NPS Form 10-900 OMB No. 1024-0018 (Expires 5/31/2012)

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NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

111

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name The Ludlow Theater

other names/site number KE-L-115

2. Location

street & number 322-326 Elm Street | NA | not for publication

city or town Ludlow | NA | vicinity

state Kentucky code KY county Kenton code 117 zip code 41016

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

Signature of certifying official/Title **Lindy Casebier, Acting SHPO** Date 1/28/2013

Kentucky Heritage Council/State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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 3.27.13

Ludlow Theater — Kenton County, Kentucky
Name of Property — County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- [x] private
- [ ] public - Local
- [ ] public - State
- [ ] public - Federal

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box.)

- [x] 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
		district
		site
		structure
		object
1	0	**Total**

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

NA

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

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/auditorium
WORK IN PROGRESS

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN/art deco

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: brick
walls: Brick, Tile, concrete block
roof:
other:

Narrative Description

Summary Paragraph

Narrative Description
Summary Paragraph

The Ludlow Theater (KE-L-115) is located at 322–324 Elm Street in downtown Ludlow, Kenton County, Kentucky. The theater is located on Ludlow's main street, at the western end of the city's downtown commercial district. It is surrounded by both commercial and residential buildings that range from historic to modern. The theater, built in 1946, is a two-story brick building that sits on a brick foundation and is capped with a flat, built-up roof. The property sits within the Ludlow Historic District, which was listed on the National Register in the Central Ludlow Historic District (NR ID # 84000526) in 1984. At the time of listing, the Theater was not yet 50 years old, and so was evaluated as non-contributing within that district. This nomination is submitted to list the property in the National Register individually. The area proposed for listing includes the Theater and its original lot boundary, which immediately surrounds the building.

Site Description

The Ludlow Theater, built in 1946, is first seen on the 1909–1949 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Covington, Kentucky.[1] It is located on the north side of Elm Street, approximately halfway between Butler and Kenner Streets. The main entry is on the south-southeast façade (for the sake of convenience, this side will be referred to as the "south" side hereafter). The front of the building is separated from the road and curb by the width of the sidewalk. The building maintains its original footprint, and no major additions or changes to the massing and form of the structure have taken place since its construction.

The 1909–1949 Sanborn Map shows the property lines coinciding with the front and back faces of the building, and extending slightly past the building's sides. While the lot has been expanded to include the lot immediately to the west—now a parking lot featuring a non-contributing building—the other three sides of the lot remain the same. That western expansion contains a paved parking lot on which sits a small non-historic office and studio building. The area proposed for this listing contains only the original lot boundary.

Exterior Description

The form of the building is long and rectangular, with a width of approximately 50 feet and a depth of approximately 135 ft. The façade of the theater features some art deco elements, such as several different designs of terracotta tile on the left (west) bay, but the theater as a whole is largely a modest modern building with little to characterize it within a specific style. The original description of the theater describes the style as "refined modern."[2] The most notable architectural element of the façade is the left bay that projects above the roofline, creating a parapet.

[1] Sanborn Map Company, Insurance Maps of Covington, Kentucky, Volume Two. Sanborn Map Company: New York, 1909–1949.
[2] "The Ludlow Theatre, Ludlow, Kentucky." *Theatre Catalog*. Jay Emanuel Productions, Inc.: Philadelphia, PA, 1945. 82.

The façade of the theater is sheathed in variegated brick with every sixth brick course projecting slightly from the façade. The façade's central bay houses its windows and doors; the bays to the left and right of the central bay have no openings.

The left (west) bay of the façade presents the building's most interesting arrangement of elements (see photo 0001). It is set apart by the use of different materials than the rest of the facade, as well as by its higher elevation, making it a focal point of the building. This bay is framed by narrow flat brick pilasters which rise to a flat concrete cap. Within those pilasters, and rising slightly higher than them, is a portion composed of a variety of terracotta tiles. Fluted terracotta tiles, with a marble finish, frame the left, right, and top sides of the bay. At the center of the top of the bay, the tiles drop down to create a square area containing a terracotta relief sculpture of a classical urn. Below the urn and within the area framed by the fluted tiles is an area of flat square terracotta tiles. A single band of larger square tiles run at the ground level of this bay, and spring up to near the midpoint of the right (eastern) pilaster; historical photos show that these tiles were originally painted a darker color than the gray they are currently painted. The bottom third of the bay currently features variegated brick with projecting sixth courses, similar to the rest of the façade, though a different type of variegated brick; historical photos (historic photos 0001 and 0002) show that this section of the bay originally contained a glass-covered display case which contained posters for current and upcoming shows.

The central bay of the façade features a new front entrance to the theater. The new entrance, made of metal and plate glass, features a recessed door flanked by a large single-pane window to the right (east) and three smaller single-pane windows to the left. These windows extend from the top of the entrance to approximately 2 ft above ground level; below this point are metal panels. The front door is a single-leaf metal and plate glass panel door, with a sidelight and transom. The reveals on either side of the recessed door are also plate glass windows. There is a small square vent above the entrance; it is not known whether this is original to the structure, as it would have been hidden behind the marquee.

Historical photos show that the original entrance was located in the same spot as the current entrance, but was configured differently. The original entrance featured two recessed portals featuring swinging, single-light double doors. Each set of doors featured two sets of angled bars that created a chevron shape. The left set of doors, with the bars on the interior, served as the exit, and the right set of doors served as the entrance. Between these two sets of doors was a three-sided projecting ticket booth, with glass windows on all three sides of the bay. To the right of the recessed entrance was another glass frame to showcase posters for current movie showings. This frame was flanked on the left side and below by more large square tiles, identical to those below and to the right of the decorative left bay. Both entrances and the frame were covered by the projecting triangular marquee. Both angled sides of the marquee featured large metal letters spelling out LUDLOW. The original description of the marquee reads: "An adequate marquee is topped by large channel letters in modern style with double non tubing which will make all those who pass by conscious of the theatre's name and location."[3]

The right bay of the façade is largely blank, but features three small square windows, arranged vertically. These feature two different designs of glass blocks. These windows are original to the structure, though it is undetermined if any of the current glass blocks are the originals. The remainder of the bay is blank, carrying on the same brick design as the rest of the façade.

