

**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 an 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 Malco Theatre
other names/site number Hot Springs Documentary Film Institute, Site # GA0732

2. Location

street & number 817 Central Avenue not for publication
city or town Hot Springs vicinity
state Arkansas code AR county Garland code 051 zip code 71901

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 for 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
Arkansas Historic Preservation Program
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.
 removed from the National
Register.
 other, (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Malco Theatre
Name of Property

Garland County, Arkansas
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

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

N/A

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION/Movie Theater

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION/Movie Theater

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)
LATE 19th & EARLY 20th CENTURY AMERICAN
MOVEMENTS/Commercial Style
MODERN MOVEMENT/Art Deco

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)
foundation Concrete
walls Brick
Stucco
roof Tar Build-up
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.** birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance.
- 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.

Levels of Significance (local, state, national)

Local

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation/Entertainment

Architecture

Period of Significance

1935-1960

Significant Dates

1935

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked)

Cultural Affiliation (Complete if Criterion D is marked)

Architect/Builder

Brueggeman & Swaim

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 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- Previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: _____

Malco Theatre
Name of Property

Garland County, Arkansas
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property Less than one

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>15</u> Zone	<u>495030</u> Easting	<u>3818580</u> Northing	3	<u> </u> Zone	<u> </u> Easting	<u> </u> Northing
2	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

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 David Austin, under Ralph Wilcox, National Register & Survey Coordinator
organization Arkansas Historic Preservation Program date May 29, 2009
street & number 1500 Tower Building, 323 Center Street telephone (501) 324-9787
city or town Little Rock state AR zip code 72201

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 Hot Springs Documentary Film Institute
street & number PO Box 6040 telephone (501) 321-4747
city or town Hot Springs state AR zip code 71902

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. 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 Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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SUMMARY

The Malco Theater, located at 817 Central Avenue in Hot Springs, Garland County, Arkansas, was built in 1935 as an early 20th Century standard commercial building with an Art Deco front façade. The theater was built on the original site of the Princess Theater of 1910, which burnt down in 1935. Today, the brick building is formed in a flat roof block, with the Art Deco style of vertically recessed strips of windows and tile marking the two elevated floor levels. While it is conjoined with a neighboring building, the theater is distinctly different in style with its extended awning, which supports the marquee and covers the entries and exits. The north facing wall has no window or entries, yet it is covered in a film-themed mural that runs the entire length from west to east. The rear of the building is the theater's two-storied lobby that faces east.

ELABORATION

The Malco Theater, at 817 Central Avenue, is a part of Hot Spring's historic downtown district. Central Avenue is also AR Highway 7, which travels north to south through all of Hot Springs, meaning the theater is on one of the main networks for tourism. It was originally the site of the Princess Theater, commissioned by Frank Head in 1910, which showcased vaudeville acts and silent films. In 1935, the Princess Theater burnt down and the new Malco was raised on the same site, in the same year. Today, the 36,000 square-foot building is owned by the Hot Springs Documentary Film Institute, who contributes to both the community and the film industry with their annual Documentary Film Festival.

The three-storied building is from the early 20th Century Commercial style with an Art Deco street front. It is made of red and light-brown brick, which are covered in a variety of materials on the facing walls of the north and west. The theater stands on a continuous, concrete-cast foundation, while the roof is a flat-top with a parapet, and is covered in tar build-up. The roof-line has four different levels, indicating four different occupational spaces inside, such as the lobby, the main auditorium, the mezzanine, and the rear entrance and lobby.

Front/West Façade

The theater's front façade is covered with stucco overlay that make vertical piers of the Art Deco style, which frame the recessed windows of the top two floors. Red, black, and white tiles mark the divisions of the ceiling/floor levels in-between the windows and the roof line. There are six windows per level on the main auditorium wall that indicate separate room spaces. All twelve windows are triple-hung, with two sets of double-pane glass over one stationary pane. Access to the interior is by three recessed entries.

The ground level is covered by the marquee awning that is made of a black frame with white, neon backing for solid-colored lettering. It is lined in Art Deco ornament with white, neon tubes, and a cinematic neon headpiece centered over the awning. The awning extends out over the sidewalk, with angled sides for displaying the marquee to the street and pedestrian traffic. The large, white Malco signs stand over both of

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the angled sides of the marquee. The awning's underside is all black with studio lighting over the main entrance.

