SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 16000359 Date Listed: 6/13/2016

Property Name: Ace Theatre
County: Miami-Dade State: FL

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

Amended Items in Nomination:

Section 8: Criteria

Criterion C is hereby deleted. The criterion is checked in Section 8, but is not justified in the narrative nor reflected in the areas of significance.

Section 8: Criteria Considerations

Criteria Consideration “G” is hereby checked.

The nomination does not explicitly address the criteria consideration; the end of the period of significance is 1973 and is a justifiable and logical ending point. The theater remains a rare, surviving resource from Cocoanut grove’s segregated past, and as such meets the exceptional importance standard.

The Florida State Historic Preservation Office was notified of this amendment.

DISTRIBUTION:
National Register property file
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)
NPS Form 10-900
(Rev. 10-90)

United States Department of the Interior
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 ACE THEATRE

other names/site number Florida Master Site File #DA14112

2. Location

street & number 3664 Grand Avenue N/A □ not for publication
city or town Miami N/A □ vicinity
state FLORIDA code FL county Miami-Dade code 025 zip code 33133

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources, Bureau 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 certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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 □ See continuation sheet.

□ removed from the National Register.

□ other, (explain) ____________________________

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6-13-2016
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] buildings
- [ ] district
- [ ] site
- [ ] structure
- [ ] object

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contributing</th>
<th>Noncontributing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>buildings</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sites</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>structures</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>objects</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)
- RECREATION AND CULTURE/Theater

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)
- Vacant

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)
- OTHER: Masonry Vernacular

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)
- foundation: Stucco
- walls: Stucco
- roof: Tar & Gravel
- other

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.

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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography
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 36) 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

#
10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property  Less than one

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

1 1 7 5 7 4 9 4 7 2 8 4 5 7 1 4
Zone Easting Northing
2

3 Zone Easting Northing
4

See continuation sheet

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  Carl Shiver, Historic Preservationist
organization  Bureau of Historic Preservation
date  April 2016
street & number  500 South Bronough Street
telephone  (850) 245-6333
city or town  Tallahassee  state  Florida  zip code  32399-0250

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 SHPO or FPO.)

name  ACE Development Company, Inc.
street & number  12605 Southwest 93rd Avenue
telephone  305.235.3351
city or town  Miami  state  Florida  zip code  33176

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 amend 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 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 Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.
The ACE Theatre is a single-screen movie theater located at 3664 Grand Avenue in the Village of Coconut Grove (aka Coconut Grove or the Grove) in the southernmost section of the City of Miami, Miami-Dade County. The theater, rising the equivalent of two-stories, is a Masonry Vernacular building with Art Deco elements. The symmetrical building contains 7,397 sq. ft. of interior space and consists of three bays. The central first bay is recessed and contains three opening entrances. A concrete and steel metal canopy/marquee projects out over the sidewalk and the parapet is prominent. At the extremities of the canopy/marquee, the name of the theater, “ACE”, sits perpendicular; the metal letters are painted yellow with red edges. The ticket booth is still present on the exterior of the building. The access for the ticket taker is inside the theater’s lobby. A ventilation window is located on the second story of each side bay. The building is painted with two cream vertical stripes at the central bay. Two “L” shape stripes in cream color bordered in red gives movement to the façade, the streamlined design details are consistent with the Art Deco style common in the 1930s. Despite some minor deterioration, the building retains its character and integrity. The owner, Ace Development Company, Inc., currently seeks to rehabilitate and renovate the building, which is easily the most recognizable landmark in the historically African American section of the Coconut Grove.

Coconut Grove lies in the southernmost section of the City of Miami, which serves as the seat of government for Miami-Dade County, Florida. The current population of Miami is approximately 400,000. The population of Miami-Dade County is approximately 3 million. The primary corridors in Miami and the county run through Coconut Grove: Grand Avenue, Douglas Road (SW 37 Avenue), U.S. 1 (South Dixie Highway), 27th Avenue, South Bayshore Drive and Main Highway. The Metro Rail, the county’s rapid transit system, has three stops in the Grove: Douglas Road and U.S. 1; 27th Avenue and U.S. 1; and Vizcaya Station near Rickenbacker Causeway (adjacent to U.S. 1).

