NPS Form 10-900
(Oct.1990)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

248

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NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name: Merced Theatre

other names/site number: New Merced Theatre

2. Location

street & number: 301 West 17th Street ☐ not for publication N/A

city or town: Merced ☐ vicinity N/A

state: California code CA county Merced code 047 zip code 95340

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

milford wayne donaldson 16 MAR 2009
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

California Office of Historic Preservation
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

☒ entered in the National Register
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ removed from the National Register
☐ other (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

5/1/09

NPS Form 10-900a
(8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Section _____ Page ___

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SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 09000248 Date Listed: 5/1/2009

Merced Theatre	Merced	CA
Property Name	County	State

N/A
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

Signature of the Keeper — Date of Action: 5/1/09

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Amended Items in Nomination:

Significance:

The Significant Date: *1978* is deleted from the nomination cover form.
[All significant dates must be within the period of significance. The current nomination fails to provide any evidence to justify that the 1978 remodeling work was of exceptional significance.]

These clarifications were confirmed with the CA SHPO office.

DISTRIBUTION:
National Register property file
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)

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
- ☐ site
- ☐ structure
- ☐ object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/ theater
DOMESTIC/ multiple dwelling
COMMERCE/ TRADE/ specialty stores

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/ theater/ work in progress
DOMESTIC/ multiple dwelling
COMMERCE/ TRADE/ specialty stores

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Spanish Colonial Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Reinforced Concrete
roof Metal (tower)
Clay Tile
walls Reinforced Concrete
Stucco/plaster (tower)
other Iron (decorative railings)

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

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.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)
ARCHITECTURE
ENTERTAINMENT/ RECREATION

Period of Significance
1931 to 1958

Significant Dates
1931, construction
1978, auditorium interior remodeled

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

☐ B removed from its original location.

☐ C a birthplace or a grave.

☐ D a cemetery.

☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

☐ F a commemorative property.

☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Architect/Builder
REID, James William (1852-1948), architect
REID, Merritt Jonathan (1855-1932), architect
HEINSBERGEN, Antoon Bonaventure (1894-1981), artist

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):
- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data
- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other

Name of repository:
Merced County Historical Society

Merced Theatre
Name of Property

Merced County, CA
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: **.52 acres**

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

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	10	723410	4130980	3		
2				4		

☐ See continuation sheet.

North: 18th Street West: K Street
South: 17th Street (Main) East: Martin Luther King Way (J Street)

Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title	Patti Dossetti		
organization	Dossetti Consulting	date	April 25, 2008
street & number	1232 Paseo Verde	telephone	(209) 722-8320
city or town	Merced	state	CA zip code 95348

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items
(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

Name	City of Merced		
street & number	678 West 18th Street	telephone	(209) 385-6827
city or town	Merced	state	CA zip code 95340

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

Summary:
The Merced Theatre is a multi-level white stucco Spanish Colonial Revival building at the corner of Main Street and Martin Luther King Way[1]. The Merced Theatre is a 150 feet by 150 feet square complex consisting primarily of:

- Theatre wing, comprising 13,670 square feet;

  The most prominent feature of the Theatre wing is its 100- foot high tower above the marquee. The tower displays the City's name in orange block letters and can be seen from miles away.

- Main Street wing, 7,000 square feet.

  The Main Street wing is a two story structure with retail spaces at street level and residential apartments on the second floor.

The remaining 1,830 feet of the Merced Theatre's 22,500 total square footage is found under the marquee, mechanical space, and an interior courtyard separating the Main Street wing from the Theatre wing.

The Golden State Theatre Company commissioned San Francisco's Reid Brothers architects to design the building; San Francisco builder Gian Battista Pasqualetti completed construction in October 1931.

Historic Appearance:
The Merced Theatre is made of reinforced concrete over a steel frame, with multi leveled red tile shed roofs.

The square tower over the marquee is decorated with recessed octagons, rectangles, panels and fluting. It is topped by a smaller square structure with pilasters, and is surmounted by a red metal hipped roof. Orange block letters lit with neon lights are located below the tower's balcony and decorative iron railing.

The curved marquee has art deco lighting and is supported by three white columns. Above the marquee, there is a small square balcony with a concrete lattice and railing.

The windows above the marquee/ in front of the tower are recessed arches with multi-pane casement sash. The rest of the building's windows are rectangular multi-pane casements. There are numerous blind windows set into the sides of the building, the majority being rectangular or arched with decorative molding.

The Main Street Frontage wing is a two-story rectangular building with 10 residential apartments on the second floor, and six retail spaces at street level. The retail spaces are highlighted by a red tile mansard roof and an "arcade" arched breezeway.

[1] Main Street is also known as 17th Street. Martin Luther King Way was formerly known as J Street.

To the rear of this building, an 810 square foot open interior court separates the Main Street wing from the Theatre portion.

Entering the Theatre Wing through the lobby, a tile stairway on the left leads to the second floor mezzanine. Originally, there were two stairways on either side of the lobby; one was removed in approximately 1948 and replaced with a lobby concessions stand. The theatre lobby extends the length of the building; a stairway at the back of the lobby also leads to the mezzanine floor.

The theatre lobby featured a large chandelier and a painted mural depicting Spanish explorers and heraldic shields. During a repainting in the 1970's, the original chandelier dropped and was destroyed; it was replaced with three chandeliers that are mounted in a tiered fashion. The lobby and mezzanine's other lighting fixtures are original. The ceiling fixtures are accentuated by a grid pattern of raised ceiling beams. The theatre's lobby and upstairs mezzanine are furnished with their original carved wood Spanish-style sofas and chairs.

