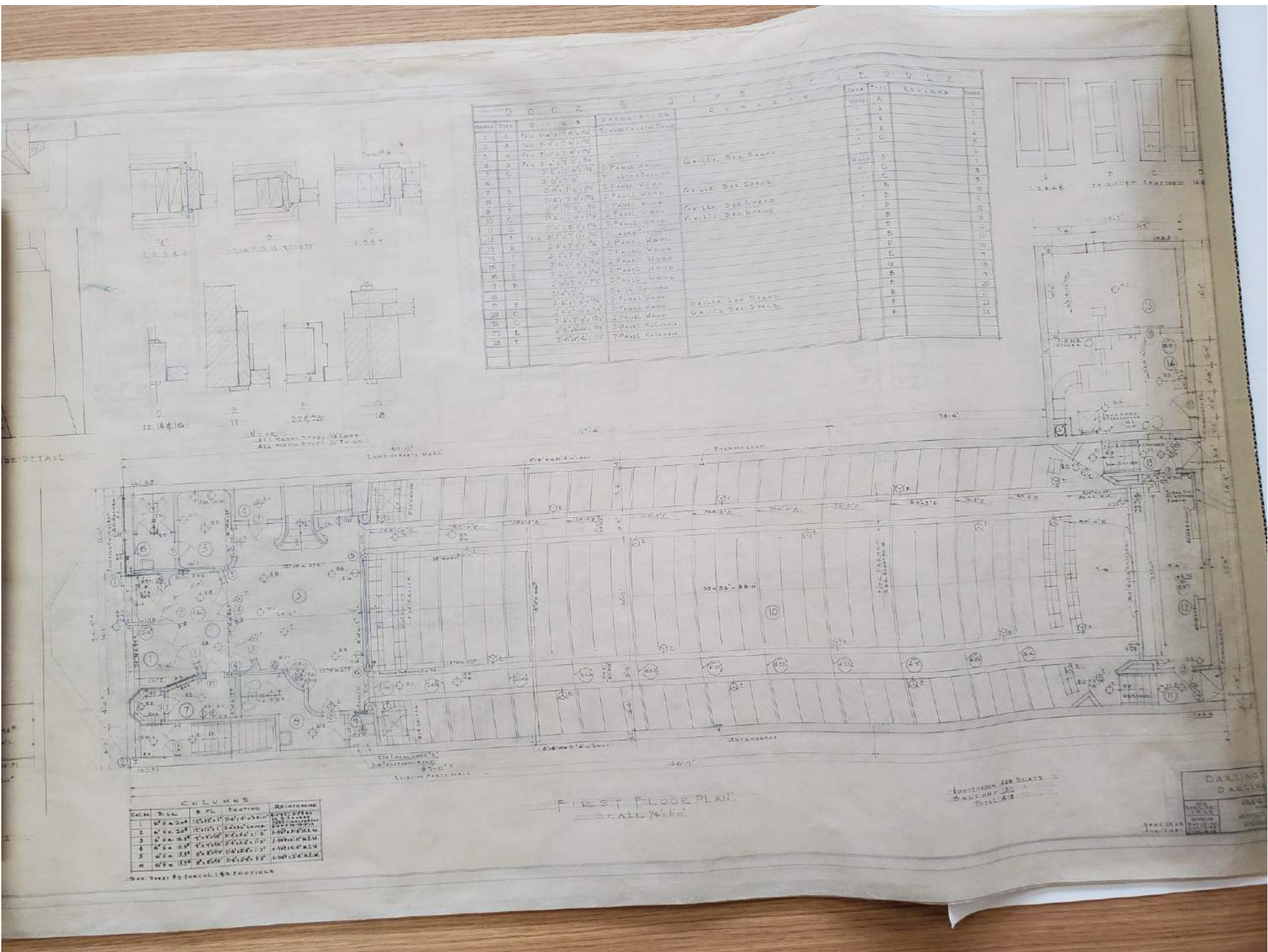


Figure 5

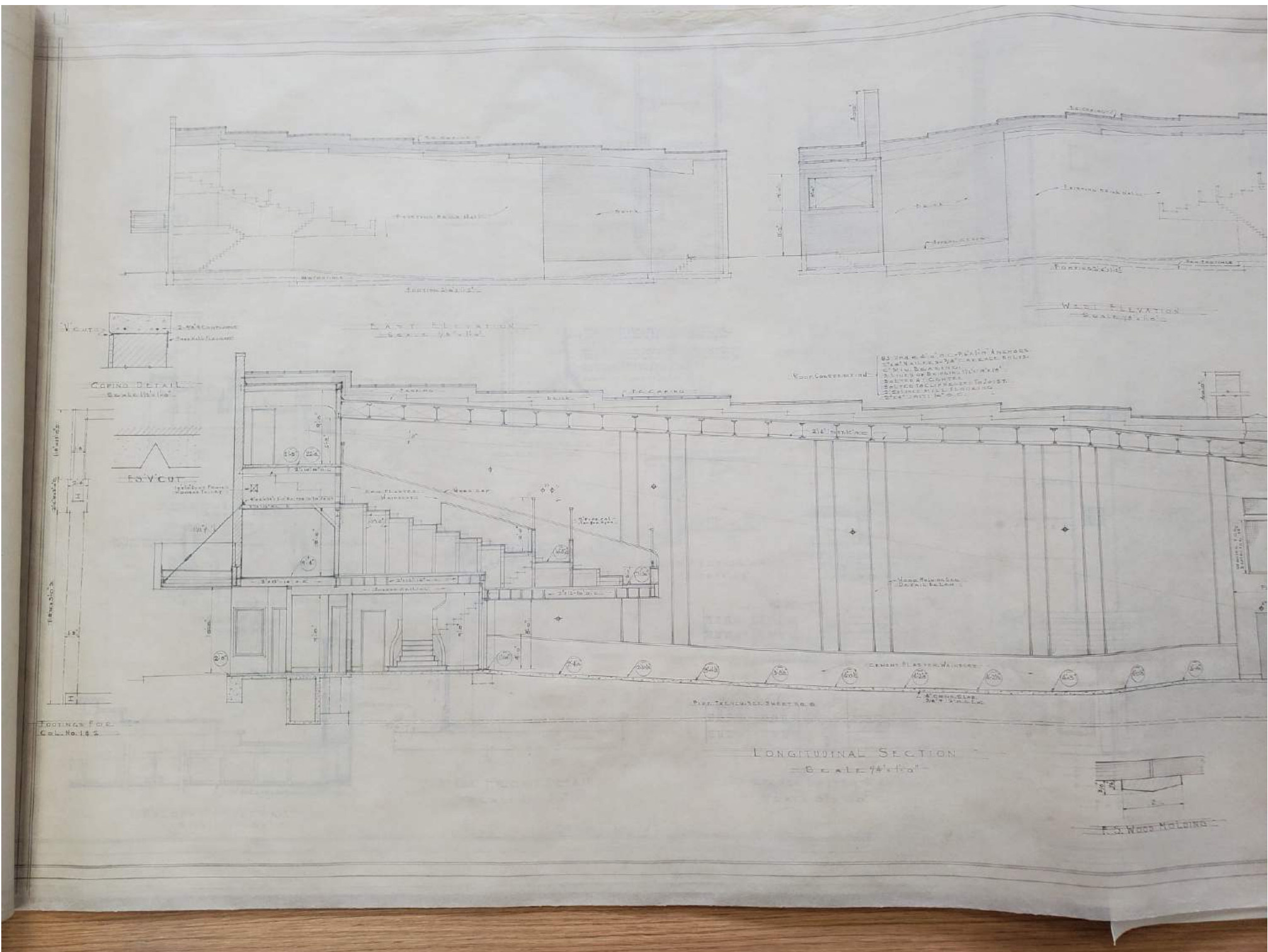


Figure 6

GRAND OPENING

Monday Afternoon, Jan. 17th, 1 P. M.

DARLINGTON THEATRE

**He won't say "YES"!
She won't take "NO"!**

The gay adventures of a bachelor baby-doctor who wants to stay single!