The walls of the ground level are covered in a variety of blue-colored, one-inch ceramic tiles that frame a series of doors and windows. The main entry is recessed on the north side of the façade, with a lower profiled roof line than the main auditorium. The entrance consists of glass with golden-framing for two sets of glass double doors. On the right side of the entrance is the black-walled partition for the box office, which has large windows on both exposed sides.

South of the main entrance are a series of glass doors, flanked by floor to ceiling windows for display cases. The first showcase entrance is to the right of the box office, and is followed by a glass door that is framed by the ceramic-tiled wall. The southernmost sets of entries are separated by the ceramic wall, and are recessed back, with glass wrapping around the corners and meeting the doors. Corrugated metal is built between the showcase entries and the black marquee, and it houses two vents above the south entrance.

Side/North Façade

The north façade is divided in function between the theater and support for the attached two-storied parking deck. The wall overlooks the top level of the parking deck and has three separate roof lines: the main lobby on the west, the auditorium space in the middle, and the rear lobby on the east.

The main surface area wall has no window or door openings, and is painted in a film-themed mural that runs the length of the wall. From the top corner of the western side, white paint begins the background and contrasts into purple and blue in the bottom eastern corner. The black-and-white film strip motif makes the mural's foreground, which curves up and down, and frames instances in cinematic history. The right side of the mural is signed "Steven Payne 98."

The eastern side of the façade has a lowered profile in the roof line, which marks the theater's rear lobby. Its part of the wall is painted black, and has a corner window slightly exposing the second level of the lobby.

Beyond the main lobby's roof line stands the blank, red brick wall of the office spaces. It has no window or door openings, and its parapet has a terraced edge.

Back/East Façade

The east façade is primarily the Malco's rear entrance with an upper level lobby, and it is all that remains of

the former Princess Theater. The structure overlooks, and is aligned with the northwestern angle of Broadway Street, while its southern corner is slightly angled to face directly east. This section of the

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building is painted aqua green, and is separated into binary surfaces, with a smooth, plastered treatment on the ground level, and a rustic, brick treatment on the second level. The ground level is plaster over solid masonry, with a recessed series of doors that flank a centered box office. The doors are all glass with aluminum framing, and the box office features a window that sits on a small set of glass blocks.

The second level of the rear lobby has four windows, which are horizontally aligned. Two sets of double-hung windows are built into the corners of the structure, with glass panes pivoting along the angles of the walls. Translucent glass blocks fill in the two middle windows of the second level.

Beyond the lobby, to the south, is the light-brown brick, triple height wall of the auditorium. The commercial features are for utility and maintenance access. Four brick pilasters slightly extend from the wall's surface, including one on the southern corner, indicating the structural members of auditorium. Three doors grant entry into the theater, two on the ground level and one to the balcony with an accessible fire staircase. The higher level and one of the ground level doors are near the northern corner, in proximity to the rear lobby. The third door is a double set that is in the middle of the wall. The remainder of the wall has no windows and is lined with utility ducting and water drainage.

Side/South Façade

The southern façade consists only of commercial features. The light-brown brick, triple height wall of the auditorium frames a single door in the middle of the ground level. The remainder of the wall is an even surface with no windows and is lined with utility ducting.

Beyond the auditorium is the southern façade of the rear lobby, which is made of the same light-brown brick. It features a single, translucent, glass block window in the middle of the second level, and has no doors. The remainder of the façade houses utility maintenance structures that also consist of light-brown brick.

Interior/Main Lobby

The Malco Theatre's interior consists of classical cinematic features. From the main entrance, red and brown terrazzo tiles mark the flooring that separates the concrete sidewalk from the carpet. The gold-framed, glass doors are built over the tile, separating the interior from the exterior. The main lobby is lined with maroon carpet and plaster covered walls that are painted gold. White panels with black frames make the ceiling, while the counters of the concession stand are also black and white with a black overhead, which is made of exposed globe bulbs and mirrors.

The lobby is hall shaped and leads to two mezzanine stairs that access the projection hall and the balcony of the auditorium. The first stair is a wide spiral to the south of the hall, which wraps around a low-hung, small chandelier. The second stair is further east and is dog-legged, accessing the projection hall and east balcony. The ground level hallway also continues east, granting access to the lower rear lobby.

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Interior/Rear Lobby

The rear lobby was once part of the prior Princess Theater. When it became a part of the Malco Theatre, it originally functioned as a discreet entrance for the African-American viewers. The straight-run stair past the entrance leads to the balcony, which was used during the years of segregation. The lobby's second level had a prior function as the on-site attendant's apartment. Today, the irregularly-shaped building has both spaces accessible to everyone for public use.