[3] "The Ludlow Theatre, Ludlow, Kentucky." *Theatre Catalog*, 82.

The western elevation of the building is partially sheathed in brick. Approximately 30 feet back from the front façade, the brick ends and tile veneer begins, which covers the remainder of the building. The western elevation features a large rectangular vent in the second story, located near the southern corner of the building. There is an entrance in this elevation, located just to the right of the end of the brick section; this entrance consists of two swinging, single-light metal doors. This entrance can be dated to at least the 1980s, when the building was a clutch factory. No historic photos of this part of this elevation are known to exist. Historic photo 0002 from 1975 shows the southern part of the elevation, which included a flat awning attached to the wall with brackets. This awning is no longer extant, but holes on the elevation extending to the double doors show the likely size of the awning. It is undetermined whether this was an original feature of the building. The tiled portion of this elevation features three narrow projecting sections of wall, each approximately 2 ft wide. The roofline of this elevation steps down several times to accommodate the slant of the flat roof behind the roofline.

The eastern elevation features the same pattern of brick and tile veneer as the western elevation. The eastern elevation is blank, with no doors or windows appearing anywhere along the elevation. No historic photos of this elevation could be found during the course of research, but given the building's function as a theater, an entirely blank façade would not have been unusual. As with the western elevation, three projecting sections of tile emerge from this elevation, and are spaced evenly along the northern half of the elevation.

The rear elevation of the theater features three large entrances, two of which have been heavily modified. The rightmost entrance, originally the size of a garage door, has been partially enclosed with cement blocks and now features a single-leaf metal panel door. An opening above this entrance, which may have originally featured a vent, has been enclosed. The central entrance is larger, and features a retractable vinyl garage door. The leftmost entrance, the same size as the one on the right, has been completely enclosed with cement block. As on the right entrance, the opening above this entrance has also been enclosed.

Interior Description

While the interior was greatly changed in the 1980s, the current interior shows clues about the original interior of the building. The levels of the original poured concrete floor are visible on the concrete block and brick. The front portion of the interior, which originally contained the lobby, is still several feet higher than the remainder of the space; this is likely the original configuration of the interior, though the wooden railings and sets of steps leading down to the lower portion of the building are newer. This raised front portion features the theater's original bathrooms. The current owner is in the process of converting the interior back into a performance space, oriented the same direction as the original theater, and has put up temporary curtains at the north end of the building. The upper floor of the building, which extends only as far as the raised portion of the lower floor, features the projection room as well as some of the original equipment for the theater, including the building's early geothermal heating and cooling system. This geothermal system, which consists of two buried water pumps and geothermal wells and a second floor wall of radiators and filters and a large fan to help circulate hot and cool air, was confirmed by the owner of the structure in 2012, and, if original to the structure, is a fairly early example of a geothermal cooling and heating system. It has not been conclusively determined whether this system is original to the 1946 construction of the theater.

No historical photos of the interior of the theater could be found, but a description noted that it included a large 725-seat theater on the first floor and a private 45-seat theater on the second floor.[4] The original plans for the

[4] Cinema Treasures, "Ludlow Theater," Cinema Treasures website, accessed October 4, 2012, http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/26918. This information comes from a commenter and is unverified.

theater show that it featured terrazzo and carpet flooring, a fluted plaster ceiling panel just inside the front entrance, and a semicircular concession stand between the entrance and the auditorium itself.[5]

The theater contains some of its original equipment and furnishings; these are currently stored or still in their original locations in the upper-level projection booth. These include two original power inverters, which aided in projecting the film; the geothermal pump system used for air conditioning; letters from the original marquee; and nearly two dozen original seats, in whole or in parts.

Changes to the Theater since the Period of Significance

The most major changes to the façade include the removal of its original marquee, the entry, and the display cases on the western bay of the façade. On the sides of the exterior, the majority of the materials of the structure and their design have remained.

Even before the marquee's removal, it had been altered. The cut-off tip of the marquee originally contained a stylized neon motif that included a star; by the 1970s, the theater's logo had changed. Historic photo 0002 shows this new logo, which consisted of two backlit letters: an L and a T or C, standing for the Ludlow Theater or Cinema. The marquee was removed in the mid-1980s, likely coinciding with the closing of the theater in 1983 and the building's conversion into a clutch factory in 1985. At this time, the original entrance was also heavily modified, with the enclosure of much of the original entrance bay and the addition of a new metal and pane glass door, as well as an awning above the entrance bay. The current owner has plans to restore or replace the original marquee.

The interior of the theater was heavily altered during the conversion to a clutch factory in the 1980s. At that time, the interior was almost completely gutted and the theater's sloping floor was leveled.

[5] *Theatre Catalog* 1945 82.

Ludlow Theater
Name of Property

Kenton County , Kentucky
County and State

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.)

- [x] 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.)

Property is:

- [ ] 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.)

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

Period of Significance

1946–1963

Significant Dates

1946

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

NA

Cultural Affiliation

NA

Architect/Builder

F & Y Building Service

Period of Significance (justification)

The Period of Significance begins with the date of construction of the theater and ends in 1963, 50 years prior to the listing, according to conventions of the Naitonal Register for properties nominated under Criterion A.

Criteria Considerations: NA

Statement of Significance
Summary Paragraph

The Ludlow Theater (KE-L-115), built in 1946, meets National Register Criterion A. It is locally significant in the area of Entertainment/Recreation. The theater is an important property in the development of Ludlow, especially within that city's entertainment culture. It stands as a typical example of postwar movie theaters in America, showing the evolution of the movie theater culture during the decades after World War II. The significance of the Ludlow Theater is explored within the contexts of Postwar Movie Theaters in America (1945–1985), as well as the local context of the Development and Entertainment Culture in Ludlow, Kentucky (1894–1983). It provides a strong example of the central role movie theaters played in small towns across the country during the movie boom following the Second World War. During this time, Main Street theaters like the Ludlow Theater became centers of their communities and played active roles in the lives of their towns. The property sits within the Ludlow Historic District, which was listed on the National Register in the Central Ludlow Historic District (NR ID # 84000526) in 1984. At the time of listing, the Theater was not yet 50 years old, and so was evaluated as non-contributing within that district. This nomination is submitted to list the property in the National Register individually.

