

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NR 5/26/04

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 Community Theatre

other names/site number Breckinridge Building, Site #JE0585

2. Location

street & number 207 West 2nd Avenue

not for publication

city or town Pine Bluff

vicinity

state Arkansas code AR County Jefferson code 069 zip code 71601

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.)

Cathie Mattaus
Signature of certifying official/Title

4/8/04
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

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

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

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

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
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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 AND CULTURE/theater

COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Moderne

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK

walls BRICK

roof ASPHALT

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.

Levels of Significance (local, state, national)

Local

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1951-1953

Significant Dates

1951-1953

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked)

Cultural Affiliation (Complete if Criterion D is marked)

Architect/Builder

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.

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 Newspapers

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property Less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>15</u>	<u>591672</u>	<u>3787956</u>	3	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Boundary Justification

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Ralph S. Wilcox, National Register & Survey Coordinator

Organization Arkansas Historic Preservation Program date 28 January 2004

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 Old Town Theatre Centre, Inc.

street & number 207 W. 2nd Avenue telephone 870-535-2646

city or town Pine Bluff state AR zip code 71601

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 Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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SUMMARY

The Community Theatre is an Art Moderne style-theater located at 207 West 2nd Street in downtown Pine Bluff, Jefferson County Arkansas. The two-story brick building has two stucco-covered walls, a shed roof and partial basement. Although the building was built in 1889 and renovated into a theatre in 1922, the current façade and marques are the result of extensive alterations in 1951-1953 after a fire.

ELABORATION

The Community Theatre is located in the heart of downtown Pine Bluff, Arkansas, at 207 West 2nd Street. The current Art Moderne style of the building is the result of extensive renovations in 1951-1953 that occurred after a fire. The building was originally built in 1889 as a furniture store, and was first renovated into a theatre in 1922.

The building is built out of brick, although the front and east façades are covered in stucco. The building features a partial basement and a shed roof. The front façade is dominated by the truncated triangular-shaped marquee that was installed in the 1950s.

The interior of the building is dominated by the auditorium space and balcony.

Front/South Façade

The first floor of the front façade is dominated by the main entrance to the theatre. The entrance, which is recessed, has a set of double wood doors. Each door has a metal kickplate and handles and a single pane circular window. To the left of the entrance are three poster display cases, and to the right of the entrance is another poster display case followed by the ticket booth. The ticket booth has glass panels in the top half and pink and maroon tiles in a chevron pattern on the bottom half. To the right of the booth is the entrance to the balcony stairs followed by another poster display case.

Above the first floor entrance of the building, the façade is dominated by the truncated triangular-shaped marquee. The diagonal sides of the marquee feature letter boards with the word "COMMUNITY" above. The front of the marquee features a large "C" and a curved-top panel projects above the top of the marquee.

The second floor of the front façade features a wood-framed, four-pane casement window towards the left edge of the façade. The window towards the right side of the façade is currently occupied by a window air-conditioner. Higher up on the façade, towards the center, are two rectangular louvered vents. The top of the façade contains a row of black tiles.

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Side/East Façade

The east façade has one metal-framed, two-over-two window near the left side of the façade approximately one-half way up its height. The rest of the façade is dominated by a mural featuring sixteen historic airplanes, and honoring the 312 A.A.F.F.T.D. that was stationed at Grider Field in Pine Bluff.

Rear/North Façade

The first floor of the rear façade has a double metal door on the left side with seven concrete steps leading up to it. The right side of the façade has a small addition on the rear, which houses the projection room for the theatre. Three metal chimneys cap the addition and a boarded-up window is in the center of the additions rear façade. A door is present to the right of the window.

The east side of the addition has a door that leads onto a metal catwalk. The catwalk leads to a set of eleven metal stairs that go to the second floor of the façade. On the left side of the façade is a single door with boarded-up transom window above. To the right of the door are two boarded-up windows. The center window is where the ductwork for the air-conditioning system enters the building.