In the lower level, square, light brown, ceramic tiles make the flooring. Plaster covers both the masonry walls and ceilings, and they are painted the same aqua green as the exterior. The door to the box office, with an ornamental cutout window in the shape of a "P," is from the original Princess Theater. Spaces behind the stair, on the west side of the lobby, are restrooms.

The second level of the rear lobby consists of a lounge, closet, powder room, dining room, and a kitchenette with a dining nook. The floors are consistently black painted concrete, with exception of the kitchenette, which is linoleum tile. The lounge and dining room walls are plaster, painted magenta with yellow painted wooden molding, while the ceilings are painted black. The powder room is made of the same materials, yet it is painted completely black. The kitchenette walls are covered in white, tropical-themed wallpaper, with black and white stove, counter, and cabinets. It also includes a nook with a built-in, semi-circular black booth.

Interior/Auditoriums

The Malco Theatre has two auditoriums, which were originally one, but it was altered by a dividing wall that was built down the middle of the large auditorium. Both auditoriums are facing south, situated side by side, east and west. They are nearly the same size, as their seating, at its widest, holds seventeen seats, with columns fourteen seats long. A balcony hangs over the back seating of both auditoriums, which has also been divided by the wall.

The seats are maroon cloth over grey metal, with stationary cushions, and the armrests cushioned in the same material. The floor is concrete with maroon carpet flanking the seats in aisles. The walls are plaster covered masonry, painted white and black on the lower portion. A large amount of water damage is on the easternmost wall, exposing the bricks beneath the plaster. The ceiling is made of dark grey panels with black framing that support studio lights.

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The white screens are centered on the main walls, above the black-painted stages. Access to the auditorium ground levels are through the hall from the main lobby, which lead to a series of wooden doors at the rear of the auditoriums. Each theater has two doors that open to the flanking carpeted aisles that lead down into the auditoriums. Emergency exits are found beside the stages, along with the eastern theater having an extra exit framed in the easternmost wall.

Interior/Balconies

A balcony hangs over the back seating of both auditoriums, which has also been divided by the wall. Any of the three stairs lead to the balconies and the projector hall behind the seating.

The seating arrangements become more angled to the rear of the balconies to grant a better view to the screens. The seats are the same fixed, maroon cloth over metal assembly as the ground level seats. They sit on a raised concrete and block foundation, which is supported by a column in each auditorium. One column in the rear of the west auditorium is grey, while the other is black, and both hold up the balconies by the block foundation. The undersides of the block foundations are painted white in the western theater and black in the eastern theater.

Forward of that foundation is the smooth, white underside of the balconies, with ovular recessed ornament cutouts of the concrete. Between the cutouts and the block foundation are studio lights. The guardrails of the balconies are stacked block, which are painted maroon in the western theater and white in the eastern theater. The walls behind the balconies are the continued white, plaster walls of the auditorium, which frame several rectangular openings for the projectors.

Access to both balconies is by the stairs, which lead to entryways that come up and in-between the seats. The eastern balcony has an emergency exit through the easternmost wall that connects to the fire stair on the exterior wall.

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INTEGRITY

Since the Malco's construction in 1935, there have been a number of alterations to the theater's exterior and interior, to maintain the trends of the theater industry over the generations.

The Malco Theatre was purchased in June 1962 from the original owner, Sidney M. Nutt, by Commonwealth Theatres, Inc. of Kansas City. The purchasing company re-decorated and reopened the theater in July 1962.

The Malco was built to include the remaining structure of the former Princess Theater, which is now the rear entrance and lobby. On June 21, 2008, the Hot Springs Documentary Film Institute held a celebratory event with the Hot Springs Jazz Society titled, "Jazzing up the Princess." All proceeds went to restoration of the original Princess structure. It commemorated the historical significance of the building as one of two remaining entrances in the country that were once segregated entries prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The marquee has been updated over the cinematic generations. On June 30, 2007, the Seiz Sign Company added neon lights to the marquee to restore its theatrical features to prepare for the theater's 100-year celebration.

A party wall was built in the main auditorium, making it into two theaters.

Today, the Malco Theatre is in good standing. The building is greatly unaltered from its original structural completion in 1935.