The theater, located 5 miles south of Downtown Miami, is on Grand Avenue, in the historic African American section of the Grove (aka Black, West Grove or Village West). It is the oldest, most visible and well-known landmark on Grand Avenue. The theater is 5 blocks west of Coco Walk, a destination retail/commercial district in the heart of the Grove’s business district. The theater is 5 blocks south of U.S. 1 on the north, and 4 blocks east of U.S. 1 on the west. It occupies the south side of Grand Avenue on an interior lot within the block bounded by Douglas Road (SW 37th Avenue) on the west and Plaza Street on the east. Several small commercial buildings lie to the east, west, and north of the theater. There is a 25 sq. ft. vacant lot located on the east side of the building that is a part of the theater’s property boundaries.
PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The ACE Theatre illustrates how elements of Streamline Modern and Art Deco styles that flourished in Miami-Dade County during the 1920s and 30s were applied to masonry buildings with smooth stucco exteriors that became the common vernacular in South Florida. Art Deco was first applied to public and commercial buildings in the 1920s.\(^1\) For projects on a tight budget, a rectangular building block could be embellished with appendages that made it fashionable. Visual interest could be further enhanced by stretching linear forms horizontally and vertically throughout the building, often accomplished with bands of brick, canopies, or copings.\(^2\)

**Exterior**

The main (north) facade of the ACE is symmetrical and is punctuated by a central bay, with three entrances into the interior of the building (Photo 1). The front facade is the single most significant feature that defines the building’s historic architectural importance. The stucco reveals bands and the central element rising above the roof line are suggestive of the Art Deco style, as well as the ceramic tile base and vertical signage. The stucco is in fair condition. The original marquee, signage, and tile base are in disrepair. Two maroon and yellow bands run along both sides of the main facade, running horizontally beneath the stepped parapet toward the center of the facade then descending to the top of the marquee. Two large air vents are found on the facade to either side of the center line and supplied air to the mezzanine/projection room. Two smaller air grilles made of cast iron showing a filigree pattern were originally a functioning device supplying air to the lobby. Three lighted poster-sized display windows are missing the glass and electrical elements. Two playbill areas are found on the east and west walls of the building but are missing their glass electrical elements (Photo 2). The two metal vertical “ACE” signs (Photos 3-4) add to the Art Deco style element. The original neon tubes outlining the letters are missing. The concrete and metal marquee is original; however, the under part of the marquee has been replaced with plywood to prevent injury to pedestrians. The marquee is in significant disrepair and the electrical fixtures that light the marquee are inoperable.

The east elevation is bounded by a 25 sq. ft. grass lot (Photos 5-7). Two drainage pipes are located on the east facade and run vertically from the roof into the ground. Another drainage pipe is situated next to an air vent on the main facade.

In the building’s rear, south elevation, two doors, one on the southeast and southwest side, provide entry from the exterior of the building to a second level (Photos 8-9). These doors were used to access the HVAC (heating, ventilation and air condition) system that is no longer operable. There is another exit door that leads

---

2 Ibid.
from the mechanical room of the east side of the building (Photo 10). The restrooms and mechanical room are located on the east elevation of the building in a small one-story extension that is 7’ x 37’ and projects from the main body of the theater, and has its own roof. The original color of the exterior of the theater is unknown. However, when Wometco sold the building in 1979, it was painted a pinkish color, bordered by the maroon-colored and greyish tiles (Photo 11).³

**Interior**

**Auditorium**

There are two entrances on either side of the concession area (east and west sides) that open into the auditorium. Upon entering the auditorium, the seats face south, which is where the stage and picture screen are oriented. The auditorium is the central space of the building. The auditorium seated between 300-400 people. The original picture screen, (Photo 12) which is framed from Dade County Pine, is still intact. The auditorium’s poured concrete floor slopes gently to a drain in the center section of the theater, before creating a landing at the base of the stage and two rear exit doors. The seating was divided into three sections, with the center section ending at a poured concrete stage/platform. At one time a 10’ x 22’ wooden thrust stage, which was accessed by wooden stairs on both sides of the stage, was present. The stage deteriorated due to water intrusion from the roof and was removed. Additionally due to water intrusion, only a few of the original seats were salvageable (Photo 13). The roof structure has large steel beams spanning the width of the space supporting reinforced columns. The beams support a wood framed deck and roof, and are in good condition.

Behind the picture screen which hangs from the sides of the theater, is a small space that contains the audio speaker system, which sits on the concrete platform/stage. The rear wall behind the stage has some concrete spalling present in certain sections. Two wooden ladders are attached to the east and west sides of the rear south wall behind the platform/stage. These ladders provide interior access to the HVAC system, which is housed in two small rooms that are the equivalent to the height of a second floor. Two “Exit” doors are located in the rear of the theater (Photo 14) on the southwest and east sides of the building. The Exit doors are painted a reddish color. Above each entry way for the “Exit” doors are metal air vents for the HVAC system.