Side/West Façade

The west façade shares a party wall with the building next door.

Interior

The interior of the building is dominated by the auditorium space and its associated balcony level. The lobby is located in the front of the building as is the screen/stage area of the auditorium. The rear of the auditorium space contains the cry room on the first floor and the balcony on the second floor. The front of the building, on the second floor, contains the office spaces.

Integrity

The Community Theatre retains good integrity as a 1950s Art Moderne theatre. The exterior of the building is virtually unaltered from its renovation in the 1950s, with the exception of the mural that was painted on the east façade in recent years. The interior of the theatre retains many of its fixtures and furnishings from the 1950s, including wall sconces, signs, bathroom fixtures, and lobby appointments. The building's surroundings in downtown Pine Bluff still reflect the urban commercial area that was present when the building was finished in 1953.

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SUMMARY

The Community Theatre is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under **Criterion C** with **local significance** as an excellent example of an early 1950s Art Moderne-style theatre. The building was originally constructed in 1889 as a furniture store, and was extensively remodeled in the 1920s to become a theatre. However, the current façade is the product of another extensive remodeling that occurred in 1951-1953, and the building is the last remaining example of an Art Moderne-style theatre in downtown Pine Bluff.

ELABORATION

The building that is currently the Community Theatre was originally built in August 1889 by builder and contractor William I. Hilliard.¹ The building was originally used as a furniture store before it became S. H. Kress & Co., 5, 10, & 25-cent store. It would remain the Kress & Co. store until 1922.²

In 1922, the architect Mitchell Seligman extensively renovated the Breckinridge Building turning it into theater, which opened on May 19, 1922, as the Un-Named Theater. An article in the *Pine Bluff Daily Graphic* of May 19, 1922, told about the opening day of the theatre:

It has a frontage of 25 feet along West Second Avenue and runs 150 feet North from West Second to the alley. The foyer walls are of deep sea green velvet. The walls are of ornamental plaster finished with soft tones of French gray and rose. Elaborate display panels consisted of the finest imported paper in tones of brown, old gold, sky blue, and pink. The ceiling is in ivory, gray, and blue. The seats with footrests are made of mahogany. A large Photo-play Wurlitzer Style U Electric Theatre Piano is installed to accompany the Photo-productions. A sanitary water-cooling system with an economy intake fan has been installed. A fireproof booth has been placed outside the building, which houses the movie projectors. The building is fireproof in every respect. An innovation in the seating arrangement has been placed in the building. Seats will face the front, with the screen at the rear of a large stage. There are no steps in the aisles, from the front to the rear, the aisles are inclined. An indirect, subdued lighting system has been arranged, said to be the most modern in moving picture theatres."³

In June of 1922, the Un-Named Theatre became the Berbig-Community Theatre, and the name was changed again in November to the Community Theatre. The theater re-opened with a triple extravaganza of movies

¹ *The Press Eagle*, February 1, 1890, Special Edition

² Pine Bluff City Directories, 1894-1922.

³ *Pine Bluff Daily Graphic*, May 19, 1922.

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featuring *The Daughter of Devil Dan* starring Emma Harrison, *The Dentist*, and *The Fighter of Diamond X*.⁴ From 1922 until 1963 the theater was family-owned and operated by the Bonner family.⁵ The theater was known for showing westerns and serials, and the family brought in cowboy star Tex Ritter to help draw crowds.⁶

Disaster struck the building in the early 1950s when, due to the use of nitrate film, a fire began in the projection room and spread into the auditorium. Renovation of the building began in 1951 with additions such as a cry-room and cinemascope screen, and sidewall neon lighting. In addition, the bathrooms were moved to the front of the building.⁷ Renovations were finished by 1953, and the theater operated another ten years until October 1963 when the doors finally closed. The last movie shown at the Community Theatre was *Phantom of the Opera*.⁸

The building would remain closed for twenty-nine years, and it suffered greatly from neglect and vandalism. On Nov. 24, 1986, William Bettwy bought the Community Theatre from Charles R. Bonner. Restoration of the building began in the spring of 1992. After spending over \$100,000 of his own money, the Community Theatre reopened on February 7, 1995, with a Jazz Band Concert under the direction of "Pinky" Curry. The efforts of Bettwy in saving the Community Theatre earned him the Governor's Award for an individual promoting the arts.