From the lower lobby four entrances lead into the auditorium at the west side of the Theatre wing. At the mezzanine floor, a wide central stairway leads into the auditorium's balcony and loge sections.

The auditorium's acoustics, seating and sight lines were designed to support both filmed and live performances; original seating capacity was 1645.

Technological advances of the time were showcased in the auditorium, with "atmospheric" features that were a Reid Brothers trademark. Comfort of theatre patrons was assured with an air conditioning system that was one of the first in Merced. Every other chair was installed with a ventilator, and a machine produced "clouds" which were sent floating beneath the stars painted on the auditorium ceiling. These features were bolstered by the auditorium's dramatic facades, which surrounded three sides of the room and were dramatically backlit in a soft colored glow. The intent was to create an atmosphere of a Spanish castle courtyard at night.

A loft located on the castle façade at the right of the stage (stage left) supported a grand piano instead of the usual organ; from this loft on the castle façade, the pianist accompanied the stage production, and sometimes also accompanied film presentations. The castle facades, including the piano loft, were removed during a 1978 remodel.

The stage was equipped with a "Magniscope" screen, the first of its kind in the San Joaquin Valley, and four "vitaphone sound horns" hung in back of the screen. From the projection room, the Magniscope screen and sound horns could be raised for live stage performances. The key feature of the Magniscope screen was its variable size: the screen area could be changed from a size of 19 by 24 feet to 25 by 38 feet. The Magniscope screen and vitaphone sound horns were removed during the 1978 remodel.

A projection room is located at the top of the balcony, which housed all the motion picture equipment and controls for lighting the stage, auditorium, and the castle façade. A ladder stairway from the projection room leads to a generator room.

The stage is 25 feet deep by 80 feet in length, with a proscenium arch 45 feet high. The stage was fronted by an orchestra pit. These features were covered during the 1978 remodel, but not destroyed.

At the east end of the stage, a door leads into the alley. Two stairways from the stage lead below to the basement, where mechanical equipment and former dressing rooms are located, as well as the doorway into the orchestra pit.

News accounts from October 1931 state that "several million pounds of structural steel" were supplied and the framework erected by the Golden Gate Iron works of San Francisco. The ornamental iron work was created by the San Jose Iron Works.

Local suppliers and tradesmen were employed for the cement, concrete, and stucco work. Many of the electrical contractors were also local Merced firms. Golden State Theatre Company was sensitive to the need to use local materials and labor to the greatest extent possible, and did so with a few notable exceptions; ornamental tiles were supplied by the Hispano Moresque Tile Company of Los Angeles, and the theatre lobby mural was created by Antoon Heinsbergen of Los Angeles.

Current Appearance

The building's exterior retains its original character, and most of its historic elements are in good condition.

Main Street Wing: Prior to August 1954, the arches above the retail shops were boarded over. Later, flagstone was applied over the stucco. By February 2007, the flagstone was removed and the arches were restored to their original appearance. The restoration retained historic architectural features wherever possible, and building systems were upgraded to accommodate residential and commercial occupants.

Theatre Wing: The exterior retains its original appearance. Restoration of the tower occurred in November 2006, during which the neon lighting was restored, the letters replaced, and the walls and roof rehabilitated.

One of the interior lobby stairways was removed in approximately 1948 and replaced with a lobby concessions stand, which remains.

The most intensive remodeling occurred in 1978, when the auditorium was converted to four screening areas. The original auditorium interior castle facades were removed, as were the wood paneling and light fixtures from the balcony's underside. Otherwise, the interior remodeling was accomplished in a sympathetic manner; the stage's proscenium arch and orchestra pit simply were boarded over and plywood partitions installed.

The auditorium is undergoing restoration to convert back to a single hall. The hall originally seated 1645 persons; the new configuration will be approximately 1100, due to requirements for handicapped seating and additional safety areas in aisle ways. New auditorium interior castle facades will be built, identical in appearance to the originals.

Chronology

1928 Two of the Merced Theatre's three lots are purchased from Robert & Molly Schmidt and Richard & Florence Shaffer; deed recorded October 13, 1928

1929 The third lot is purchased, from Robert & Molly Schmidt; deed recorded April 9, 1929

1929 Architects retained and designing Merced Theatre (Merced Sun Star, November 23, 1929)

1929 Permit is requested to excavate the property, and is granted by Merced City Council (Merced Express, December 6, 1929)

1930 Building plans for the New Merced Theatre are presented to the City Council (Merced Express, January 10, 1930)

1931 Merced Theatre Manager requests permission to construct a sidewalk of red color in front of the New Merced Theatre (Merced Express, July 24, 1931)

1931 Merced Theatre completed October 31, 1931

1933 Martha Maltby opens a beauty shop in one of the retail spaces, financing the furniture and equipment through Merced Theatre Company; Notice of Intended Mortgage recorded December 1, 1933

1948 One of the lobby's two stairways was removed and a concession stand constructed. (Nutt, 2005)

1950 Heavy oak doors at front entrance replaced with stainless steel doors

1954 Main Street Wing arcade arched walkway had been modified by August 1954 (restored February 2007)

1966 Merced Theatre sold to United Artists September 30, 1966

1978 United Artists remodeled Theatre Wing auditorium interior (Merced Sun-Star, June 7, 1979)

- Spanish Castle façade removed
- Proscenium arch boarded over
- Magniscope screen removed
- Orchestra pit boarded over
- Light fixtures and antique wood paneling removed from balcony's underside
- Auditorium converted into 4 movie screening areas separated by plywood partitions

