State of North Carolina  
Division of Archives and History

INDIVIDUAL PROPERTY FORM FOR  
Fayetteville

X MULTIPLE RESOURCE OR THEMATIC NOMINATION

1 NAME  
HISTORIC  
Carolina Theater

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION  
STREET & NUMBER  
443 Hay Street  
CITY, TOWN  
Fayetteville  
STATE  
North Carolina

VICTORY OF  
COURTHOUSE.

3 CLASSIFICATION  
CATEGORY  
_X DISTRICT

OWNERSHIP  
_PUBLIC

STATUS  
_OCCUPIED

PRESENT USE  
_AGRICULTURE

-MUSEUM

-COMMERCIAL

-PARK

-EDUCATIONAL

-PRIVATE RESIDENCE

-ENTERTAINMENT

-RELIGIOUS

-GOVERNMENT

-SCIENTIFIC

-INDUSTRIAL

-TRANSPORTATION

-MILITARY

-OTHER

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY  
NAME  
R.L. Pittman Investments  
Attn.: Dick Taylor

STREET & NUMBER  
Grace Pittman Building

CITY, TOWN  
Fayetteville  
STATE  
North Carolina

VICTORY OF  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION  
COURTHOUSE  
Register of Deeds, Cumberland County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER  
P.O. Box 2039

CITY, TOWN  
Fayetteville  
STATE  
North Carolina

VICTORY OF  
FORM PREPARED BY  
NAME / TITLE  
Linda Jasperse, Principal Investigator, City of Fayetteville

ORGANIZATION  
Consultant for Survey and Planning Branch

DATE  
March 31, 1982

STREET & NUMBER  
Division of Archives and History, 109 E. Jones St.

TELEPHONE  
1-919-733-6545

CITY OR TOWN  
Raleigh  
STATE  
North Carolina
The Carolina Theater was built in 1927 on a corner lot in the 400 South Block of Hay Street. The downtown area was still the center of commercial and recreational activity which made the site both visible and accessible. It was built during the prosperous, carefree days before the stock market crash and ensuing depression and helped to satisfy an entertainment craze. It is distinguished by "Moorish architecture" so highly lauded by period newspaper reports.

The basic, oversized two-story brick rectangular form of the building is dressed at the front with terracotta, clay, brickwork, and decorative stone or concrete friezework. A hint of the Moorish detailing wraps around to the highly visible east side. Although the front facade is now obscured by a metal grid, its unusual, most distinguishing features survive intact.

These features decorate the front third of the east side, which is most visible from busy Hay Street. Above ground level, which contains arched exits, a triptych-like pattern is formed on the forward face by raised dark brick. Within the large panels of the triptych, oversized diamond shapes are created by dark headers set into the brick. At the center of the diamonds are cross-like motifs comprised of a combination of dark headers and stretchers. Windows intersect the panels near their bases.

The most notable features of any of the Carolina Theater's decorative components follow the side and front roofline. There, lacy ornamental terracotta is applied in a continuous band which is delineated by decorative molding strips above and below. The delicate quality of the ornamental work is repeated and reinforced by modillions beneath the overhanging eaves which have four petal floral cutouts on their end faces. A Mediterranean theme is carried through the false mansard roof above which is covered with curved red clay tiles.

The more recent cover which sheathes the front facade is in itself an eye-catching mid-1950's construction. On ground level, turquoise metal sheathing panels cover the front and part of the side. A glass and metal marquee liberally adorned with small globular light bulbs spans the face. It is flat except for a triangular projection located directly above the front center entrance. Covering the theater's face all the way up to the roofline is a grid-like metal mesh screen. It bears the name "Carolina" in script across it.

Access to the theater is permitted by a front central entrance. It is flanked on either side by shops currently unoccupied (they are merely partitioned off the main block floor space). Past the ticket booth is a foyer opening into the main seating area, which is roomy and spacious and retains hints of its early plushness and elegance. At the front of the sloping floor is the stage, and at the second level rear is the balcony, projection room and restrooms.
The Carolina Theater was built in 1927 in the wake of the movie-going craze which swept the country during the prosperous years preceding the stock market crash and the depression. Most large and middle-sized and many small communities boasted a motion picture theater which featured the latest silent films and, after the late twenties, talkies. Fayetteville was no exception after the Carolina, which featured the latest "Moorish architecture", was built. The theater had a reputation for elegance with its terra cotta detailing, ornamental modillions, and a red-clay roof cover. Its exterior features are intact despite a superficial grid which now covers the front facade.