In the winter of 1996, Bettwy deeded the Community Theatre over to the Friends of the Saenger, combining the Community Theatre and the Saenger Theater (National Register listed March 23, 1995) into the Old Town Theater Centre, Inc., a non-profit organization.

For the past nine years the Community Theatre has served its community with its weekly live shows (Wednesday off Main), weekly movies, nostalgic tours, and other events. The Community Theatre is also one of the venues for the Pine Bluff Film Festival. In fact, many important contributors to the American movie industry in the twentieth-century have graced the stage of the Community Theatre. Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., and Geraldine Chaplin came in 1995 and 1996, and other stars that have appeared include Van Johnson, Fay Wray, Ruth Warrick, Cameron Matheson, Gloria De Haven, Tippi Hedren, Celeste Holm, Jane Russell and Kitty Carlisle Hart.

When the Community Theatre was renovated in the early 1950s, the resulting building, with its Art Moderne architecture, cinemascope screen, and sidewall neon lighting, represented the latest in theater design. The

⁴ Advertisement in the *Pine Bluff Commercial*, November 16, 1922.

⁵ Pine Bluff City Directories, 1922-1963.

⁶ *Pine Bluff Commercial* Ad, January 17, 1939.

⁷ Interview with Charles R. Bonner previous owner of Community Theatre 1995.

⁸ Advertisement in the *Pine Bluff Commercial*, November 3, 1963.

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building has been an important part of the entertainment life of Pine Bluff, and continues to be a part of it currently. Today the Community Theatre remains the best example of an Art Moderne-style theatre in downtown Pine Bluff.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Community Theatre is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under **Criterion C** with **local significance** as an excellent example of an early 1950s Art Moderne-style theatre. The building was originally constructed in 1889 as a furniture store, and was extensively remodeled in the 1920s to become a theatre. However, the current façade is the product of another extensive remodeling that occurred in 1951-1953, and the building is the last remaining example of an Art Moderne-style theatre in downtown Pine Bluff.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bonner, Charles R. (previous owner of Community Theatre) Interview with Brenda Hall, 1995.

Pine Bluff City Directories, 1894-1963.

Pine Bluff Commercial

November 16, 1922

January 17, 1939

November 3, 1963

Pine Bluff Daily Graphic, May 19, 1922.