1985 Included in the City of Merced's Inventory of Historic Resources (Manning, July 29, 1985)

1992 United Artists re-painted exterior features (Teaney, October 8, 1992)

- Marquee repainted
- Tower signs repainted
- Theatre wing exterior repainted

1994 Collapse of interior ceiling while patrons were viewing a movie (Merced Sun-Star, December 24, 1994)

2002 Merced Theatre purchased by City of Merced Redevelopment Agency December 2002

2003 Designated a Local Historic Resource June 11, 2003 by the City of Merced Historic Preservation Commission

Designated a Local Historic Resource July 7, 2003 by the City of Merced City Council

2006 Restoration of Theatre wing tower completed November 2006

- Tower walls and roof renovated
- Tower's letters spelling "MERCED" replaced
- Tower's neon lighting restored

2007 Restoration of Main Street wing completed February 2007

- Apartments renovated
- Retail spaces renovated with archway entrances restored
- Arched breezeway in front of retail spaces restored

2007 "Phase 3" Restoration of Theatre wing interior under way

- Grant awarded August 2007 by the California Cultural and Historic Endowment
- Renovations begun to remove the four-plex configuration and restore the original single hall configuration, with the original proscenium arch, stage and orchestra pit
- Plans include recreation of auditorium's interior Castle facades
- Plans include restoration of Theatre wing basement

2008 City of Merced Redevelopment Agency authorized ownership transfer to City of Merced April 2008

Summary:
The Merced Theatre was built in 1931 for San Francisco theatre owner entrepreneurs Eugene Hugh Emmick and Robert Allen McNeil. The Merced Theatre was one of the first theatres in the City of Merced and is one of the relatively small numbers of commercial buildings surviving from this period of Merced's history. Established during the Depression era, the Merced Theatre was more than a source of entertainment; it was a local gathering spot and the center of downtown night life.

The Merced Theatre affected the community's cultural and social development, creating an opportunity for Mercedians to experience performances commonly found in larger cities over 50 miles away. Throughout the period of significance, the Merced Theatre was the largest performance venue and continued in business the longest, adapting to changing times and needs. Recognition of the Merced Theatre under Criterion "A" establishes a standard for the significance and integrity of a building which reflects Merced's history.

Further, the Merced Theatre is the work of prominent San Francisco architects the Reid Brothers, contains an original A.B. Heinsbergen mural, and handcrafted tiles from the Hispano Moresque Tile Company of Los Angeles, and overall is an outstanding example of Spanish Colonial Revival architecture. The Merced Theatre embodies distinctive characteristics of a type, period, and method of construction emblematic of its era, therefore qualifying for the National Register under Criterion "C".

Criterion A *(Buildings that are associated with the events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.)*

The Merced Theatre building has become a visual landmark of Merced for many residents and visitors, resulting both from its height and its location within the City. The Merced Theatre's tower is situated in such a way that it can be seen from the freeway that runs through the City. Merced is located in California's central San Joaquin Valley, known for its proximity to Yosemite National Park, and a logical place to spend the night prior to travelling into the park itself.

Throughout the Great Depression, World War II, and post-World War II years, the Merced Theatre was the cultural and social center for the Merced community. The City's population was 7,066 persons[2] at the time the Theatre was constructed; yet 2,600 persons attended the October 31, 1931 grand opening. Throughout the period from 1931 until becoming a movie four-plex in 1978, the Theatre's stage was the site of live concerts, dramatic performances, dance recitals, talent shows, cooking demonstrations, and at least one wedding ceremony. High school graduation ceremonies were held at the Merced Theatre until the 1950's.

News reels shown before the main attraction kept Merced's audiences informed on current events. Film of the 1932 Summer Olympics and the controversial February 1940 Joe Louis versus Arturo Godoy fight could be seen at the Merced Theatre. During World War II, war bonds could be purchased at the Theatre along with an admissions ticket.

[2] 1930 U.S. Census

The Merced Theatre provided an experience otherwise beyond reach to its patrons. Its technology was cutting edge; the Magniscope screen and vitaphone features enhanced the viewing experience for audiences only recently introduced to motion pictures with sound. Only one other building in town – the Hotel Tioga – was air conditioned. The Merced Theatre was the first in the region to offer atmospheric embellishments; the Castle facades and clouds across a ceiling painted with stars remain in the collective memory of Mercedians.

Prior to the Depression era, theatres typically did not sell food or drink; the Main Street wing's retail spaces were occupied alternately by a coffee shop, a confectioner's shop, and other businesses providing essential services, such as a beauty salon, a dentist, and a women's clothing store.

Many of the Main Street wing's apartment tenants were Golden State Theatre employees, either at the Merced Theatre, or at the Strand Theatre just a few blocks away. Other apartment tenants were employed downstairs in the coffee shop, or at other downtown businesses such as Montgomery Wards or the Merced Sun Star newspaper.