The auditorium’s interior ceiling is the equivalent of two-stories (24’ H). The theater’s interior ceiling and light fixtures were partially removed when the roof system was replaced. Acoustic material covered the auditorium’s ceiling and there is evidence that a sprinkler system was present. The remnants of acoustic tiles covered the east and west side walls and formed an arched design that started at the auditorium’s entrance. On both side walls are remnants of the theater’s interior scone lights that were placed above the acoustical tiles (Photo 15).

First Floor/Lobby

The first floor contains 5,466 sq. ft. of interior space. Spaces within the first floor include the auditorium, lobby, office, ticket booth, restrooms, mechanical room, and stage. Concrete spalling is present in the slab above the mezzanine/projection room (lobby’s ceiling) and the beam above the concession area. Due to a long-term lack of maintenance and the subsequent failure of the roof, most of the original interior features deteriorated, including light sconces, acoustical materials, and the seats. The three exterior front entrance doors open into the lobby, which housed a small concession stand that is no longer present. The floor of the lobby is poured concrete, which was covered with vinyl tiles.

On the east side of what was the lobby are the restrooms. The female restroom consists of two stalls, one sink, and a powder room (Photos 16-17). The male restroom is accessed from a door through the lobby and consists of one stall, two urinals and a sink (Photos 18-20). Some of the original green tile is missing and the plumbing fixtures are inoperable. The ceiling has to be replaced due to water intrusion. There is a small janitor’s closet inside the male restroom. The mechanical room is accessed through a separate door in the rear of the male restroom. The ceiling has to be replaced due to water intrusion. A door leads from the mechanical room to the exterior of the building. All of the electrical elements are inoperable.

On the west side of the lobby is a small office with a sloped ceiling as a result of a stair case that leads to the mezzanine/projection room (Photos 21-22). Inside the office is the small storage closet. An interior office space in the theater reveals a window that suggests that at one time the west side of the building was adjacent to vacant land or that a former structure was not built contiguous to the theater. Access to the ticket booth is from the west side of the lobby. Between the office and the ticket booth is a concrete staircase that leads to the mezzanine/projection room (Photo 23).

Second Floor/Mezzanine/Projection Room (1,931 sq. ft.)

The second floor or mezzanine/projection room consists of three rooms with a poured concrete floor, which was covered by vinyl tile. The mezzanine/projection room sits directly above the first floor lobby, concession stand, office, ticket booth and women’s powder room.

The first room is at the top of the landing and was probably used for storage. A toilet and sink are present, but inoperable (Photos 24-25). The projection room is rectangular and occupies the bulk of the second floor. Entry into the projection room is through a doorway. The projection room’s north wall has a rectangular shaped indentation, which probably housed an air conditioner unit. The south wall, which faces the picture screen, has five square openings that were used for the projection equipment (Photo 26). There is a toilet and a sink in the projection room which are inoperable. The third room was probably used as a small office or storage space. This room has a door (Photo 27) that leads out to the exterior roof of the restrooms and mechanical room.
A new roof was installed in 1993, after Hurricane Andrew. Having the same slope as the original flat roof, the new roof rests below the parapet of the original I-beams, and is not visible from the street level. The drainage pipes on the east facade have been removed due to deterioration. The two access doors to the HVAC service area were removed and the doors covered with plywood.

The theater’s original color scheme has been changed over the years. Evidence indicates that the original color was a shade of pink, which was complimented by the maroon and greyish tiles that form the base of the front façade. The theater was painted its current color scheme, white, yellow and red, sometime after 1992. The metal frame outlining the marquee was removed due to deterioration and replaced with plywood. The marquees under carriage and the electrical features were also removed as safety measures to prevent injury to pedestrians. The exterior tile that covered the entry way into the theater has been removed.

The auditorium’s ceiling was partially destroyed due to water intrusion from the roof. Water intrusion also destroyed the seats and many of the wall sconces and lighting fixtures. The interior tiles that covered the lobby have been removed. There is evidence that a thrust stage/platform extended from the concrete platform beneath the picture screen out into the auditorium and covered several rows of center aisle seats. A 1951 Billboard article stated that Wometco would have to construct a stage at the ACE in order to accommodate a planned “Negro vaude circuit.”

Overall, the ACE Theatre is intact and possesses a high level of integrity, including design, workmanship, setting, association, feeling and location. The exterior has significant material integrity, having remained almost entirely unchanged since its construction.