Dore Schary presents
Cary Grant

in DON HARTMAN'S production

Every Girl Should Be Married

CO-STARRING
FRANCHOT TONE · DIANA LYNN

and introducing **BETSY DRAKE**



Produced, Directed and Co-written by DON HARTMAN
Screenplay Collaboration by Stephen Morehouse Avery

OPENS MONDAY
(AFTER MONDAY)
2:45 P. M.
FIRST SHOW
STARTING
DAILY AT 3 P. M.
PHONE 45

As the clock Monday afternoon the doors of the New Darlington Theatre will swing open and Darlington will claim another institution of her own.

Theatre-goers of this area will find the Darlington Theatre rich in magic beauty. Its soft tones and luxurious comforts its finest and most modern equipment, its service will make a popular meeting place. It will be a distinctive show place of Darlington — a definite contribution to the welfare and happiness of the community. It's your theatre and you will be proud of it.

PRICES
MATINEE
36c
TAX INCLUDED
NIGHT
44c
TAX INCLUDED
CHILDREN 9c
NO CHILDREN UNDER 3
YEARS OLD ADMITTED

LAUGHS, TEARS,
THRILLS
ARE WHAT
YOU
WILL
GET
WHEN
YOU



COLUMBIA PICTURES presents
**GLENN FORD
TERRY MOORE**
in
The RETURN of OCTOBER

with Albert SHARPE · James GEESEON · Dame May WHITTY · Henry O'NEILL

COLOR BY
TECHNICOLOR

Screenplay by Abelm Frank and Herman Panama
Story by Dennis Lee and Keris Galtell
Directed by JOSEPH H. LEWIS · Produced by RODOLPH MATE



Meet
October
the
Horse of the Month

FREE
WE HAVE 1000'S OF
CANDY AND GUM
SAMPLES WHICH
WILL BE GIVEN
AWAY MONDAY
FREE

WED. - THURS.

BOX OFFICE
OPENS
2:45 P. M.

MORE:
LATEST WORLD NEWS
**CHARLIE SPIVAK &
HIS ORCHESTRA**



When GALLANT BESS
STARS IN THE RODEO...

You're in
for the thrill
of your life!

**Adventures of
GALLANT
BESS**

Glorious Cinecolor!
A Crestview Production
in Eight Lion Films Release

with GALLANT BESS
The Wonder Horse
DONALD DUCK CARTOON
"HAWAIIAN HOLIDAY"
ALSO — This Is America Short

FRIDAY &
SATURDAY

WATCH

FOR THESE BIG PICTURES
COMING TO YOUR DARLINGTON
THEATRE SOON:

- "WHEN MY BABY SMILES AT ME"
- "THE THREE MUSKETEERS"
- "A FOREIGN AFFAIR"
- "SO DEAR TO MY HEART"
- "ON OUR MERRY WAY"
- "UNFAITHFULLY YOURS"
- "YELLOW SKY"
- "ROPE"