Golden State Theatre Corporation
E.H. Emmick, President of the Golden State Theatre Corporation, purchased the property for the Merced Theatre from Robert Schmidt and Richard Shaffer, two business owners in Merced's downtown. At the time the Merced Theatre was constructed, the Golden State Theatre Corporation operated 38 others, none of which were in Merced's geographical region – all were either in the San Francisco bay area or the Monterey bay areas of California (Merced Theatre Grand Opening Program, October 1931).

Eugene Hugh Emmick (1882-1956) was raised in southern Indiana along the Ohio River, and came from a family of steamboat captains. In an October 1931 press release, Emmick describes his move toward the west, buying and selling film from approximately 1910 while representing the T & D Jr. firm, and along the way, "acquired five theatres in California".

Emmick met Robert Allen McNeil in 1921, who by his own account owned several San Francisco nickelodeons at the time. Emmick, McNeil, and a third partner, Mike Naify, pooled their interests and formed the Golden State Theatre Corporation, with Emmick as its President and McNeil and Naify both Vice Presidents of the Corporation. Mike Naify was also the President of T & D Jr. Corporation, which owned 30 theatres in its own right.

Emmick related that in approximately 1923, he had been passing through Merced while traveling between San Francisco and Los Angeles, and, being "impressed by the possibilities of the theatre business in this city", purchased an existing 1100-seat theatre at Main and N Street from Charles Douglas. Douglas had opened this theatre in March 1920 with his brother in law, Francis Egan. It should be noted that this theatre was known as the "Merced Theatre" until 1931; then the "Old" Merced Theatre until it burned in December 1936; and was re-opened by Emmick in February 1938 as "The Strand" (Merced Sun Star, February 11, 1938).

The Merced Theatre was Golden State's flagship San Joaquin Valley operation. By 1947, Golden State had acquired several theatres in other Valley communities, including Turlock, Madera, Hughson, Avenal and

Coalinga (Deed of Trust recorded October 1947). By 1966, the Golden State Theatre Corporation and Naify's T & D Jr. Corporation merged into United Artists. [3]

In the late 1990's, community members became increasingly concerned about the state of the Merced Theatre; and in 1998, a group of volunteers formed a non-profit organization whose sole purpose is to restore it. Working with this group, in December 2002 the City's Redevelopment Agency purchased the theatre from United Artists. The City of Merced Redevelopment Agency and the Merced Theatre Foundation have committed to retain the Merced Theatre as a public asset and are in the process of restoration, using the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation of Historic Buildings.

Criterion B *(Properties associated with the lives of persons significant in our past)* Not applicable.

Criterion C *(Buildings that embody distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values.)*

The Merced Theatre is the work of San Francisco's prolific architects, brothers James and Merritt Reid. It is one of the few intact examples remaining of their theatre designs. The Merced Theatre is an outstanding example of early 20th century theatre architecture that utilizes distinctive elements of the Spanish Colonial Revival Style in its overall design quality and detailing, both exterior and interior.

Spanish Colonial Revival was an architectural movement which enjoyed widespread interest largely as a result of 1915's Panama-California Exposition, the grounds of which featured Spanish Colonial structures. The movement enjoyed its greatest popularity between 1915 and 1940, particularly in regions of America with Hispanic pasts such as California. The style is marked by the prodigious use of arches, smooth stucco/ plaster walls, clay tile roofs, small porches or balconies, and decorative iron trim.

The Reid Brothers designed 28 theatres around California during the time period 1907 through 1933, primarily in the San Francisco bay area and the Monterey bay area. Few other examples of Reid Brothers theatres exist; only eight are still open, and the Merced Theatre is the only one located in California's San Joaquin Valley.

The Merced Theatre's dominant position in downtown on a corner lot was an unusual opportunity for Reid Brothers in comparison to the spatial restrictions usually confronted throughout their San Francisco commissions; the Reid Brothers' Call Building was constructed on a lot that measures only 75 feet by 70 feet.

The Merced Theatre's massed floor plan with combinations of hipped, mansard and shed roofs mimic the form of a Spanish village. The stucco walls and clay tile roofs respond to Merced's hot climate. Archways are used at the Main Street wing's exterior, and in the interior lobby of the Theatre wing. Decorative ironwork is

[3] The original T & D firm was known as Turner and Dahnken, who had sold out to Fox. Naify separated with Turner and Dahnken and formed the T & D Jr. Theatre circuit.

used on the Theatre wing's tower just above the 'MERCED" block letters; the ironwork is also found on the lobby stairway and underneath the lobby mural.

Colorful ceramic tile is an important element of the Spanish Colonial Revival style. The Merced Theatre's ornamental tile was purchased from the Hispano Moresque Tile Company of Los Angeles, which has since received notice for its artistic importance during the late 1920's and 1930's.

As television made its impact, theatres across America struggled to remain competitive, and the Merced Theatre was no exception. In 1978, United Artists converted the auditorium into a four-plex. The theatre's interior suffered a dramatic aesthetic change, namely to the castle façade's being completely removed.

Overall, the other remodeling was sympathetic to the theatre's original features, as economic efficiency dictated that wherever possible, elements be left in place and simply covered over. The Merced Theatre retains many features of the original Reid Brothers design. The original proscenium that flanks the stage, the stage itself, and the orchestra pit remain intact behind the screens that were installed during the 1978 renovation.