Malco Theatre
Name of Property

Garland County, Arkansas
County and State

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SUMMARY

The Malco Theatre in Hot Springs, Garland County, Arkansas, occupies a site that has been a source for regional recreation since the 1870s. The Malco currently stands as the Hot Springs Documentary Film Institute, which contributes educational entertainment to both the local community and the film industry. The theater is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places with **local significance** under **Criterion A** for associations with entertainment and recreation in Hot Springs in the twentieth century. The building, which was built in 1935, is also being nominated under **Criterion C**, as it is an outstanding example of the Art Deco style, with classical cinematic features on the front façade and marquee.

ELABORATION

The Princess Theater originated the site of the Malco in the early 20th Century, just after Hot Springs had boomed into a resort city due to the spa industry. It was built on Central Avenue, originally known as Valley Street, as it travels the valley of Springs Creek in the Ouachita Mountains. From the early 19th Century, Hot Springs began as a small township, before it grew as a resort community. The theater would later contribute to an area that began expanding their lodging, dining, and evening entertainment industries to support the rising number of tourists of the bathhouses.

Centuries prior to western expansion, Springs Creek valley was the source of healing, warm waters, which the indigenous tribes relied on for their ailments. Explorers would later discover the springs, leading to settlers making them a part of their new homes. As testimonies spread about the healing springs, people looked to build accommodations for visitors to the area. By 1832, before Arkansas became a state in 1836, the valley was established as America's first reserved land for recreational use, which later became Hot Springs National Park.¹

What was once known as Arkansas County, after the Louisiana Purchase, was a territory of inhabiting native tribes and French trappers. In 1818, Arkansas County was divided into four smaller counties of Clark, Hempstead, Lawrence, and Pulaski. The township of Hot Springs resided in Clark County, with an 1830 census of eighty-four residents. By that time, many settlers had establishments of crude cabins as their homes and for renting to visitors. Ludovicus Belding, from Massachusetts, built the first small hotel of Hot Springs in 1828, which would become a common structure of the region, as tourism for the springs would continue to grow.²

Malco Theatre
Name of Property

Garland County, Arkansas
County and State

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¹ Cuning, C.W. "Garland County." (Hot Springs, Arkansas: 2009). *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture*, online at <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net>, accessed 3 June, 2009.

²Brown, Dee. *The American Spa*. (Arkansas Bank & Trust Co., 1982), p.14, 15.

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By 1860, the census of Hot Springs was 201, but the Civil War brought challenges to the populated region. The governor of the time, Henry M. Rector had to make Hot Springs the state capital for a short period, after Little Rock became occupied by Union Troops. It was an unsettling point in Hot Springs' history, as many of the residents fled to Louisiana and Texas to avoid encounters with Union troops and renegade bands. But, reconstruction after the war proved beneficial to Hot Springs.³

On April 5, 1873, Clark County was further divided as Garland County was established, leaving the remains to form parts of Hot Spring, Montgomery and Saline counties. Garland County was created by the current governor, Augustus H. Garland, who also named Hot Springs as the county seat. The move was made to appease the residents of Clark County, who made the day-long travel to the town of Rockport, which was the county seat before the division.⁴

With a newly established purpose, Hot Springs would regain its population, rebuild the lost homes and begin development of their local industry. Two railroads were laid across the town, giving it a greater reach to visitors of the springs, who were also attracted to the new, large resorts. In 1876, the U.S. Supreme Court made the decision to maintain its entitlement to the springs as a reservation, after years of litigation over claims from several resort-founding businessmen that the land was theirs. Compensations were granted to those who were judged, and Hot Springs was able to grow as a recreational resort.⁵

Visitation to Hot Springs increased through the 1870s and locals were making good business. The booming spa industry drove the resorts just south of the recreational reservation, where they made their own district on the old Valley Street. The district was soon known as Central Avenue, which became lined with frame-constructed buildings that were hotels, diners, concession shops, and theaters. They were typically one to three stories in height, with board and batten siding, gabled roofs, and covered porches. These did not last, as the timber structures were highly vulnerable to fire, and would be rebuilt in masonry.⁶

Tourism and local revenue increased, and the population expanded as more of the visitors were coming to settle in Hot Springs. The 1880s were the beginning period of brick construction, or renaissance, as buildings were becoming larger, more ornate, and could accommodate more guests. These structures were distinguished by the influential styles of Italianate, Second Empire, and Greek Revival.⁷

People from all over the country were attracted to the spas and bathhouses, as well as the recreational amenities. Tourists who came to "take the cure" in the springs needed more to fill the hours of the day, and

³ Cunning.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Cunning, p.16.