MONDAY **TUESDAY**

BOX OFFICE
OPENS
1:00 P. M.
MONDAY

ADDED ATTRACTIONS
Latest Paramount News
GOOBY AND WILBUR
WALT DISNEY CARTOON

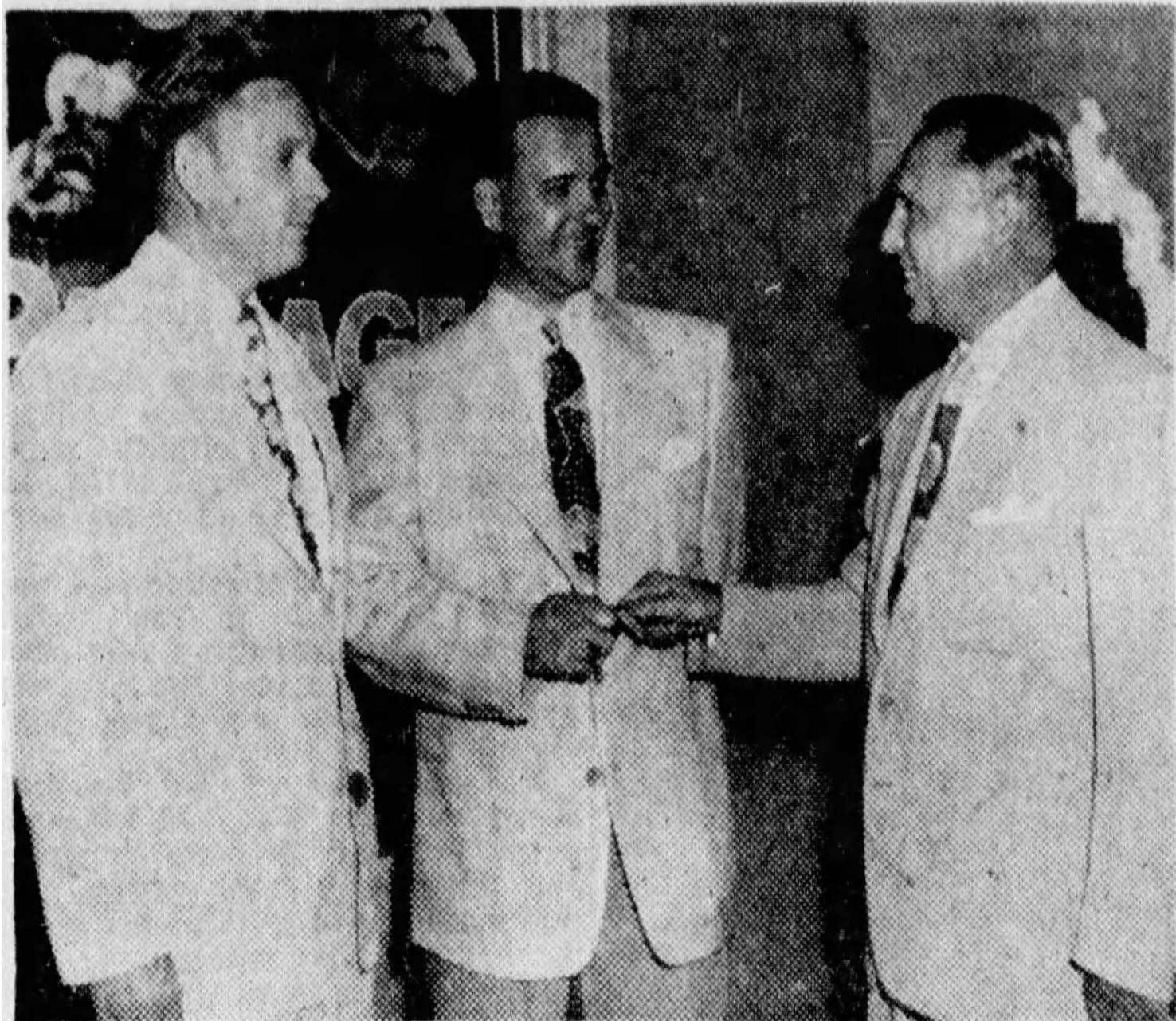
SHOWS
START AT:
1:15 - 3:10 - 5:05
7:00 - 8:55

ARCHITECT

Figure 7



RITZ CHANGES HANDS



WARREN IRVIN (right), district manager for Palmetto Theater Co., is shown handing the keys to the new Columbia Ritz theater to Jack D. Fuller who, with Sam L. Irvin (left) have purchased the theater. (Record photo—Price).

South Carolina PREMIER

**...for those
who measure success
only in the hours before
the morning light!**



You'll need a baby sitter!

an EYE PRODUCTION in
EASTMANCOLOR

• Maria CAPRI • Stuart LANCASTER • HAL
PAL WRIGHT • Karen CICAL • Don JOHNSON
Toni HOWLAND • Megan TIMOTHY
Toby ADIER • Sylvia TEDEMAR • Carol PETERS

The ULTIMATE Film...by Russ Meyer

Wrestling with the Devil

Good Morning ...and goodbye!

FOR MATURE ADULTS

Show Time

Sunday: 3:00 P.M. and 9:00 P.M.