Character- Defining Exterior Features:

- Multi-story form and massing typical of theatre design of the era
- 100-foot high tower over the marquee; near the top, the tower is surrounded by the City's name in neon lights
- Original decorative iron railings near the top of the tower
- Original projecting marquee with neon lighting
- Restored arched breezeway in front of Main Street wing retail spaces

Character- Defining Interior Features:

- Original theatre lobby mural by A.B. Heinsbergen
- Archways at lobby and mezzanine entrances
- Original proscenium arch framing the stage
- Original stage
- Original decorative iron railings at lobby stairway
- Original Hispano-Moresque tiles, found on lobby stairway and Mezzanine wall wainscoting

Reid Brothers

The Reid Brothers firm was one of San Francisco's most respected and versatile architectural firms for more than 40 years. Throughout their careers, they designed hotels, office buildings, churches, single-family residences and theatres; many of these buildings are on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Reids were born in St John, New Brunswick, Canada. Merritt Jonathan Reid (1855-1932) is not known to have completed any formal architectural training. James William Reid (1852-1948) was the firm's principal designer, and studied at the Lowell School of Practical Design in Boston, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris.

The Reid Brothers firm was often recognized for its engineering accomplishments, due at least in part to James' training in engineering theory at Lowell and MIT. The planning principles associated with Beaux Arts instruction would also prove pivotal to the firm's success in "fast tracking" future major projects.

The Reid Brothers embarked on their professional architectural careers in Evansville, Indiana, and opened their own firm there in 1879. While in Evansville, they designed a number of buildings which survive, such as Evansville's Willard Library (1885). Their careers were forever altered when they accepted a commission to construct what became San Diego's Hotel del Coronado (1888).

The Hotel del Coronado was a notable achievement in part for being completed within 11 months. The Hotel del Coronado was one of the first hotels in the country built with electrical lighting, and is greatly respected as a masterpiece of Victorian architecture.

James and Merritt Reid were both made Fellows of the American Institute of Architects in 1889; in that year, they opened an office in San Francisco.

The Reids became closely associated with the San Francisco Spreckels family, designing mansions for family members and the headquarters for the Spreckels-owned newspaper, the San Francisco Call. The Call Building is one of the Reid Brothers' best known achievements. At the time of construction, the Call Building was the tallest building in California. The Call Building is also significant for having survived the San Francisco earthquake and fires of April 1906 (Tobriner, pg. 90).

Much of the Reid Brothers' work occurred during San Francisco's reconstruction after April 1906, including San Francisco's Cliff House (1909), the Colombo Building (1913), and First Congregational Church (1914); scores of single family residences; and theatres.

The theatre building type allowed the Reid Brothers to explore a variety of architectural vocabularies; their theatre designs included Art Deco, Egyptian, Art Moderne, Spanish Renaissance, Gothic Revival, Italian Renaissance styles. Over the decades, all but eight Reid Brothers theatre houses have been demolished, abandoned or converted to other uses. Remaining examples include the Grand Lake in Oakland (1926), the Golden State in Monterey (1926) and the Balboa in San Francisco (1926). One other, the Sebastiani in Sonoma, completed construction in 1933 after Merritt Reid's death.

The Reid Brothers firm dissolved with the death of Merritt Jonathan Reid on February 4, 1932; thus, the Merced Theatre (1931) was the last of the firm's 28 known theatres which both brothers saw completed.

Antoon "Tony" Bonaventure Heinsbergen
News media reported the many firms who had been employed to create the Merced Theatre; one account states that "painting and decorating work was directed by Tony Heinsbergen of Los Angeles" (Merced Sun Star, October 29, 1931).

Antoon "Tony" Bonaventure Heinsbergen (1894-1981), also known as A.B. Heinsbergen, was a nationally acclaimed Dutch muralist who collaborated on buildings of all types, but his artistic reputation is most linked to theatre decors. In 1928, he had designed the interior décor for another downtown Merced building, the Hotel Tioga:

> "For dramatic effect, he drew upon such diverse sources as Native-American, Spanish and Italian design traditions...Portraits of King Ferdinand V, Vasco Nuñez de Balboa and Hernando de Soto he rendered in the heroic Spanish tradition... Heinsbergen's keen sense of color and vivid palette, along with his innate ability to combine distinctively different architectural vocabularies into a visually cohesive mixed idiom, were handsomely illustrated in the Hotel Tioga." (Powell, 1996)

Heinsbergen was responsible for over 750 theatres nationwide during America's golden age of theatre construction. Other Heinsbergen murals are found in Los Angeles City Hall, the Elks Clubs in Los Angeles and San Francisco, the Beverly-Wilshire Hotel, and the Senator Hotel in Sacramento.

Hispano Moresque Tile Company
The Hispano Moresque Tile Company was founded in 1927 by Harry C. Hicks, a former manufacturer of stained glass windows in England. The Hispano Moresque Tile company attracted such notice that it was featured in a 1929 edition of Architectural Digest (Taylor, 2003). The Reid Brothers architectural firm was designing the Merced Theatre throughout the latter months of 1929 and during the year 1930.

At the grand opening of the Merced Theatre, local press reported that "ornamental tile" had been "supplied by the Hispano Moresque firm of Los Angeles" (Merced Sun Star, October 29, 1931). These tiles are found on the risers of the lobby stairway and in the wainscoting on the mezzanine.

The Hispano Moresque Tile Company was located on La Brea Avenue in Los Angeles, and furnished tile for many notable buildings, including Charlie Chaplin's office on the same street, and in "Scotty's Castle" in Death Valley, California.

Criterion D *(Buildings that have yielded, or may be likely to yield information important in history or prehistory)* Not applicable.