Historic Context 1: POSTWAR MOVIE THEATERS IN AMERICA, 1945–1985

Prior to World War II, the American movie-going experience was a lavish one. The movie palaces of the 1920s and 30s were massive, ornate structures, typically able to seat thousands, that combined live entertainment, films, spectacle and service.[6] These extravagant buildings held special-occasion events, with relatively high ticket prices (up to 55 cents a ticket in 1928[7]), not an everyday escape for the masses. More modest neighborhood theaters, with fewer amenities and lower ticket prices, provided a much-needed escape for citizens of all classes during the hard years of World War II. Theaters, and the films they sold, helped boost morale, spread information through newsreel footage, show propaganda and recruitment films, and helped the war effort by hosting war bond sales and drives to collect scrap materials like metal and rubber. The government went so far as to officially designate the movie industry as a "necessary war industry," saying that "a movie camera is as much an instrument of war as a machine-gun"[8]—while maintaining a moratorium on movie theater construction to conserve materials and labor.[9]

Because of the movie industry's efforts on the home front, a House Naval Affairs Subcommittee recommended in 1943 that "$25 million in materials and equipment be allocated for [the construction of] theaters and other recreational buildings."[10] Due in part to the framing of movie-going as a patriotic act, theaters saw a boom in

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[6] Valentine, Maggie. *The Show Starts On The Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theatre*. Yale University Press: New Haven, 1994. 35.
[7] Valentine 194.
[8] Valentine 129.
[9] Valentine 128.
[10] Valentine 129.

attendance during the war years—between 1941 and 1945, theaters sold an average of 85 million tickets per week—a nearly 25 percent increase from a decade earlier.[11] Movie studios saw record profits of over $66 million in 1945.[12]

Immediately after the war, the moratorium on movie theater construction was lifted, resulting in an immediate surge in theater-building. Postwar theaters were built to capitalize on the boom in movie-going that had started during the war, and to take advantage of the influx of soldiers returning home and looking for venues for entertainment and courtship. By the end of 1945, the number of movie theaters in the country had risen to 19,096—1,116 more than the previous year[13]. These new theaters responded to the limited availability of materials like steel, aluminum, and chrome by scaling down and incorporating widely-available materials like concrete and glass.[14] These theaters exhibited clean modern minimalist forms that reflected the attitudes of a country emerging from a heavily-rationed wartime experience. The Ludlow Theater exhibits these features, from its modern, minimal décor and design, to its lack of rationed materials, like steel and chrome, even on its original appearance. This was described as a "refined modern scheme" in the original description of the theater.[15]

With soldiers returning home, and all Americans returning to peace-time pursuits, the movie experience continued to grow in popularity. During the years immediately following the war, people flocked to the movies to see films, to socialize, and to enjoy the amenities movie theaters provided. Movie attendance peaked during the years immediately after the war, with an average of ninety million tickets sold every week between 1946 and 1948.[16]

The postwar movie boom was short-lived, with two major events coinciding to cause the decline. One event, the widespread rise of the personal television, threatened the business of movie theaters by offering in-home entertainment without a ticket charge. According to Valentine, "between 1947 and 1957, weekly movie attendance fell by one-half, as 90 percent of American households acquired a television set."[17] The increased availability and convenience of home televisions, combined with increased ticket prices at the movie theaters, led to a massive drop in movie theater attendance. In addition to the threats of televisions and higher ticket prices, traditional one-screen theaters were facing competition from the drive-in theaters that were rising in popularity with the automobile and suburb culture.

The second event that led to the decline of the theater came from within the theater industry. In 1948, the Supreme Court decided that the major studios—Paramount, RKO, Loew's, Twentieth Century–Fox, and Warner Brothers—violated anti-trust laws by restricting the exhibition of movies to theaters owned by the respective studio. Prior to this case (*United States v. Paramount Pictures, Inc.*, 334 US 131), a movie made by Paramount,

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[11] Valentine 130.
[12] Schatz, Thomas. *Boom and Bust: American Cinema in the 1940s*. University of California Press: Berkeley, 1999. 290.
[13] Valentine 195.
[14] Valentine 144.
[15] *Theatre Catalog* 1945 82.
[16] Valentine 144.
[17] Valentine 163.

for instance, could only be shown in a Paramount-owned theater. After 1948, movie theaters that were under independent ownership were forced to raise ticket prices to make up for lost studio backing.[18]

Independent theater owners responded to these economic pressures by improving their amenities to keep and attract customers. Features like state-of-the-art air conditioning and heating systems, wide screens, new or expanded concession stands, and stereo sound all helped movie theaters stay in business during the period after World War II. Some production companies experimented with 3-D technology, introduced in 1953, though it failed to catch on in any significant fashion.[19] Some new amenities, including individual hearing aids and "cry rooms" with views of the screen, reflected the awareness of returning veterans and their new families.[20]

While these new amenities helped theaters, ticket sales did not return to the levels of the boom years during and immediately after the war. This was especially true for the small downtown cinemas like the Ludlow Theater, which were even more threatened by the rise of the suburbs, drive-ins, televisions, and, in the 1970s, the large state-of-the-art multi-screen cineplexes that featured a greater array of modern customer amenities. The single-screen downtown theaters that were so popular during and after the war became "mementos of a different age—when people traveled by foot, when neighborhood theater meant it was within walking distance, when movies were movies and admission was a dime," according to a 1983 article in the Kentucky Post.[21]

These threats from all sides led to mass closures of single-screen theaters from the late 1960s onward. Peggy Kreimer writes, in 1983, about the loss of many downtown theaters in the Northern Kentucky area: "The Madison in Covington, another one-screen walk-in theater, has been boarded up since 1977. The Kentucky in Latonia houses a dentist's office. Bellevue's Dayvue closed in 1952. Covington's Liberty is part of a bank. The old Family Theater is a church. The Hippodrome is a parking lot. The Princess in Dayton is a hardware store."[22] Once they were no longer profitable, these buildings were torn down or reused—often for an unrelated purpose—to maintain some level of profit in failing downtown settings. From their peak just after World War II, postwar movie theaters were almost completely extinct by the 1980s, due to the combined factors of competition, modernization, and suburbanization.