——

4 “Plan Negro Vaude Loop In Florida”, Billboard, August, 18, 1951.
SUMMARY

The ACE Theatre was built c. 1930 is significant at the local level under Criterion A and in the areas of Entertainment and Recreation, Social History, and Ethnic Heritage (Black). Its history is associated with events and people that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of South Florida and American history. The development of the theater contributed to the unique history, social, cultural and economic development of the African American section of Coconut Grove and Miami. The ACE is one of the last remaining theaters built, owned and/or operated by Wometco Enterprises (formerly the Wolfson-Meyer Theatre Company) that has not been repurposed. Built during America’s Jim Crow era, the theater provided entertainment for black communities throughout Miami-Dade County. The ACE is the most visible and well-known landmark on Grand Avenue and in the West Grove. As a result, the ACE Theatre’s application for local designation as a historical landmark was approved on July 1, 2014.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

Compared to the oldest, continuous city in America, St. Augustine, Florida, which was founded in 1565 as a European and African American settlement, the City of Miami is relatively young. On July 28, 1896, 344 voters, one-third of whom were African Americans or of Bahamian descent, incorporated the City of Miami. Several of these African Americans lived in what was then known as “Colored Town” or the black section of Coconut Grove, (aka “Black Grove” or “West Grove”). The City of Miami’s anniversary is celebrated with little homage being paid to these African American incorporators, many of whom were pioneers in the city and surrounding areas. Often nothing more than a footnote in history books, the Black Grove is intertwined in the historical landscape of the city, county and state.

Many of the houses and buildings that were architecturally unique to “Colored Town” succumbed to neglect and disinterest. The “shotgun houses” and Bahamian-style homes hosted illicit drug parties and consequently were razed as blighted and abandoned structures. Other buildings were demolished to make way for new construction.

Consequently, with the exception of G.W. Carver Elementary and Middle Schools, the Mariah Brown house, which has yet to be restored, Odds Fellow Hall, the E.W.F. Stirrup house, and the Charlotte Jane Memorial Cemetery, the ACE is one of the last physical reminders of Black Grove’s history.

---

5 Dorothy Jenkins Fields, Ph.D., Overtown: Reclaiming a Sense of Place, http://www.theblackarchives.org/?page_id=2177 (last visited June 1, 2014).
6 “Coconut Grove’s Historic Village West Enclave, Places to See in Miami,” http://www.miamiandbeaches.com/places-to-see/coconut-grove/coconut-grove-village-west (last visited June 1, 2014), Appendix B, News Articles - Coconut Grove. The ACE is also located two blocks from MacFarlane Homestead in the City of Coral Gables, which is also known as the Black Gables, and is listed on the National Register. See http://www.preservationnation.org/magazine/2011/story-of-the-day/the-black-gables.html.
In 1909, F.W. Hahn built Miami’s first real theater, The Lyceum Theater. It was constructed of reinforced concrete. The stage was forty feet square with an orchestra pit. There were four boxes, 700 seats on the main floor and 300 in the balcony (reserved for Negroes). On October 4th, opening night, a racial conflict occurred. The Metropolis ran an editorial, “A Disgraceful Affair,” which began with a quote from a letter signed “Colored Citizen.”

Editor Metropolis:
The citizens of Colored Town beg to have you mention in your paper that we highly appreciate the kind invitation and the grand treat given to us at the new theater Monday night, but are more than sorry to have to state that we cannot afford to continue to show our appreciation by patronizing the enterprise. We can’t afford to buy a new suite of clothes every day after the play, made necessary by the stains of rotten eggs and stones and other missiles thrown at us in the dark, such as were thrown into crowds of our people coming home Monday night.  

The paper’s editor printed the following response:

It is a reproach upon the white race that such an occurrence as that recited in this communication should take place and it is a reproach upon the Miami police force that nothing has been done to find out the perpetrators of this act. The good behavior of the Negroes in Miami is frequently remarked upon by visitors…The Negroes were invited to patronize the theater, an institution that we all want to succeed. The gallery of the theater has been reserved for their use and it is so arranged that they do not come in contact with whites in reaching the gallery.

Unfortunately, nothing seems to have been done to atone in any way for the mistreatment that blacks had suffered. This racial animus could have foreseeably prompted Wometco to build and operate “colored only” theaters.

The ACE was built circa 1930-1940 as a “colored only” theater by the Wolfson-Meyer Theater Company and served as a local movie theater for West Grove residents until 1978. The Wolfson-Meyer Theater Company, founded in 1924-25 by Colonel Mitchell Wolfson and his brother-in-law Sydney Meyer, started with three movie houses in Miami: the Temple, Lyric and Lincoln, later renamed the Ritz, and two in West Palm Beach:

---


8 Id.

9 Col. Mitchell Wolfson (1900-1983) was one of the founders of Miami Dade Community College, now known as Miami Dade College. The downtown campus, Wolfson Campus, is named in his honor. Col. Wolfson was also the first Jewish of Mayor of Miami Beach. He is known throughout Miami for his dedication to education and the arts.
the Grand and Dixie. In 1926, the company built its first theater, the Capitol. The company soon became one of South Florida’s corporate giants, Wometco Enterprises, diversifying its business interests to include television broadcasting (WTVJ, Channel 4), vending, Coca-Cola Bottling, cable television, and tourist attractions – including the world famous Seaquarium.