Each Evening: 7:30 and 9:00

Darlington Cinema

ANOTHER PICTURE AT THE DARLINGTON CINEMA
THAT GIVES YOU YOUR MONEY'S WORTH

Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13

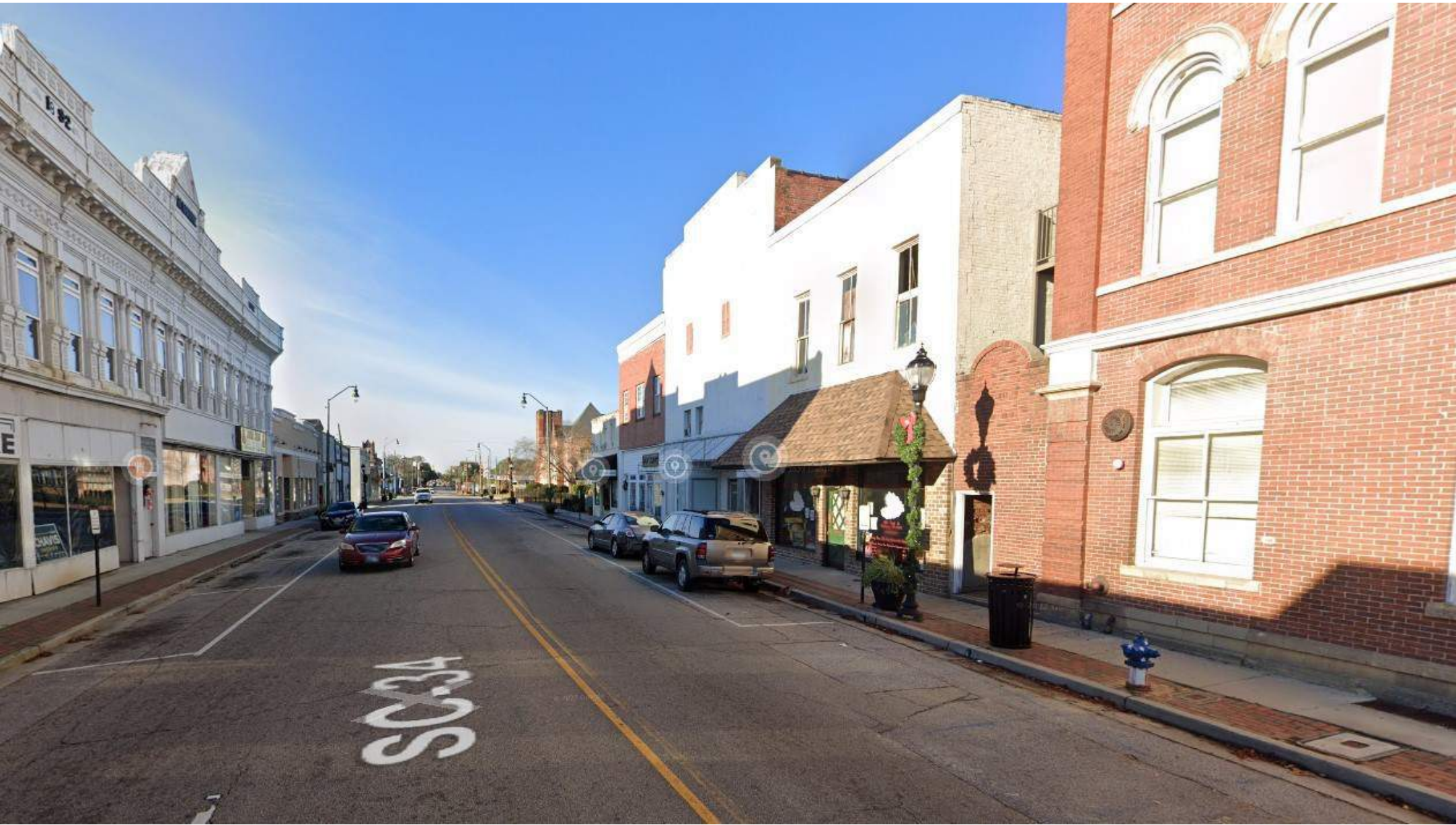


Figure 14



Figure 15