History of the Ludlow Theater

The Ludlow Theater was opened in 1946 (some accounts say 1947) by Henry Hilling, who also owned Ludlow's first theater, the Elm. According to an account in the Ludlow Centennial Souvenir Program from 1964, Mr. Hilling saw "the need for newer and more modern facilities" and opened the larger, air-conditioned Ludlow Theater in response to this need[23]. In addition to air conditioning, the Ludlow Theater featured double the seating capacity of the Elm, as well as a sleek, modern design "conveying a metropolitan smartness" with amenities like a large concession stand and modern heating and cooling systems for year-round comfort[24]. The

[18] Valentine 163.
[19] Valentine 168.
[20] Valentine 174.
[21] Kreimer, Peggy. "The Old Theaters: When movies were movies." *The Kentucky Post*, Cincinnati, Ohio, May 21, 1983.
[22] Kreimer, 1983.
[23] Winterberg, Pat. "Ludlow…entertainment and recreation," in *Ludlow Centennial Souvenir Program, 1864–1964*. Ludlow Centennial Celebration Inc., Acorn OTTOmatic Printing Co., 1964. 52.
[24] *Theatre Catalog* 1945: 82.

theater was owned and operated by the Hillings until at least the mid-1960s—the 1964 centennial program notes that the theater was currently being operated by Mrs. Hilling. No connection between the Ludlow Theater and any particular movie studio could be found; it would not be uncommon for small neighborhood theaters like the Ludlow to be independently owned and free of studio backing.

Little can be found of the theater's film schedules, but historic photos from the Kentucky Post reveal several of the features shown. One from the 1960s advertises "ADULT FILMS THURS FRI SAT," featuring Raquel Welch headlining the 1967 film *The Oldest Profession*—a series of sketches about prostitution through history.[25] According to city directories, the Ludlow Theater was in operation throughout the next several decades. It may have been operated by James and Janet Rohan in the 1970s and 80s; by this time, it was only showing films on the weekends.[26] A longtime Ludlow resident recalled the theater showing films of rock concerts in the 1970s and 80s as well. The last year the Ludlow Theater was listed was 1983; in 1984, the address was listed as vacant, and in 1985 a new tenant, Mach Three Clutch, a clutch manufacturing plant, was occupying the building.[27] Mach Three was responsible for many of the changes to the structure of the building, including the removal of the marquee, alteration of the entrance, and leveling of the floor. In 2009, Paul Miller, the founder of Circus Mojo, moved into the space and began converting it to a circus training school and camp. Circus Mojo officially opened in January of 2010, and has been working to convert the structure to a teaching and performance venue.[28]

Evaluation of Significance of the Ludlow Theater within the context of Postwar Movie Theaters in America, 1945–1985

The Ludlow Theater is a good example of a postwar movie theater, from the reasons and timing behind its opening to its design and materials to the story of its decline and closure. The theater was built to provide a more modern, amenity-filled alternative to an older, smaller theater and to take advantage of the movie-going boom that came with World War II and the years immediately following. The building itself, designed to "embrace the serviceable needs of its rural location and clientele, while conveying a metropolitan smartness which would contrast favorably with nearby showhouses,"[29] embodies the restraint in design and materials that characterized postwar buildings. Its minimal design and façade show the modern aesthetic that was common among buildings of this period, while remaining conservative enough for its small town setting. The interior featured modern amenities like heating, air conditioning, and concessions, to meet the expectations of the movie-going public.

The challenges to single-screen downtown theaters after the war are evident in the history of the Ludlow Theater. While the theater remained under the operation of its original owners for two decades, the competition

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[25] Kenton County Public Library, "Ludlow Theater." Faces and Places—Northern Kentucky Photographic Archives, accessed October 4, 2012.
http://www.kentonlibrary.org/genphotos/viewPhoto.cfm?imagename=di50480

[26] Cinema Treasures, "Ludlow Theater," Cinema Treasures website. This information comes from a commenter and is unverified.

[27] Williams Directory Company. Williams Covington and Vicinity City Directory. Cincinnati: Williams Directory Co. Publishing, 1983, 1984, 1985.

[28] Wartman, Scott. "Circus School Sets Up In Ludlow," Cincinnati Enquirer, February 6, 2010.

[29] *Theatre Catalog* 1945 82.

from large, state-of-the-art multiplexes in surrounding towns (especially nearby Cincinnati) clearly affected the theater. From showing high-profit adult films in the late 1960s, to only showing movies on weekends in the 1970s and 80s, the theater's decline from a bustling, family-friendly entertainment venue to its eventual closure in the early 1980s parallels a similar decline of single-screen downtown theaters all across the country. The Ludlow Theater is one of the few surviving single-screen downtown theaters in Northern Kentucky—nearly all were closed in the decades following World War II, and many were destroyed. It is one of the only ones currently remaining in use as an entertainment venue. Even the theater's altered condition is emblematic of the patterns within the film and entertainment industry in the years and decades following the war, in which these theaters were re-used, altered, or torn down completely after they ceased to be profitable.

Historic Context 2: DEVELOPMENT AND ENTERTAINMENT CULTURE IN LUDLOW, KENTUCKY (1894–1983)

The History of Ludlow, 1846–present

Ludlow, Kentucky is one of the string of river cities that make up the Northern Kentucky region. These cities, connected by Highway 8 just south of the Ohio River, include (from west to east): Bromley, Ludlow, Covington, Newport, Bellevue, and Dayton. Ludlow is located in a bend of the Ohio River, southwest of Cincinnati. The city of Ludlow was originally laid out by Israel Ludlow in 1846, on land previously owned by William Bullock. Before Bullock, the land was owned by Thomas D. Carneal, who built a large home called Elmwood Hall on the property in 1818.[30] The town developed slowly in the years prior to the Civil War, and was officially incorporated by the Commonwealth of Kentucky in 1864. In the decades following the war, the town developed rapidly, establishing schools, police and fire departments, and a town hall. The Cincinnati Southern Railroad came to Ludlow in the 1870s, altering the character of the town from "a rural area to a working class suburb" and bringing with it jobs, new residents, and increased development. A railroad bridge to Cincinnati was completed in 1877, with a footpath added in 1885.[31] By 1883, commercial development along Ash Street was established, and was beginning to develop along Elm Street.[32] In 1893, streetcar service between Covington and Ludlow began and a Pullman passenger car repair plant was built in the city. The Ludlow Lagoon Amusement Park was opened in 1894. New schools were built in the 1890s, with additions completed in the first several decades of the 1900s. The city's population continued to increase throughout the first half of the twentieth century.[33]