Celebrating its 25th Anniversary in 1950, Wometco had 30 theaters throughout South Florida and the Bahamas. From 1925 to 1950, Wometco either built, owned and/or operated eight “colored only” theaters in South Florida. Six were in Miami: the ACE, Bunche, Capitol (formerly the Harlem), Carver, Lyric and Ritz; and two in West Palm Beach: Dixie and Grand. Of the six in Miami, the ACE is the only “colored” theater built by Wometco that remains standing. Wometco did not build the Lyric and Carver Theaters, and the Carver was not originally built to serve a “colored only” audience.

The ACE is significant for its association with the social and political history of African American communities in and around Miami and the county. The ACE is located in Miami’s oldest black neighborhood. During Miami’s “separate but [un]equal” era, blacks managed to cultivate a thriving and close-knit community that centered on black-owned and operated businesses, schools and churches. As the only public entertainment facility opened to blacks in the Grove, the ACE was an integral part of that community, which Wometco supported.
The ACE tells not only the story of the African American community in the Grove, the City of Miami, and Miami-Dade County, it also tells the story of America.

By preserving historic sites that tell the story of African Americans in this country we draw attention to the contributions of both ordinary and extraordinary people. Such stories might otherwise be lost because urban renewal and out-migration of blacks destroyed or led to abandonment of many African American communities. By saving African American landmarks we can simulate revitalization and foster interest in places that today seem to exist without history or meaning. 18

In 1909, there were approximately 112 African American theaters in the United States. 19 That number eclipsed in 1955 to between 1045 and 1065, with the highest number being in Florida, 114 theaters. 20 Movie theaters, primarily in the South, that catered to Negro audiences were either built exclusively for Negroses or were segregated by partitions. Segregation in public accommodations and recreational facilities was an important feature of African American life post-reconstruction and throughout the 20th century. 21 Where segregation did not extend to separate facilities for blacks and whites, certain sections of the theater were designated as being for “whites only” and other sections (most often the balcony or less desirable rear seating) for “colored” patrons. 22

These segregated areas took on derogative terms such as “buzzard’s roost, crow’s nest, and peanut gallery.” 23 Some theaters operated a “midnight” show policy exclusively for Negroses. 24 Some theaters split the week between days for white and days for black audiences. 25

“African American theaters were often smaller and lower quality. It was rarer, for instance for an African-American theater to be air conditioned, and in the early years of cinema it was less likely for an African-

---

20 Knight, supra.
23 Ibid. at 19.
24 Knight, supra note 16, at 231.
25 Ibid.
American theater to have sound.”26 Although, Negro theaters were lower in quality in several aspects than their white counterparts, i.e. air conditioning, cleanliness, and technology,27 these theaters, because of segregation in many Southern towns, were the only places “where mostly everyone could go and enjoy themselves...[They were] the major form of entertainment that [Black] people looked forward to daily and on weekends.”28

HISTORIC AND SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE

Utilitarian in form with Art Deco characteristics, the ACE has the conventional features of small, modest theaters built exclusively to provide entertainment to a “colored only” clientele. One of the ACE’s distinguishing features is that, unlike theaters in other parts of Florida and the South, Negro patrons did not have to use a separate entrance for designated seating in the rear of the theater or a separate staircase to access designated seating in the balcony.

Although the ACE’s genesis began in the days of legally sanctioned segregation, people’s memories of the ACE are as rich and colorful as the Technicolor pictures that once lighted its screen. George Washington Carver Sr. High School held graduation ceremonies29 and proms at the ACE. Imagine the pageantry of students walking down Grand Avenue on a hot June day in their caps and gowns into the welcoming confines of the ACE. Or imagine teens swooning to the Do Wop sounds of The Drifters and the Platters at the proms. When the ACE’s screen was silent, the auditorium reverberated with the electric guitars of gospel bands,30 rhythm and blues, and soul singers. And for singers who finger-snapped to songs of love and loss on Saturday nights, church revivals saved their souls on Sunday mornings.

During wartime, the ACE was prepared to shelter the Black Grove. With U-Boat warfare stepped up in the Caribbean, particularly on the South Florida coastline, Wometco ensured that all of its theaters took safety measures for its patrons, because the “show must go on.”