Published Sources

Bracing for Disaster: Earthquake-Resistant Architecture and Engineering, Stephen Tobriner, Heyday Books: 2006 (pgs 88 & 89)

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Polk's Directories for Merced California, R.L. Polk & Co.: Dallas, Texas (published annually)

San Diego: California's Cornerstone, Iris Wilson Engstrand, Sunbelt Publications, Inc.: 2005 (pgs 102 & 103)

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Memorandum to City of Merced Design Review Commission, Susan Teaney, October 8, 1992

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Memorandum to City of Merced Historic Preservation Commission, Kimberly Nutt, June 15, 2005

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Merced Theatre Renovation Study, Wenell Mattheis Bowe Architects, September 2004

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Newspaper Articles

1700 Seats for Merced Theatre, Merced Sun Star, November 23, 1929

Meeting of the City Council: Monthly Reports of Various City Officials are Read and Approved, Merced Express, December 6, 1929

City to Ban Street Ball: Ordinance Introduced Against Football, Baseball and Basketball, Merced Express, Merced, CA: January 10, 1930

Meeting of the City Council: Applications for Permits for Building Repairs are Granted, Merced Express, Merced, CA: July 24, 1931

Local Theatre Heads Honored, Merced Sun Star, Merced, CA: September 26, 1931

Emmick Heads Theatre Firm, Merced Sun-Star, Merced, CA: October 29, 1931

'Bob' M'Neil is Stage Veteran, Merced Sun Star, Merced, CA: October 29, 1931

Many Firms Aid in Construction, Merced Sun Star, Merced, CA: October 29, 1931

Merced Playhouses of the Old and New Day (Rad's Ramblings), Merced Sun Star, Merced, CA, February 11, 1938

Internet Sources

Cinema Treasures, accessed April 7, 2008, http://cinematreasures.org/firm/52/show=all

Mural Conservancy of Los Angeles, accessed April 14, 2008, http://www.lamurals.org/MuralistPages/Heinsbergen.html

A Guide to Historic Architecture in Fresno, California; Biographies of Prominent Historic Architects, Designers and builders in Fresno and the Central Valley (Anthony Heinsbergen), John Edward Powell, 1996, http://historicfresno.org/bio/heinsber.htm

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries of the Merced Theatre comprise Lots 14, 15, and 16 of Block 161, as shown on the map entitled "Supplemental Map to Town of Merced", filed April 4, 1889, in the Office of the County Recorder of the County of Merced, in Volume 2 of Official Plats, at Page 12; Northwest corner of Main Street & Martin Luther King Way; Assessor's Parcel Number 031-151-005 (TransCounty Title Co., Sept 16, 2002).