The Press Eagle, February 1, 1890, Special Edition

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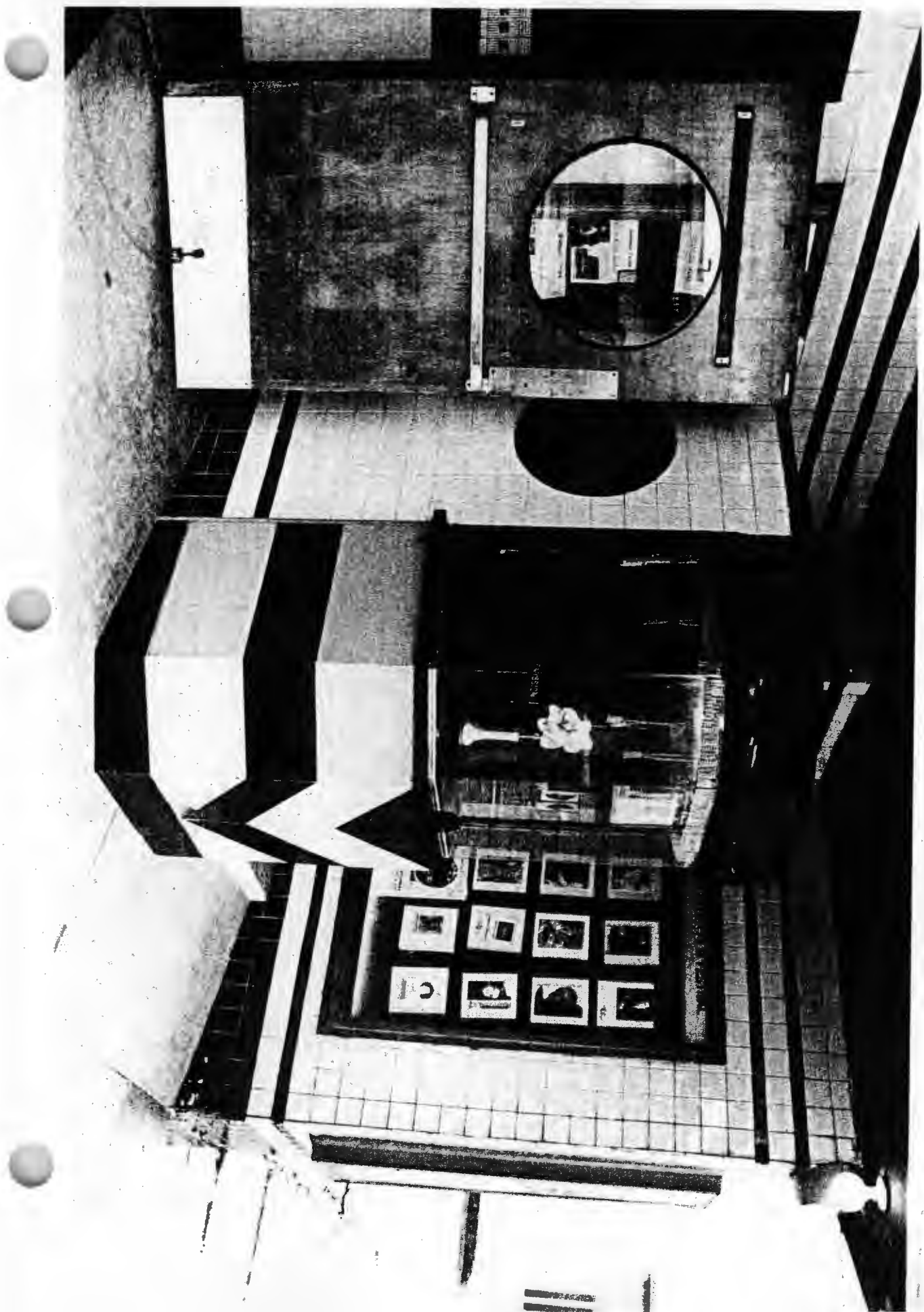
VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