26 Gil, supra note 18, at 2.
27 Id., at 1.
For example, the Wometco chain of stands is pretty much in the pink of condition as regards protective measures, -- blackouts, air raids, fire-fighting, et al --, thanks to the enterprise of the circuit’s co-owners, Mitchell Wolfson and Sidney Meyer….Not only are the Wometco safety plans finely delineated on paper, but the organization to carry them out is painstakingly achieved….It is like a small but finely equipped army….Each warden and attache has received solid training, -- being realized by the Messrs. Wolfson and Meyer that their theaters lie in a decidedly exposed area….In Miami itself, the holdings consist of the Capitol, Mayfair, Miami, State, Rosetta, Center, Biltmore, Tower, Grove, Strand, Harlem, Lyric, Ritz and Ace, while in hard-by Miami Beach are the Lincoln, Plaza, Surf and Cameo, plus the Grand and Dixie in Palm Beach…To give you some idea of the thorough preparations, there are, of course all kinds of safety equipment devices and accessories, to protect property and life…But the payoff is that even needles wherewith to play the emergency phonographs, designed to provide entertainment during air raids, should all other musical mechanisms fail, have been thought of and purchased!31

The ACE served as a refuge for those needing secure and safe shelter during hurricanes. In 1948, the ACE was used as a hurricane shelter.32 During the Cuban missile crisis, as Miami opened its arms to thousands of Cuban refugees, the ACE was one of the designated fallout shelters in “Colored Town,” should Fidel and his cohort Khrushchev decide to bomb Miami from an isle 90 miles to the south.

During the sixties, the ACE treated its patrons to closed-circuit telecasts of boxing matches33 and featured movies such as “Hercules Unchained,” “Imitation of Life”, “The Valley of the Dragons”, “Big Sky”, “Spread Eagle”, and “Rage of the Buffalo”34 On Teacher Work Days, Wometco, along with Coca-Cola Bottling Company, sponsored free admission passes for students in the Grove. Teachers doled out the passes as rewards for good conduct, good grades and perfect attendance, or to encourage students who were destined for Silver Oaks (the juvenile detention center) to stay on the right track.

The ACE provided a constructive outlet for students who would have roamed the streets. It was the surrogate babysitter for parents who worked. It was a central component of a village that raised its children.

When Jim Crow’s wings no longer blanketed Miami, blacks were allowed to go to white theaters. Ironically, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, while opening doors quickened the closing of others. Blacks from the Grove

branched out and patronized newer venues in Suniland (now Pinecrest), Dadeland, and downtown Miami. Single screen movie theaters quickly became passé, yielding to multiplex theaters. Determined to support the West Grove community, Wometco reopened the ACE as a movie theater in 1973, after having closed it for a couple of years. But “colored” theaters were no longer profitable. Unlike the Capitol Theater, however, which succumbed to the wrecking ball in the name of urban renewal, Wometco sold the ACE in 1979 to Harvey Wallace, a local black businessman in the Grove. Mr. Wallace’s family has owned commercial property on Grand Avenue since the 1940s and were pioneers and business people in the West Grove community, having been in South Florida since 1921. Because of Mr. Wallace’s ties to the Coconut Grove community, Wometco hoped that he would preserve the theater. He died before his vision to develop the ACE into a Bahamian-style marketplace or a mixed-use, residential/retail structure, with a smaller auditorium for cultural and entertainment purposes, materialized.

The ACE is owned by the ACE Development Company; the principals are Mrs. Dorothy Wallace and Dr. Denise Wallace. Mrs. Wallace, like her husband, has a long history of civic and community involvement in Miami-Dade County. A Missouri native, she migrated to Miami after marrying her college sweetheart, Harvey, lured by the promises of swaying palm trees and orange groves. Her career as an educator spans more than 30 years. She began as a substitute teacher at Carver Sr. High School and later accepted a permanent position at Mays Sr. High School in Goulds. Breaking barriers is not anything new for Mrs. Wallace. In 1963, she was one of two black women to integrate the University of Miami’s School of Education, graduating with a Master’s degree in Guidance and Counseling. In 1972, she was appointed administrator for COPE Center South, an alternative school for pregnant teens and teen parents. In 1997, the school board renamed the school Dorothy M. Wallace COPE Center South. In 1980, she was the only black delegate to the Republican National Convention from Dade County. She has served as Secretary of the Dade County Republican Executive Committee, Financial Secretary and Committee Chairman of the Florida Black Republican Council and President of the All-American Republican Council. Governor Jeb Bush appointed her to serve on various committees. See Appendix C, Designation Report.