⁶ Arkansas Historic Preservation Program. "Central Avenue Historic District." *The Arkansas School for Mathematics, Science, and the Arts*, online at <http://asms.k12.ar.us/armem/brown/intro.htm>, accessed 3 June 2009.

⁷ *Ibid.*

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business in entertainment was found. Visitors would originally go hunting, fishing, or horseback riding, but they later wanted to do what they rarely did at home. Gambling became the one of the new focuses in Hot Springs, as casinos and racetracks were established. Hotels were makeshift gambling houses and the Sportsman Park racetrack was built on the south edge of town for betting on horse races.⁸

Theatrical acts had a small account for amusement in Hot Springs prior to the Civil War, as there was a small theater near the spas for entertaining visitors. As potential grew for the entertainment industry, the war set it back until the 1880s. The construction of the first Opera House was completed in October of 1882, commissioned by Samuel W. Fordyce. It was a Victorian style structure with a galvanized iron front that was located at 200 Central Avenue, and it hosted high-quality entertainment, occasionally direct from New York City.⁹

The Opera House would come under the management of Frank Head, from Illinois, who kept performance acts coming and seats filled into the early 20th Century. However, a shift in audience's taste developed, as well as the size in theatrical productions, which required larger stages and greater audiences. The Opera House was later outdone in scale and performance ability by the Auditorium on Benton Street in 1904.¹⁰

At the same time, the newly invented motion picture enterprise was changing the theatrical experience nationwide. It eventually began to influence the entertainers of Hot Springs, as Frank Head had the Princess Theater constructed in 1910, namely for motion picture viewing along with vaudeville acts. The site chosen for the theater was also on Central Avenue, in the middle of the successful tourism-based community. Located just south of "Spencer's Corner," where Bridge Street connects Broadway Street to Central Avenue, the Princess would contribute to the youthful film industry for the next 25 years.¹¹

The early years of cinema were marked by a cultural shift, as high culture clashed with the arising pop culture. Brightly lit marquees were placed on classical facades to advertise for vaudeville houses, which were considered a contradiction by the upper class citizens. But, these houses began to rely on motion pictures to make up half of their programs, and the influence of a new entertainment media began. Soon, members of all classes were filling seats in the auditoriums to watch "picture shows," which evolved into feature narratives.¹²

However, the Princess Theater stood during a delicate age in Hot Springs. The city was impacted by World War I and the Great Depression, which caused the tourism economy to dwindle. While Frank Head was the established owner, Sidney Nutt, a lifetime Hot Springs resident, purchased the theater from him in 1927, and

⁸ Brown, p.50-55.

⁹ *Ibid*, p.45-49.

¹⁰ Hanley, Ray & Hanley, Steven. *Hot Springs Arkansas*. (Charleston: Arcadia, 2000), p.46.

¹¹ *Ibid*.

¹² Herzog, Charlotte. "The Movie Palace & the Theatrical Sources of its Architectural Style," *Exhibition, The Film Reader*. (London: Routledge, 2002), p.60.

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remained the theater's manager. In 1929, after the vaudeville period had passed on, the Princess showed the first film to feature sound.¹³

In the time the Princess Theater stood, a number of fires had devastated much of the developed Central district, warranting reconstruction of buildings and businesses in higher quality with more permanent materials. In 1905, forty city blocks of the valley district were destroyed, and again in 1913, as well as in 1923.¹⁴ It was not until 1935 when the Princess was claimed in a fire that destroyed all but its foundation and its masonry entrance that faced Broadway Street. That entrance survived to support the site's next occupying structure, the Malco Theatre.¹⁵

As the film industry was soundly established, its cultural influence developed a new appearance for the buildings that housed them. The theaters would become larger, as bright marquees advertised to the street and enough seating was installed to house thousands of audience members. They would not only entertain audiences, but inform them on current events through newsreels. The theater became the place to be.

Sidney Nutt, the continued owner of the former Princess's site, ordered the construction of the Malco Theatre in 1935. Brueggeman & Swaim, the contracted architects, designed the building to utilize the remains for the Princess Theater. The completed structure consisted of a single, large auditorium, with a balcony, a lobby, and a structure for offices that faced Central Avenue. The front façade was in the spirit of the modern movement with its Art Deco features. Vertical stucco piers framed windows and multi-colored tiles, and a bright marquee attracted customers from the street. It had an occupational limit of one-thousand seats, which helped to continue the recreational value of Hot Springs tourism.