CRITERIA ASSESSMENT

A. The building of the Carolina Theater in Fayetteville is another manifestation of the movie-going and entertainment craze which was part of a larger movement sweeping the nation in the prosperous years prior to the stock market crash and ensuing depression.

C. The Carolina Theater exhibits unusual detailing described in period accounts as "Moorish" features, which include lacy ornamental terra cotta band along the roofline, ornamented modillions, and a red-clay roof cover. Its exterior features are intact despite a superficial grid which now covers the front facade.
The building of the Carolina Theater in 1927 took place during prosperous mid-twenties era which witnessed a dramatic increase in available entertainment and recreational activities nationwide. Movies with comedy, romance, and Western themes were popular and every large city and many small and medium-sized towns had a theater where sometimes three or four of these films were shown weekly. Early theaters were elaborate affairs with ushers, doormen, plush interior appointments, and, frequently, live stage performances during intermissions. The Carolina Theater was one such "picture palace" built during the late 1920s movie-going craze.1

The theater's opening was a major local event and received coverage and publicity through the Fayetteville Observer. According to newspaper reports, it was scheduled for opening on 15 September, but did not actually open its doors until a month later.2 The movie house was run by Publix Saenger Theaters of North Carolina, an affiliate of Publix Theaters Corporation of New York and Saenger Theaters of New Orleans, as a most progressive one of its type. It boasted of pleasing Moorish architecture, a seating capacity of 900, a lobby with a fountain, a children's nursery complete with an attendant, modern projection equipment, upholstered seating, stage sets, an organ and climate control.3 A full third of the structure was occupied by the elegant foyers with two small stores flanking and the rest by seating and projection equipment. It is interesting to note that the Carolina Theater was flanked to the west by a miniature golf course, making the southwest corner of Hay and Pittman streets a local recreational center.4

A formal program for the theater-opening, complete with singing, live organ music, poetry-reading, movie releases, and inaugural program was planned and conducted on 17 October 1927. The purpose of the new theater was to bring to Fayetteville the "best in motion pictures", and the opening picture featured Lon Chaney in The Unknown.5 Later, Man, Woman, and Sin and When a Man Loves were featured. The titles, although provocative, did not necessarily reflect a racy subject matter; instead, the "sensational society films" were designed to draw crowds.7

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES
See continuation sheet.

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA
ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Less than 1 acre.
UTM REFERENCES

ZONE EASTING NORTHING
A 6 9 9 6 0 3 9 8 1 0
C

ZONE EASTING NORTHING
B
D

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION
All of Lot 1, Block E, Map 78-2-3-3, Cross Creek Township, as outlined in red on map. See map section.
The Carolina Theater was regarded locally as an establishment of high repute. After "talkies" replaced silent movies by 1929, only high-grade "A" movies -- as opposed to hastily-produced "B" movies -- were shown there. The first talking motion picture to be shown at the Carolina was *Glorious Betsy* featuring Delores Costello.

In the 1940s, however, competition in the movie house business surfaced when the Colony Theater was built one block east. Then, the Carolina Theater was reduced to a B movie house. Its subsequent history parallels that of the downtown in general; decline ensued when a combination of factors prompted long-time businessmen to close their shops or relocate in suburban locations. Patronage also declined and owners and managers of the Carolina Theater had to resort to survival tactics in order to keep the doors open. Films of various types--first-run, bid-run, thematic, and star-studded--were shown; however, attempts were unsuccessful and the theater finally closed its doors on 19 October 1978. It is currently unoccupied, awaiting adaptive use of its intact, uniquely detailed shell.
Reference Notes:


2. *Fayetteville Observer*, 1 August 1927, 17 October 1927.

3. *Fayetteville Observer*, 1 August 1927.


5. *Fayetteville Observer*, 17 October 1927.


Fayetteville Observer, 1 August 1927; 17 October 1927; 2 January 1928; 20, 21 October 1928.