Dr. Denise Wallace has more than 20 years of experience as an attorney, specializing in complex commercial litigation and higher education law. She has served as an Assistant City Attorney (City of Miami), Sr. Assistant Florida Attorney General, General Counsel for Palm Beach State College, and Vice President of Legal Affairs & General Counsel, Dillard University. Having served as the Vice Chairperson of the Coconut Grove Village Council, she has extensive knowledge and experience in community development. She has participated in numerous studies on the revitalization of the West Grove. See Appendix C, Designation Report.

36 Death for Capitol Theater, supra note 14, Appendix A, News Articles – Wometco Enterprises, Inc.
Mrs. Wallace and Dr. Wallace share their husband/father’s dream to preserve the ACE and to make it once more a viable part of the Coconut Grove community. Although many community residents have fond and sentimental memories of the ACE, few would want to attend the theater as it was decades ago. Theaters as entertainment facilities have changed. Today theater owners realize that patrons want comfort and amenities. They want food, beer and wine as part of their entertainment experience. They want restrooms large enough to accommodate them during intermissions. They want to come early and linger after the show with their friends. They want their entertainment to be a much more social experience. They are more likely to want facilities that invite everyone into a social atmosphere than the fixed seating halls of the past.

In 2008, the owners of the ACE applied to have the theater designated as an historic site by the City of Miami’s Historic and Environmental and Preservation (HEP) Board. The final hearing was held on July 1, 2014. Community members, several of them who once worked at the theater, and other concerned citizens came to Miami’s City Hall to support the owners’ application for historic designation. Many people gave impassioned personal recollections of their fond memories of the ACE. See Appendix A, Designation Report. The ACE, which had been silent for decades, spoke through the voices of the ticket takers, those who sold popcorn and hotdogs, those who participated in graduation ceremonies and proms, those who came to meet boyfriends, and those who simply wanted to see a movie. Everyone wanted to remind the members of the HEP Board that the ACE should not be forgotten. In fact, that is the purpose of historical preservation. “Preservation contributes much to a forgetful society. It empowers black youth by revealing historical themes besides slavery, including entrepreneurship, civil rights, entertainment, sports, education, and political activism.”

Dr. David White, one of the sixty-eight students known as the Crusaders whose graduation was held at the ACE in 1949, shared his memories of the ACE. “As a little boy it was 10 cents to attend the ACE Theatre and as a teenager we paid 25 cents; ticket sales were by Carnet Johnson. We saw mostly Westerns featuring John Wayne. I remember one time they put me out [of the ACE] because I was infatuated with a young lady who didn’t want to be bothered. So I learned not to bother people if they didn’t want to be bothered.”

For Lorraine Dean (aka Shane) Bethel, who worked at the ACE as a teenager, the ACE has a special place in her memories. It was the place, as a teen, where she had dates with her future husband. “I recall having 30 minutes break. The ACE stayed crowded and I had to be home by 10 p.m. After the movie everyone would gather at the Rainbow Inn. One night close to 10 p.m., I cut my foot running home through the alley behind the Inn. The scar still remains. The best thing about the ACE was meeting the people who came there.”

---

37 Leggs, supra note 15.
38 Id., at 21.
39 Id. at 17.
For Annette Wallace Turner and other students, the ACE was their math tutor. “If you couldn’t count your money, [Bobbie Sands] would give your money back to you. You had to know how to count your money before you could purchase a ticket.”

Shirley McClane remembers the ACE as the place where she learned skills that helped her mature from a shy, introverted teen to a young, confident woman. Being allowed to work as ticket taker and concession attendant helped her excel in math and allowed her to polish her customer service skills, which later helped her when she went to work at Eastern Airlines.

Bobbie Sands, who worked the ticket booth and concession stand from 1962 until sometime after 1973, when the ACE closed, remembered seeing James Brown at the ACE. “Uniforms were not required, but when you worked the concession area you were required to wear a little white jacket. To see the Tammy Show featuring James Brown, the line was down the street to the fish market and sometimes down to Bethel Williams Funeral Home. And I remember Lover’s Lane was in the back row of the theater.”

The Black Grove, once known for good times and mayhem, the ACE Theatre’s neon lights, mom and pop businesses, and a bustling pedestrian community, is struggling, like so many black neighborhoods, to find renewed economic life. There have been many studies by the city and county on how to revitalize this area without gentrifying it. Florida International University and the University of Miami have used the ACE for design projects. Several community groups and civic-minded individuals support the restoration of the ACE, seeing it as vital to the revitalization of the “Black Grove”, and a beacon of pride for a community that has been plagued by dreams deferred.

For Coconut Grove’s black community, the ACE signifies much more than an aged building. The ACE is a part of their lives and fetches good memories of a time when they did not have the mobility to go out and about as everybody else, good memories that kept this community united and strong to fight for equal rights and a better future.