Ludlow saw building and population booms after both world wars. After World War I, additions were constructed on the east and west ends of the city, with new residential, commercial, and civic developments, including a new city hall and firehouse and a five-acre park. After World War II, more residential streets were developed to accommodate returning veterans and the resultant baby boom. Ludlow's population peaked at 6,374 in 1950, and began to decline during the late 1960s, when residents left for surrounding suburban areas. The population stabilized around 4,500 in the early 1980s, and has maintained a similar level since.[34]

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[30] Schroeder, David. "Ludlow," in *The Encyclopedia of Northern Kentucky*, edited by Paul A. Tenkotte and James C. Claypool. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009. 567.
[31] Schroeder 567
[32] Feldman, Lori. Ludlow Multiple Resource Area nomination. Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1984.
[33] Schroeder 567–568.
[34] Schroeder 567–568.

Entertainment Culture in Ludlow, 1894–1983

Ludlow has a rich and varied entertainment history that includes theaters, amusement parks, music venues, and bars, among other types of entertainment. For the purposes of this nomination, this context will focus on the city's most popular and important sources of entertainment through its history: the city's amusement park and theaters.

Ludlow's entertainment culture began with the Ludlow Lagoon Amusement Park in 1894. This park, located along Pleasant Run Creek west of downtown Ludlow, was created by damming Pleasant Run Creek to create a large lake. Rides, amusements, pavilions, theatres, a dancing hall, arcades, a carousel, and a large club house with restaurant were all situated around the new lake. Boats were available to rent; 100 were available on opening day.[35] A manmade beach, built of timber with sand and gravel on top, was another attraction of the park; bathing suits were available for purchase on-site.[36] The roller coaster, named the "Scenic Railroad," was one of the first three coasters in the country. Another ride, "Autoing in the Treetops," consisted of an elevated road equipped with real Buicks, advertised as "the only ride of the kind in the world."[37] The theatre in the park, which advertised "high-class 'free Vaudeville,'" could seat 2,200.[38] The Lagoon added the Motordrome, a banked track used for motorcycle racing, in 1913.[39]

The Lagoon was an extremely popular destination for residents throughout the Northern Kentucky and Cincinnati area. Crowds could reach thirty thousand on a weekend night, and fifty street cars were dedicated to the route to the Lagoon. On weekends and holidays, trolleys destined for the Lagoon left Fountain Square in Cincinnati every two minutes[40]. The Lagoon was a point of pride for Ludlow's citizens, and was a major draw to the city. However, the Lagoon was relatively short-lived, and closed after a series of disasters in the 1910s: an accident in the Motordrome a month after that attraction opened caused a fire in which ten people died, and many more were injured; a flood in 1913 further damaged the park; and a tornado in 1915 caused massive damage to the park, wrecking the Motordrome, the auto track, and the theatre, and badly damaging the clubhouse, entrance, dancing pavilion, and many other sections of the park. The tornado caused an estimated $50,000 in damages, from which the park never completely recovered. Following the tornado, World War I and Prohibition combined to put additional strains on the park, which finally closed in 1918.[41, 42]

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[35] Northern Kentucky Views, "The Ludlow Lagoon, Part 1." Northern Kentucky Views webpage, accessed October 4, 2012. http://www.nkyviews.com/kenton/kenton_lagoon_1.htm

[36] Northern Kentucky Views, "The Ludlow Lagoon, Part 3." Northern Kentucky Views webpage, accessed October 4, 2012. http://www.nkyviews.com/kenton/kenton_lagoon_3.htm

[37] Northern Kentucky Views, "The Ludlow Lagoon, Part 3."

[38] The Lagoon Company, "Beautiful Lagoon." 1905. Accessed via Northern Kentucky Views webpage, accessed October 4, 2012. http://www.nkyviews.com/kenton/text/1905_lagoon.htm

[39] Northern Kentucky Views, "The Ludlow Lagoon, Part 3."

[40] Northern Kentucky Views, "The Ludlow Lagoon, Part 1."

[41] Northern Kentucky Views, "$50,000 Loss at Lagoon," The Kentucky Post, July 8, 1915. Accessed via Northern Kentucky Views, accessed October 4, 2012. http://www.nkyviews.com/kenton/text/1915_tornado_lagoon.htm

[42] Schroeder 568.

Movie theaters came to Ludlow in 1909. The first movie house, called "The Wilma," was located in a cottage on Elm Street, and was later moved to the second floor of the Odd Fellows Temple. The Wilma was purchased by Harry Hilling, who moved his movie operation into a new building at 235 Elm Street in 1921.[43] This theater, "The Elm," was the first traditional, dedicated "movie theater" in Ludlow, and featured a 385-seat capacity and five-cent admission for half-hour movies with hand-cranked projectors. The Elm even premiered a movie filmed in Ludlow called "The Sweetest Story Ever Told,"[44] in 1922. While the Elm was in business, another Ludlow citizen, Thomas Balsley, opened a second movie house, the "Dixie," in the Odd Fellows temple. Mr. Hilling opened the Ludlow Theater, double the size of the Elm and equipped with modern amenities, in 1946, and presumably closed the Elm at this time.[45] The Ludlow Theater operated continuously until 1983.

Movies have been a part of Ludlow's culture for many decades. In addition to the popularity of going to the movies—evidenced by the continuous run of movie houses and theaters in the town since the early 1900s—several movies were filmed in Ludlow as well. "The Sweetest Story Ever Told," produced by the Romel Motion Picture Company of Cincinnati, was not only filmed in Ludlow; it also included Ludlow citizens. The Elm Theater sponsored a "Prettiest Girl in Ludlow" contest, and the winner, Margaret Mershon, won the lead role in the film. The film premiered in April of 1922 at the Elm Theater.[46] Seventy years later, another movie, *Lost in Yonkers*, was partially filmed in Ludlow. This Columbia Pictures production, starring Richard Dreyfuss, was set in 1940s Yonkers, New York; Ludlow was chosen to play the role of that town. Elm Street was transformed into a movie set, with new temporary buildings constructed and existing buildings modified to fit the time period. Hundreds of Ludlow residents were used as extras during filming. Period advertisements painted on some of the buildings still remain as a reminder of the town's role in this film.[47]

Since the late-nineteenth century, Ludlow's culture has almost always included at least one entertainment venue. Despite the town's small size, these venues were draws for both residents and outsiders, and were an important part of the community, enhancing both the economy and the social scene of Ludlow. Many factors, from natural disasters to modernization to a declining population, have resulted in all these entertainment venues being closed down. Despite being closed and, in many cases, no longer extant, they remain important parts of the community's history.

