



Interpreting The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation

Subject: Adding or Modifying Fly Lofts on Historic Theaters

Applicable Standards:

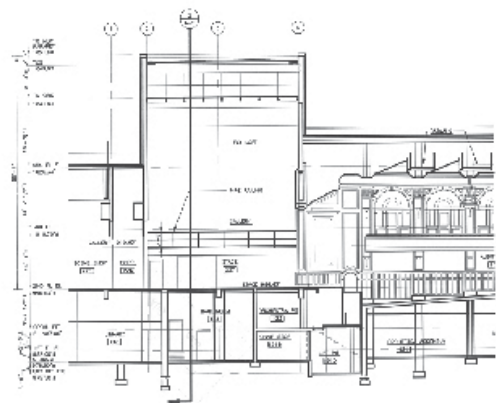
1. Compatible Use
2. Retention of Historic Character
9. Compatible New Additions/Alterations
10. Reversibility of New Additions/Alterations

Issue: If a theater is to be reused as a theater, physical changes may be required to meet the demands of modern performances. This may necessitate adding or modifying a fly loft—the space that houses rigging for raising and lowering stage sets, lighting and curtains. Fly lofts typically project from the roof of a theater above the stage and, depending on the site conditions and the building plan, may be visible from a number of vantage points.

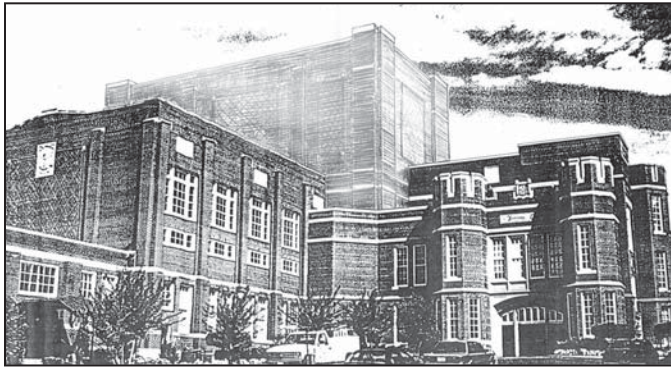
Unlike a rooftop addition that is constructed to gain square footage, a fly loft is integral to the operation of a theater. Therefore, constructing a new fly loft or changing an existing fly loft may be necessary in order to keep the building in use as a theater.

Whether an existing fly loft is modified or a new fly loft is added, in order to meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, care must be taken to ensure this new feature is as unobtrusive as possible. Its overall massing and height should be kept to a minimum so as not to compete with the historic building. And, to lessen its impact, the design of a fly loft must be as simple as possible with minimal architectural detailing. It must also have a horizontal rather than a vertical emphasis. No unnecessary embellishment should be added to the surface of a fly loft and attaching signs or advertisements should be avoided. Construction materials must also be compatible with the original structure.

Application I (*Incompatible treatment revised to meet the Standards*): This red brick, early twentieth century high school houses an auditorium with superior acoustics. The building was no longer used as a school and was to be converted into a performing arts center. Although a small fly loft already existed on the roof above the stage, a new design proposal called for an addition that projected several stories above the height of the original fly loft. This would have a negative impact on the building's historic character and would not meet the Standards. To bring the design into compliance, its height was significantly reduced and the material changed from cream-colored synthetic stucco to a brick compatible with the existing. Simple horizontal banding, similar to that found elsewhere on the building, was added to the design to break down its massing and further de-emphasize its height. A large logo dedicated to a local



Top: New fly loft is not visible front elevation of high school after rehabilitation. **Middle:** Rear elevation of high school before rehabilitation - note existing fly loft just above center of image. **Bottom:** Sectional drawing through stage showing approved fly loft design.



Initial proposal for fly loft.



Rear elevation of the school showing new fly loft redesigned to meet the Standards.

theater group was also eliminated from its side. Although the new fly loft is large, it is situated at the rear of the building and is not visible from the primary elevation.

Application 2 (*Incompatible treatment revised to meet the Standards*): This Colonial Revival-style theater was built as a movie house in 1930 and, because it originally showed only movies, never had a fly loft. Vacant for over thirty years, the community planned to reuse the theater for a variety of performances. Because the rear of the theater where the stage is located is quite visible, the fly loft design needed to minimize the impact of the added space. The first proposal was a contemporary design of glass and aluminum with a prominent curved roof. This design competed with the architectural style of the building and did not meet the Standards. The fly loft was redesigned using slightly varied brick with a simple decorative pattern to break down its massing. While the fly loft is sizeable, it is sensitively executed and compatible with both the historic theater and the surrounding historic district.



Left: Front of Colonial Revival-style movie house after rehabilitation. Due to the length of the building (a full block long), the added fly loft is only visible at the rear of the site.

Below: Detail of fly loft showing compatible brickwork.



Original proposal for fly loft at the rear of the building was incompatible with the character of the historic theater.



The new fly loft redesigned to meet the Standards is shown here after rehabilitation.

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These bulletins are issued to explain preservation project decisions made by the U.S. Department of the Interior. The resulting determinations, based on the [Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation](#), are not necessarily applicable beyond the unique facts and circumstances of each particular case.