---

40 Novaes, supra note 4, at 16.
41 Oral interview of Shirley McClane, Feb. 18, 2015.
42 Id., at 18.
45 Excerpts - Grand Avenue Vision Plan, supra note 40.
46 Id., at 12.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


“Board Delays Action on Loan.” Miami Daily News, 17, Mar. 22, 1934, (“Decision by Wometco Theaters, Inc. not to offer a negro show at the Harlem theater to white patrons was announced and an ordinance prohibiting the attendance of white patrons at negro theaters in the future was proposed. Action was postponed for a full meeting.”) https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=Ay8uAAAAIAJ&sjid=3NUFAAAAIBAJ&pg=5172%2C139905 (last visited Mar. 1, 2015).


ACE THEATRE
MIAMI, MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number 9 Page 5

ACE THEATRE
MIAMI, MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

_________.


**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

**CONTINUATION SHEET**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section number</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ACE THEATRE**

MIAMI, MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA

**MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**


ACE THEATRE
MIAMI, MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES


The School of Architecture at the University of Miami, CUCD Past Projects, ACE Theater Complex, 2, http://www.arc.miami.edu/cucd/CUCD_Past_Projects.html (last visited Dec. 27, 2007).


Verbal Boundary Description

From Homestead Amended PB B PG106, Lot 10&W 1/2Lot 9 Blk 26
Parcel Number: 01-4121-007-4150

Boundary Justification

The above boundary description encompasses all of the historic resources associated with the historic ACE Theatre.
LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

1. ACE Theatre
2. 3664 Grand Avenue, Miami (Miami-Dade County), Florida
3. Denise Wallace
5. 3391 Florida Avenue, Miami, FL 33133
6. Front (North) Facade with Marquee and Signage, Looking South
7. Photo 1 of 27

Numbers 1-5 are the same for the following photos unless otherwise indicated

6. Front Facade, Lighted Playbill, Looking East
7. Photo 2 of 27

6. Signage and Marquee, Looking South
7. Photo 3 of 27

6. Signage and Marquee, Looking East
7. Photo 4 of 27

6. Front and East Facade, Looking South
7. Photo 5 of 27

6. East Side of Theater, Grass Lot, Looking South
7. Photo 6 of 27

6. East Side of Theater, Looking North
7. Photo 7 of 27

6. Rear of Theater and East Side Exit Door, Looking West
7. Photo 8 of 27

6. Rear of Theater, East Side Exit Door, Looking South
7. Photo 9 of 27

6. Exit Door that Leads from the East Side of the Building
7. Photo 10 of 27
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section number  Photos  Page  2  ACE THEATRE
MIAMI, MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA
LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

6. Historic Front Facade, circa 1979
7. Photo 11 of 27

6. Auditorium Original Picture Screen, Looking South
7. Photo 12 of 27

6. Auditorium, West Side Exit Door, Looking South
7. Photo 13 of 27

6. “Exit” Door, Looking North
7. Photo 14 of 27

6. Auditorium, Scone Light Fixture, Looking West
7. Photo 15 of 27

6. Women’s Restroom, Sink, Looking North
7. Photo 16 of 27

6. Women’s restroom, Stall #1, Looking South
7. Photo 17 of 27

6. Men’s Restroom, Urinals, Looking West
7. Photo 18 of 27

6. Men’s Restroom, Sink, Looking South
7. Photo 19 of 27

6. Men’s Restroom, Stall, Looking South
7. Photo 20 of 27

6. Office, Closet, Looking North
7. Photo 21 of 27

6. Office, Window on West Wall, Looking West
7. Photo 22 of 27

6. Staircase Leading to Second Floor Mezzanine and Projection Room, Looking West
7. Photo 23 of 27
United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**CONTINUATION SHEET**

| Section number | Photos | Page | ACE THEATRE  
MIAMI, MIAMI-DADE COUNTY, FLORIDA  
LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS |
|----------------|--------|------|--------------------------------------------------|
| 6.             |        | 3    | Second floor, Mezzanine Landing, Restroom, Looking North  
7.             | Photo 24 of 27 |
| 6.             |        |      | Second Floor, Mezzanine Landing, Restroom, Looking East  
7.             | Photo 25 of 27 |
| 6.             |        |      | Projection Room, Looking South  
7.             | Photo 26 of 27 |
| 6.             |        |      | Door Leading into Storage Room, Second Floor, Looking East  
7.             | Photo 27 of 27 |
ACE Theatre, 3664 Grand Avenue, Miami (Miami-Dade County), Florida

Latitude: 25.727449°
Longitude: -80.252840°

UTM References

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>Easting</th>
<th>Northing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>574947</td>
<td>2845714</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>