Brueggeman & Swaim referred to the licentious use of the modern artistic movement of the Malco's time period. The theater's Art Deco features were relied through 1920s and 1930s for public buildings. In architecture, it was an avenue to attract prospective customers to a company's business. For commercial buildings, grand scale geometries of the exterior were manipulated and highlighted in sculpture, while concepts were continued in the interior. An Art Deco building's vertical features attracted viewers from the street, while illuminated horizontal features, such as marquees, welcomed people into their lobbies.¹⁶

The style's name derives from the 1925 Paris exhibition, "L' Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes." The name is now typically applied to typical artistic products of the 1920s and 30s.

¹³ Hanley, p.46.

¹⁴ Besom, Robert D. "Spencer's Corner, Once the Center of Town, Is Staging a Comeback." *The Record*, (Garland County Historical Society, 1979), p.1.

¹⁵ Hanley, p.46.

¹⁶ Arwas, Victor. *Art Deco*. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1980), p.9, 10, 13, 14.

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American Art Deco designs generally favored cubism as solid geometric structures that could be sculptured with vertical piers, curves, and neon lighting to gain attractive qualities through the Depression.¹⁷

From 1929 to 1964, the Princess structure that faced Broadway Street functioned as the segregated entrance for African-American audience members, who discreetly entered and had direct access to the balcony seating. This method lasted until the Civil Rights Act was enacted, which is when the Princess entrance became another general access to the theater and the balcony was a part of general seating. Today, it is only one of two existing entrances with the same historical relevance to the Civil Rights period in the country.¹⁸

Although Sydney Nutt was the proprietor of the site and building, he sold his interest in the theater in 1936, which was bought up by M.A. Lightman, founder of Malco Theatres. Lightman was in the early years of developing the Malco chain when he bought the rights to the theater, which would soon become part of a successful franchise in the southern United States.¹⁹

Mr. Nutt remained the owner of the Malco Theatre until he sold it in 1962 to Commonwealth Theatres, Inc. of Kansas City. By the 1960s, the multiplex theater was created, as feature films were in color and attracted audiences to an unprecedented number in American entertainment history. The amount of feature films premiered required more screens to accommodate their display, and newer theaters were constructed with multiple auditoriums within their walls. Single auditorium theaters that were already established had to make alterations to keep up with the amount of movie premiers, including the Malco Theatre.

Under new ownership, the Malco had a party wall built down the middle of its auditorium, making it into a two-theater multiplex, or Cineplex as they came to be known. The marquee was also renovated to be larger in scale and with brighter, neon lights for more attractive qualities. These new features helped the Malco remain an entertaining venue for Hot Springs through the modern era.

The Malco continued displaying feature films to audiences until 1995, when it again came under new management. Acclaimed magician, Maxwell Blade, became the tenant in the Malco, which became the Theater of Magic. In 1996, Blade shared the theater with the Hot Springs Documentary Film Institute, which became a proprietor in 1992 and incorporated in 1996, whose annual film festival continually attracted international society members of the documentary film genre, along with their audiences. In 2008, the

Malco Theatre
Name of Property

Garland County, Arkansas
County and State

¹⁷ Menten, Theodore. *The Art Deco Style*. (New York: Dover, 1972), Introduction.

¹⁸ _____. "Jazzing Up the Princess." Event program for HSDFI & HSJS Princess refurbishment celebration, June 21, 2008.

¹⁹ _____. "Hot Springs New Era." *The Sentinel-Record*. Hot Springs, Arkansas, February 22, 1946.

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HSDFI became the sole proprietor of the Malco. Their annual film festival had reached an esteemed level, as it became Hot Springs' highest profile cultural event.²⁰

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Malco Theatre in Hot Springs, Garland County, Arkansas, occupies a site that has been a source for regional recreation since the 1870s. The Malco currently stands as the Hot Springs Documentary Film Institute, which contributes education entertainment to both the local community and the film industry. The theater is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places with **local significance** under **Criterion A** associations with entertainment and recreation in Hot Springs in the twentieth century. The building, which was built in 1935, is also being nominated under **Criterion C**, as it is an outstanding example of the Art Deco style, with classical cinematic features on the front façade and marquee.

²⁰ Hendricks, Nancy. "Hot Springs Documentary Film Institute (HSDFI)." *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*, online at <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net>, accessed 3 June 2009.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Malco Theatre occupies Block 68, parts of Lots 9-10 of the Original Town of Hot Springs.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

These are the original boundaries as deeded to the Hot Springs Documentary Film Institute.