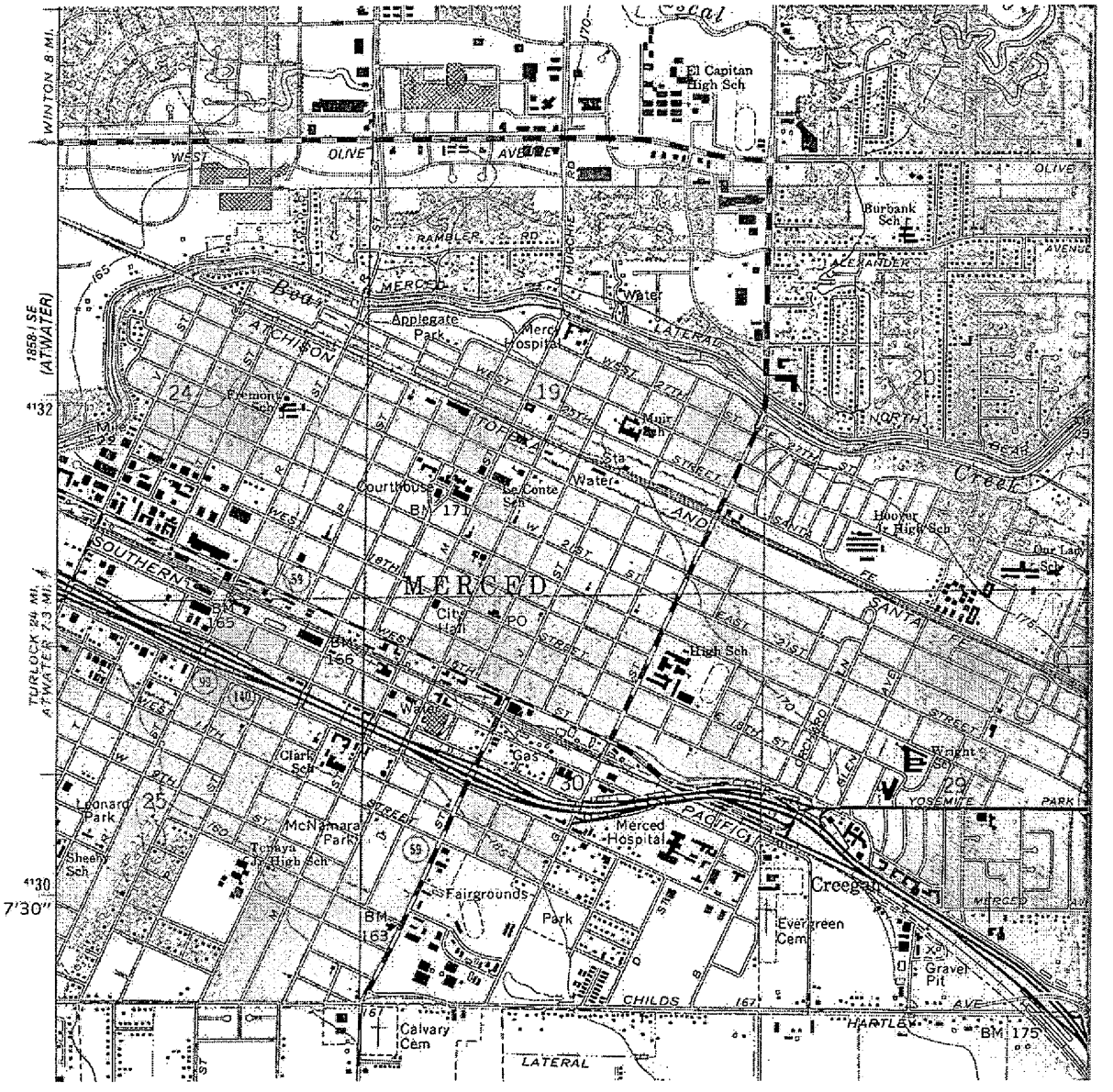
Boundary Justification

The boundaries were selected because they describe the original City lots, legal description, and Assessor's Parcel Number of the Merced Theatre.

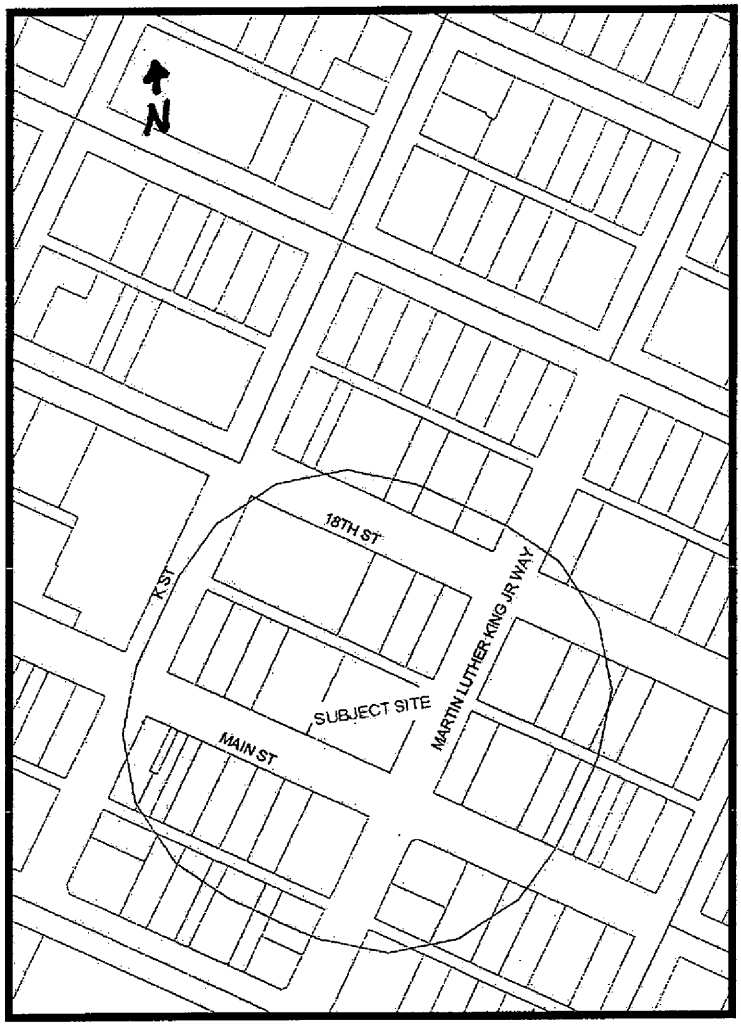
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