Evaluation of Significance of the Ludlow Theater within the context of Development and Entertainment Culture in Ludlow, Kentucky (1894–1983).

The Ludlow Theater, as a social destination for the community, is significant for its role in that important period of post-WWII Ludlow, as well as for its associations with Ludlow's once-robust, now nearly extinct entertainment culture that stretches much longer than the post-WWII period.

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[43] Winterberg 52.

[44] Kenton County Public Library, "Sweetest Story Ever Told," Kenton County Public Library webpage, accessed October 4, 2012. http://www.kenton.lib.ky.us/genealogy/history/ludlow/article.cfm?ID=67

[45] Winterberg, 1964, p. 52.

[46] Kenton County Public Library, "Sweetest Story Ever Told"

[47] Kenton County Public Library, "Lost In Yonkers," Kenton County Public Library Webpage, accessed October 4, 2012. http://www.kentonlibrary.org/genealogy/history/ludlow/article.cfm?ID=63

The Ludlow Theater has been a center of the community's social scene since its construction. In 1952, Vernon C. Lowdenback wrote his University of Cincinnati master's thesis on "The Leisure-Time Activities of Ludlow, Kentucky High School Boys, 1949–50." His data from this project showed that 94 percent of the boys surveyed listed "going to the movies" among their leisure-time activities—the most popular among all activities listed.[48] A longtime Ludlow citizen reported that the Ludlow Theater was a very popular destination while it was open, and recalled seeing movies like *Planet of the Apes* there, as well as watching films of concerts.

The Ludlow Theater was Ludlow's newest, largest, and most modern entertainment venue, and stood apart from the smaller bars and clubs that offered entertainment in the form of live music. The theater's location on the west end of downtown, surrounded by both commercial and residential development, was ideal—many Ludlow residents could walk to the theater. The longtime owners of the theater, the Hillings, lived in the house directly across from the theater. The theater's location offered a downtown destination with walkable residential proximity that is not seen in the large suburban multiplexes or drive-in theaters that became popular in the decades following World War II, and allowed the theater to become a focal point for the community. Despite this, the competition provided by larger and more modern theaters, along with Ludlow's declining population in the 1960s and 1970s, forced the theater to close in the early 1980s, depriving Ludlow of its last dedicated downtown entertainment venue. Today, the nearest movie theaters are all large multiplexes located in Newport and Cincinnati.

Evaluation of the Historic Integrity of the Ludlow Theater

The Ludlow Theater stands as one of the few remaining structures from Ludlow's long relationship with entertainment and movie culture. The Ludlow Lagoon has been almost completely destroyed, and the Elm Theater, though still standing, is not recognizable as a former movie venue. The Ludlow Theater is certainly the only such structure currently being used for entertainment purposes, and the planned improvements to the structure will only enhance the building's appearance and illuminate its history. Even in its current state, without any improvements, the theater stands as a reminder of the community's history and heyday in the 1950s, when the city was growing and developing in the wake of World War II, building new schools and neighborhoods and preparing to celebrate its centennial in 1964.

Integrity is defined as the ability of a property to convey its significance in its material form. The integrity of the Ludlow Theater is being evaluated, in light of its current physical condition, for its ability to convey its associations with postwar theaters and with the history and development of Ludlow. Because of this, the most important aspect of integrity for this building is its integrity of association. Integrity of association results from the culmination of a number of more detailed integrity factors: location, setting, and, to a lesser extent, materials, workmanship, and design. The Ludlow Theater retains enough of these defining characteristics to convey its associations with the patterns and influences of American culture on postwar movie theaters, as well as with the history of Ludlow and its entertainment culture.

The Ludlow Theater retains excellent integrity of **location**. The building remains in its original footprint and has never been moved. This location is a key factor in the theater's place in the history of Ludlow: the location

[48] Lowdenback, Vernon C. "The Leisure-Time Activities of Ludlow, Kentucky High School Boys, 1949–50," unpublished master's thesis, University of Cincinnati, 1952. Accessed via Northern Kentucky Views webpage, accessed October 4, 2012. http://www.nkyviews.com/kenton/kenton970.htm

at the confluence of commercial and residential development allowed the theater to be a social and commercial hotspot for the downtown area while remaining walkable for much of residential Ludlow in the pre-suburban era. This downtown location was also common for many small postwar theaters, and is an important factor in the Ludlow Theater's association with that period in American cinema history.

Likewise, the Ludlow Theater retains excellent integrity of **setting**. Historic Sanborn Fire Insurance maps show that the theater was originally surrounded by commercial buildings to the east and approximately a block to the west, with residential development farther west and a mix of residential and commercial development across Elm Street to the south. Today, the setting around the theater retains the same mix of residential and commercial development, with very little in the way of modern infill or incursions. As with its location, the theater's setting was a key in its place within the history of Ludlow, and its current integrity of setting has helped to maintain its associations with Ludlow's entertainment culture, as well as the culture surrounding postwar cinemas in general.

The Ludlow Theater retains good integrity of **materials**. While some materials, including the marquee, entrance, and most of the interior, have been removed, the majority of the structure remains in place. The exterior, including the majority of the façade, remains as it was built and retains its original brick and terracotta tile. These materials, which were some of the few to not be rationed or limited in the wake of World War II, are significant to the structure's status as a postwar theater.

The Ludlow Theater retains modest integrity of **design**. The regrettable loss of the original entrance, marquee, and interior have diminished the building's integrity of design, but the design as a whole is more than these individual parts. The theater was designed to be a "refined modern" building that would look modern but not garish in its small town setting. The minimal, modern design of the exterior, with the parapet panel and brick and tile detailing, has been retained despite the other changes to the façade. Many of the façade's original details, including the terracotta tiles and detailing and the unique "rusticated" pattern of the brick, remain today. Additionally, no additions or alterations have been made to the footprint of the building as a whole, allowing it to retain its original size and feel from the street. The current entrance, though a replacement, retains the location of the original entrance, as well as maintaining some of the original rhythm of the exterior through its use of a recessed door and windows with similar size and shape as the dedicated space for the framed movie posters to the right of the original entrance.

The Ludlow Theater retains good integrity of **workmanship**. Though the façade design is fairly modest, it features detailing like the projecting brick courses and the terracotta tile panel that show the workmanship inherent in the construction of the building. While the majority of the interior finishes are gone, the exposed concrete block and brick walls allow for the workmanship in the structure of the building to be seen. Additionally, the good physical condition of the building today is a testament to the workmanship put into the structure during construction.

The Ludlow Theater retains a modest amount of integrity of **feeling**. Feeling is a property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular period of time, which results from the presence of physical features that, taken together, convey the property's historic character. The unique design of the structure makes it stand out among the older structures that make up the majority of historic architecture in downtown Ludlow. This signals that the theater was created as a modern structure, meant to make it distinctive and to attract attention of its potential customers. While the theater lacks the marquee that would make it immediately read as a historic

theater, the design of the building without the marquee still retains its integrity of feeling. The maintenance of the building's original form, façade, and footprint, as well as its current use as a performance space, help the building continue to convey that feeling. Though the interior has been altered, the two-level floor and maintenance of the original divisions of space inside the building—separating the front lobby and standee area from the auditorium—help maintain the original feel of the theater as well.

Finally, the Ludlow Theater retains a strong integrity of **association**. Integrity of association, like integrity of feeling, is a cumulative effect of the physical aspects of a structure, and is dependent upon how well those aspects can convey the historical trends with which the structure is associated. The Ludlow Theater's most significant associations, with the history of Ludlow and its entertainment culture and with postwar cinemas and cinema culture in America, are maintained and strengthened by the building's physical aspects and surroundings. The theater's location and setting are the same as they were when it was built, which both physically and metaphorically ground the building within the community and its history. The downtown location and setting, as well as the small size of the theater, help establish the theater within the patterns of postwar movie theater construction—small downtown theaters like the Ludlow were most popular during this period. The theater's modest, modern design and maintenance of its original materials speak to the theater's consciousness of its small town setting, as well as the postwar era of limited materials in which it was built. The workmanship evident in the building has helped to maintain the structure's physical integrity. Despite the theater's missing pieces, it still easily conveys its associations with the patterns in history, both broad and local, that make it significant and worthy of preservation.

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

____preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
_X_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: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____KE-L-115_____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

0 acres: previously listed within Ludlow Historic District
The area of the property is .172 acres

UTM References
Quad Name: Covington

UTM Coordinates according to NAD 1927: Zone: 16 Easting: 711 937.73 Northing: 4329 818.91

UTM Coordinates below, according to NAD 1983:

	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	16	711 932.29	4330 027.00
2			
3			
4			

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

The boundaries of the property will follow the original 50x150 ft boundary of the lot. The property is bounded on the south by Elm Street. Starting from a point 150 ft east of the intersection of Elm and Kenner Streets (Point A, latitude 39.093446, longitude -84.549430), north 150 ft (to Point B, latitude 39.093839, longitude -84.549617), east 50 ft (to Point C, latitude 39.093893, longitude -84.549226), south 150 ft (to Point D, latitude 39.093505, longitude -84.549226), then west 50 ft to Point A.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)
This is the original lot boundary, though the lot has been expanded to include the 50x100 ft lot west of the theater, which is now used for parking and is occupied by a non-historic office building. This boundary

encompasses the theater building in its entirety; the long, narrow lot size is typical for a downtown setting and dictated the footprint and design of the theater.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kathy Martinolich, M.H.P.
organization Cultural Resource Analysts, Inc. date November 21, 2012
street & number 151 Walton Avenue telephone 859-421-9832
city or town Lexington state KY zip code 40508
e-mail ktmartinolich@crai-ky.com

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **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. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Continuation Sheets**

- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs:

Photo Log

The following information applies to all photos

Name of Property: Ludlow Theater
City or Vicinity: Ludlow
County: Kenton **State**: Kentucky
Photographer: Kathy Martinolich
Date Photographed: October 2, 2012

Description of Photograph and Number
Photo 0001. North-northeasterly three-quarter view of Ludlow Theater.
Photo 0002. North-northwesterly façade view of Ludlow Theater.
Photo 0003. Northwesterly three-quarter view of Ludlow Theater.
Photo 0004. North-northwesterly detail view of parapet.
Photo 0005. North-northwesterly interior view of Ludlow Theater, from lobby area.
Photo 0006. Southwesterly interior view of Ludlow Theater, second floor, from auditorium.

Photo 0007. Northerly interior view of Ludlow Theater, showing level of formerly stepped floor.
Photo 0008. Easterly view toward the center of downtown Ludlow, from in front of the Ludlow Theater.

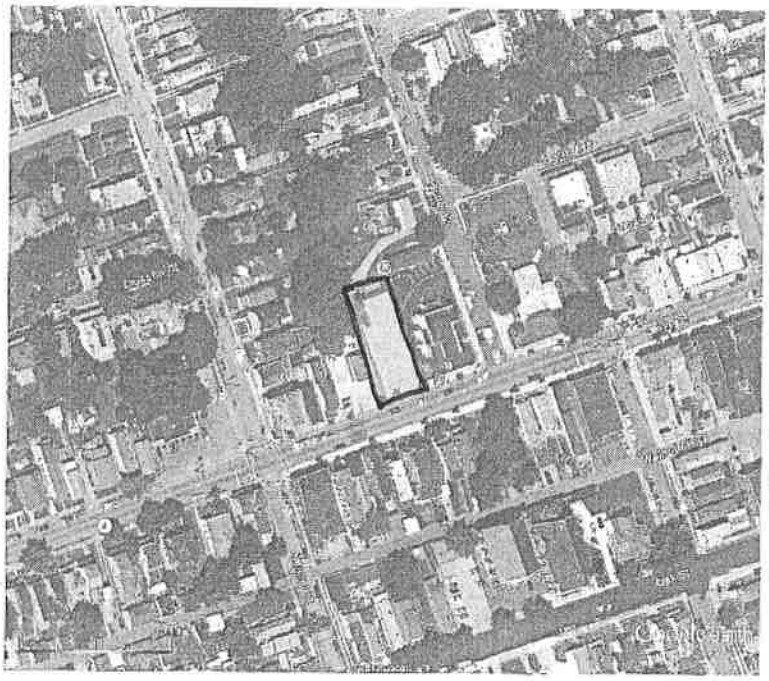
Property Owner:

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

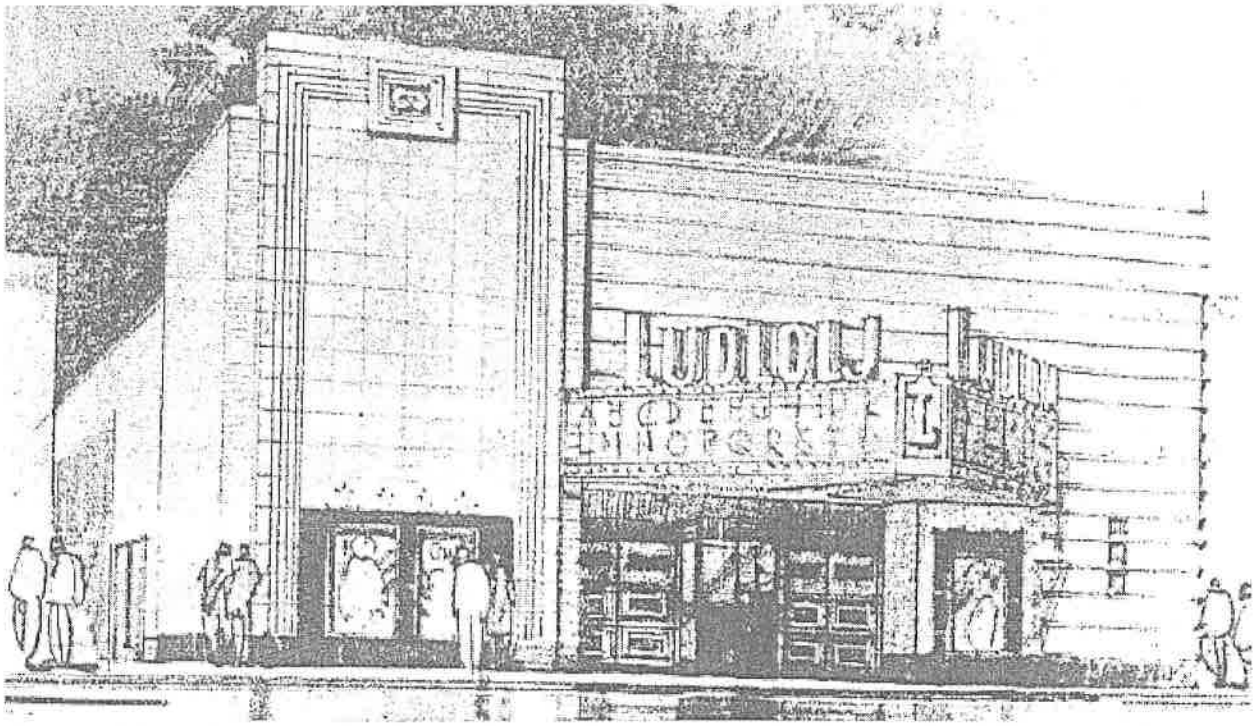
name Paul Miller

street & number 322 Elm Street telephone

city or town Ludlow state KY zip code 41016



Ludlow Theater
Area proposed for Listing
Kenton Co., Ky



Original Rendering of Ludlow Theater in *Theatre Catalog* (see bibliography).

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

STATE OF KENTUCKY
KENTUCKY GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

COVINGTON QUADRANGLE
KENTUCKY—OHIO
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)
SE/4 WEST CINCINNATI 15' QUADRANGLE

Ludlow Theater
City of Ludlow
Kenton County
Kentucky
Covington Quad
Zone 16S

Coordinates - NAD 83
711 932.29/4330 027.00

Coordinates - NAD 27
711 937.73/4329 818.91

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
Control by USGS, USC&GS, USCE, and the City of Cincinnati
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken 1949, and in part by the City of Cincinnati
Field checked 1950 and 1953. Revised 1961
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum
10,000-foot grids based on Kentucky coordinate system, north zone, and Ohio coordinate system, south zone
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 16, shown in blue
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked
The state boundary as shown represents the approximate position of the low water line as determined from U.S. Corps of Engineers Ohio River charts, surveyed 1913 and 1914, and supplementary information
Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown
Ohio area lies within the Between the Miamis. Land lines based on the Great Miami River Base. Dotted land lines established by private subdivision of the Symmes Purchase

SCALE 1:24 000

1 MILE
1000 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 5000 6000 7000 FEET
1 .5 0 1 KILOMETER

CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET
DATUM IS MEAN SEA LEVEL

UTM GRID AND 1961 MAGNETIC NORTH DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, WASHINGTON 25, D. C.,
KENTUCKY GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY,
AND KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE, FRANKFORT, KENTUCKY
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

KENTUCKY
QUADRANGLE LOCATION

ROAD CLASSIFICATION
Heavy-duty — Light-duty
Medium-duty — Unimproved dirt
Interstate Route · U. S. Route · State Route

COVINGTON, KY.—OHIO
SE/4 WEST CINCINNATI 15' QUADRANGLE
N3900—W8430/7.5

1961

AMS 4062 II SE—SERIES V853

INTERIOR—GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, WASHINGTON, D.C.—1963

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events
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MOJO

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OCT. 23
Performance Dates:

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Funeral Home
BUTLER ST
Huntington

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MARCH 19 20 21
RAQUEL WELCH IN
THE OLDE T PROFESSION
LUDLOW
ADULT FILMS
THURS FRI SAT
THE OLDEST ROFESSION

LUDLOW
SHARKS TREASURE
ALSO BRANNIGAN
CLASS A CHAMPS