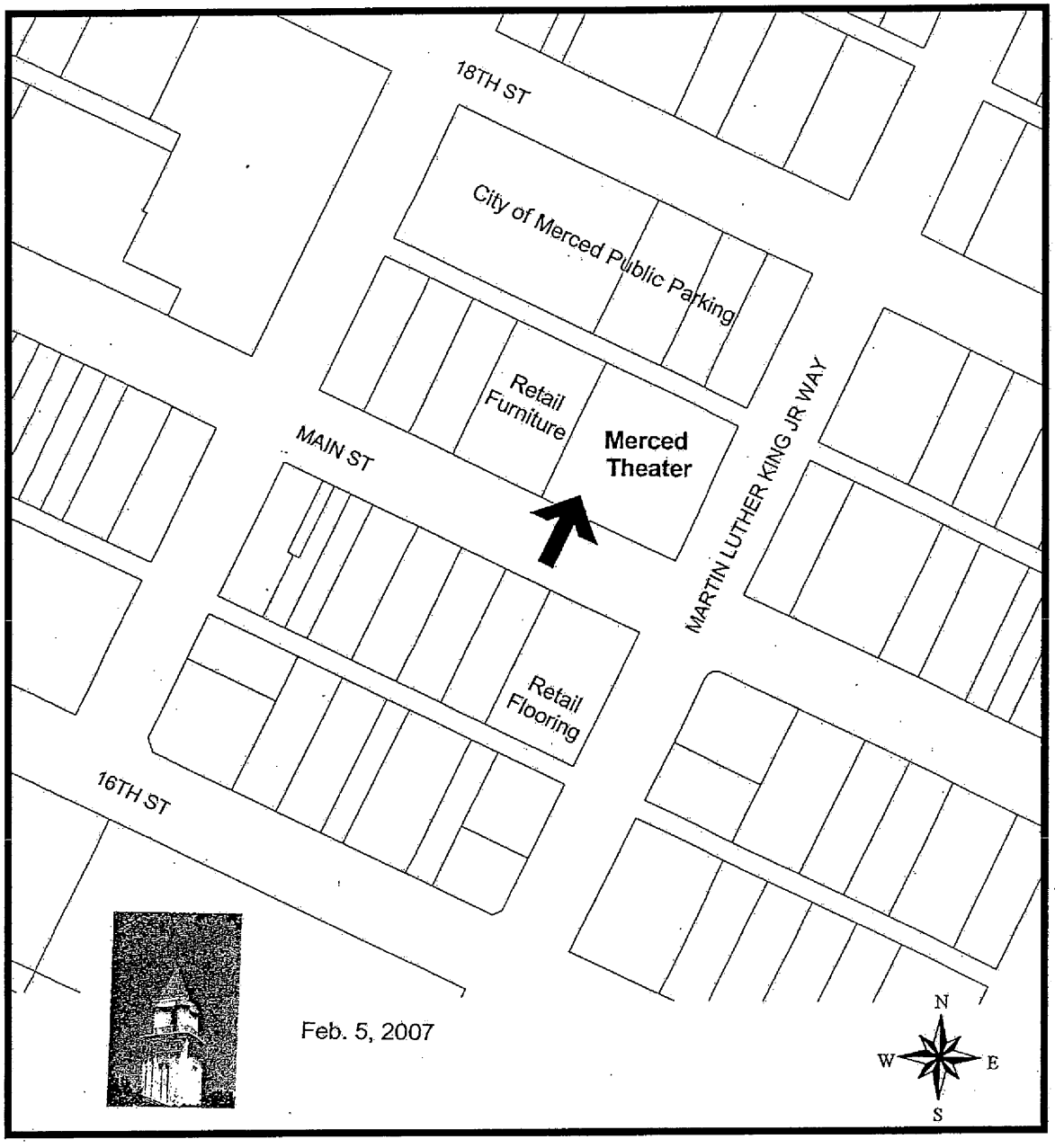
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

USGS Map



Sketch Maps




18TH ST
City of Merced Public Parking
Retail Furniture
Merced Theater
MAIN ST
MARTIN LUTHER KING JR WAY
Retail Flooring
16TH ST
Feb. 5, 2007
N
W
E
S

Digital Prints

A. (0001) **View: View north-northwest**
Description: Front elevation
Photographer: Patti Dossetti
Date: April 2008

B. (0002) **View: South-southwest**
Description: Commercial storefront colonnade
Photographer: Patti Dossetti
Date: April 2008

C. (0003) **View: west**
Description: Theatre entrance area
Photographer: Patti Dossetti
Date: April 2008

D. (0004) **View: north**
Description: Corner tower/sign detail
Photographer: Patti Dossetti
Date: April 2008

1.	View:	Merced Theatre Tower and Marquee
	Description of View:	Northwest across the intersection of Main and Martin Luther King Way
	Name of Photographer:	Unknown; original in possession of Merced County Historical Society
	Date of Photograph:	October 22, 1932
2.	View:	Merced Theatre Street Scene
	Description of View:	Northwest
	Name of Photographer:	Unknown; original in possession of Merced County Historical Society
	Date of Photograph:	Unknown/ circa 1935
3.	View:	Merced Theatre Main Street Wing
	Description of View:	Northwest
	Name of Photographer:	Unknown; original in possession of Merced County Historical Society
	Date of Photograph:	August 1954
4.	View:	Arcade Arched Breezeway, Main Street Wing
	Description of View:	Southeast, on Main Street facing Martin Luther King Way
	Name of Photographer:	Patti Dossetti
	Date of Photograph:	April 20, 2008
5.	View:	Entrance Lobby, Theatre Wing
	Description of View:	North
	Name of Photographer:	Unknown; original in possession of Merced County Historical Society
	Date of Photograph:	Approximately February 1954
6.	View:	Mezzanine Ceiling Beams and Light Fixtures, Theatre Wing
	Description of View:	South
	Name of Photographer:	Patti Dossetti
	Date of Photograph:	April 14, 2008
7.	View:	A.B. Heinsbergen Mural, Theatre Wing
	Description of View:	South, Above Lobby Entrance Doors
	Name of Photographer:	Patti Dossetti
	Date of Photograph:	April 14, 2008
8.	View:	Balcony Side Exit, South Castle Façade
	Description of View:	South
	Name of Photographer:	Unknown; original in possession of Merced County Historical Society
	Date of Photograph:	Unknown/ prior to 1978
9.	View:	Auditorium, Theatre Wing
	Description of View:	On stage, facing Southeast
	Name of Photographer:	Unknown; original in possession of Merced County Historical Society
	Date of Photograph:	Unknown/ prior to 1978

10.	View:	Stage with Castle Facades
	Description of View:	From balcony, facing West
	Name of Photographer:	Unknown; original in possession of Merced County Historical Society
	Date of Photograph:	Unknown/ prior to 1978

MERCED
MERCED
MERCED THEATRE

MERCED