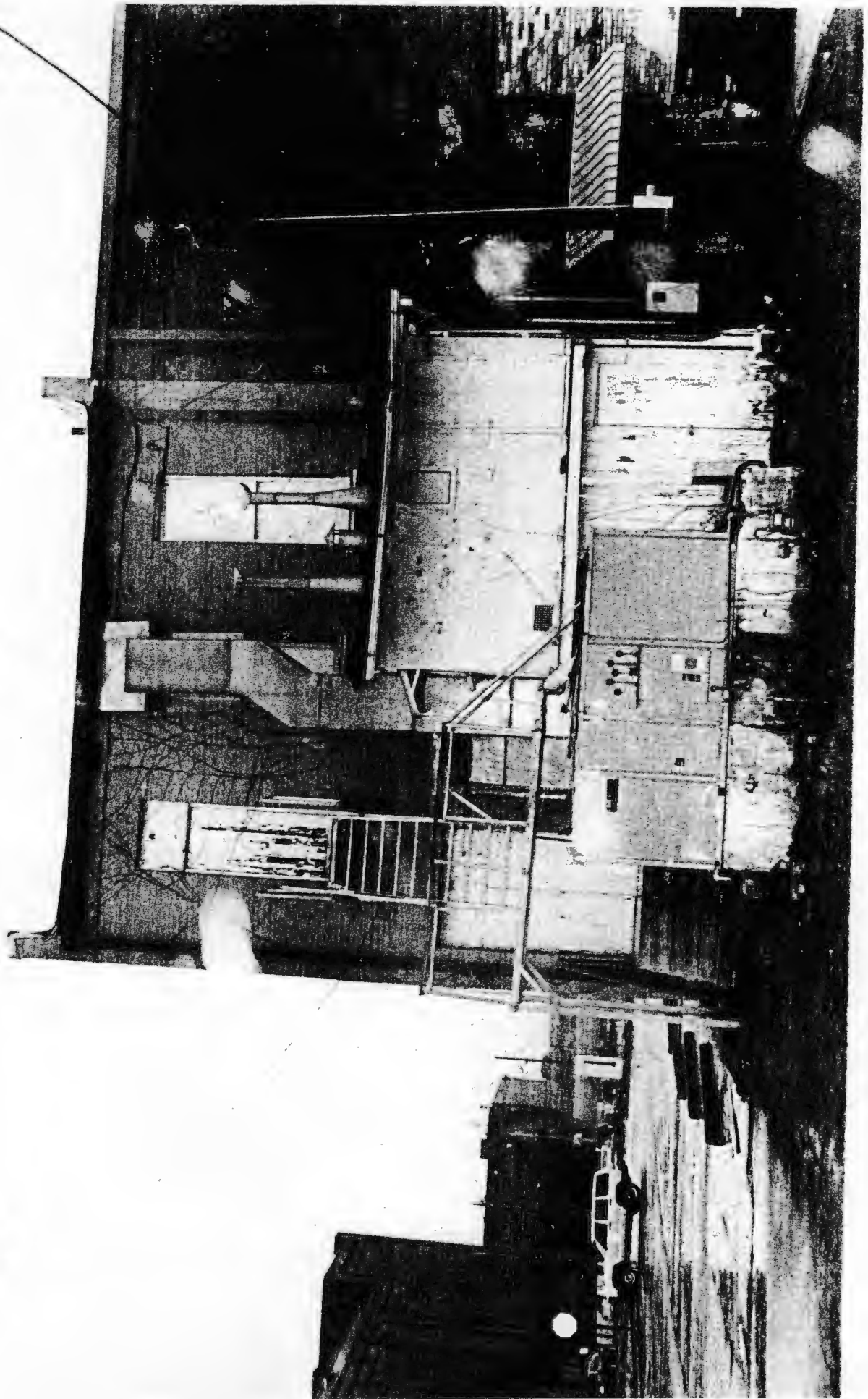
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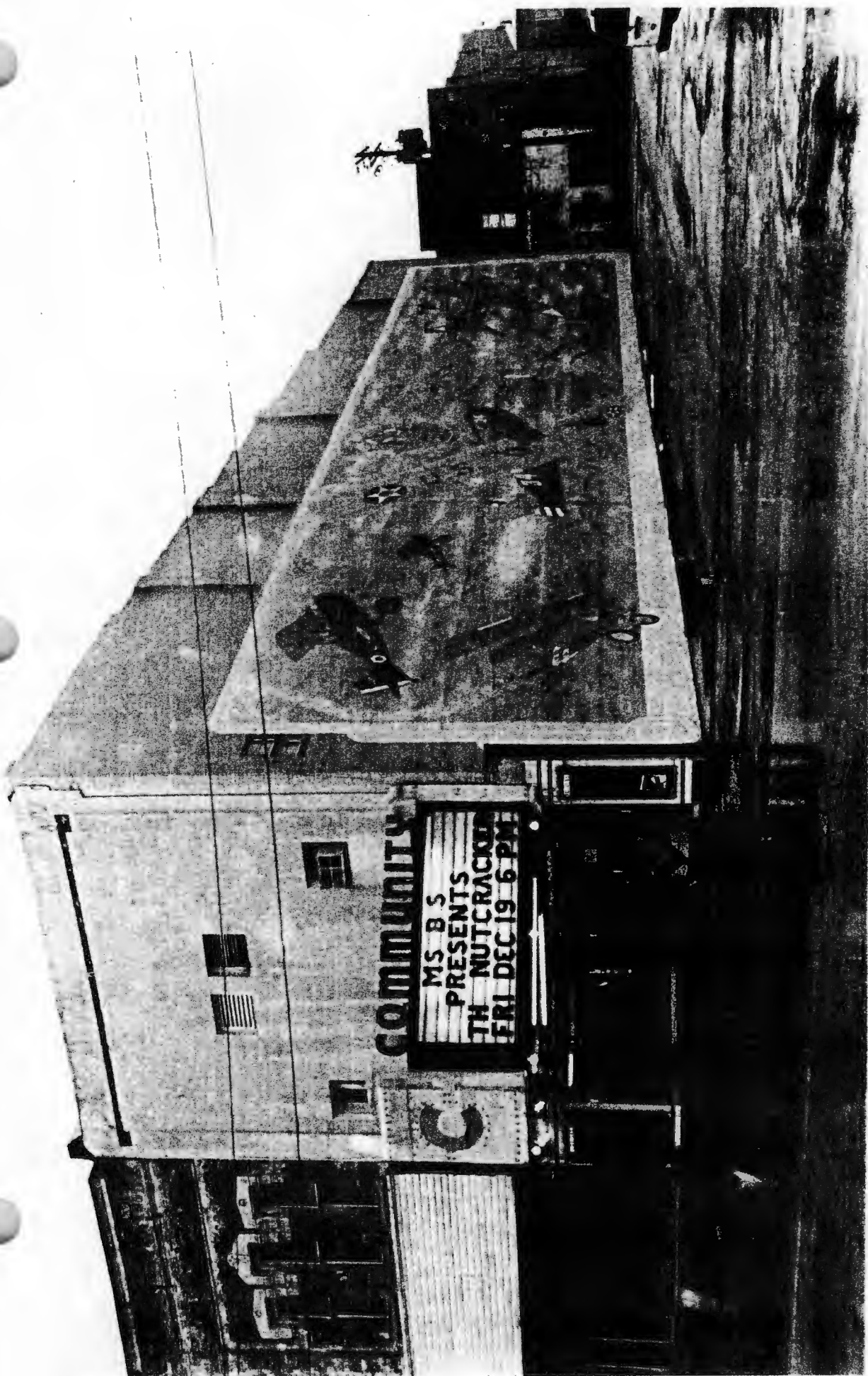
Beginning at a point 50 feet west from the Southeast corner of Lot 3 in block 20 of the Old or Original Town of Pine Bluff Arkansas and running thence west 25 feet and north 154 feet to the alley, thence east 25 feet to the point of beginning. Same being located in the southeast fractional $\frac{1}{4}$ of section 32, township 5 south, range 9 west of the 5th principal Meridian.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary includes all of the land that is historically associated with the Community Theatre.







COMMUNITY

MS B S
PRESENTS
THE NUTCRACKER
FRI DEC 19 6 PM



COMMUNITY

**HAVE
A MOVIE PARTY
RENT A THEATRE
535 2646**

C

COMMUNITY

**MS B S
PRESENTS
THE NUTCRACKER
FRI DEC 19 6 PM**

PINE BLUFF QUADRANGLE
ARKANSAS—JEFFERSON CO.
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

7632 IV SW
(ROB ROY)

W. 2'30"

589 | 1 990 000 FEET

R. 9 W.

590

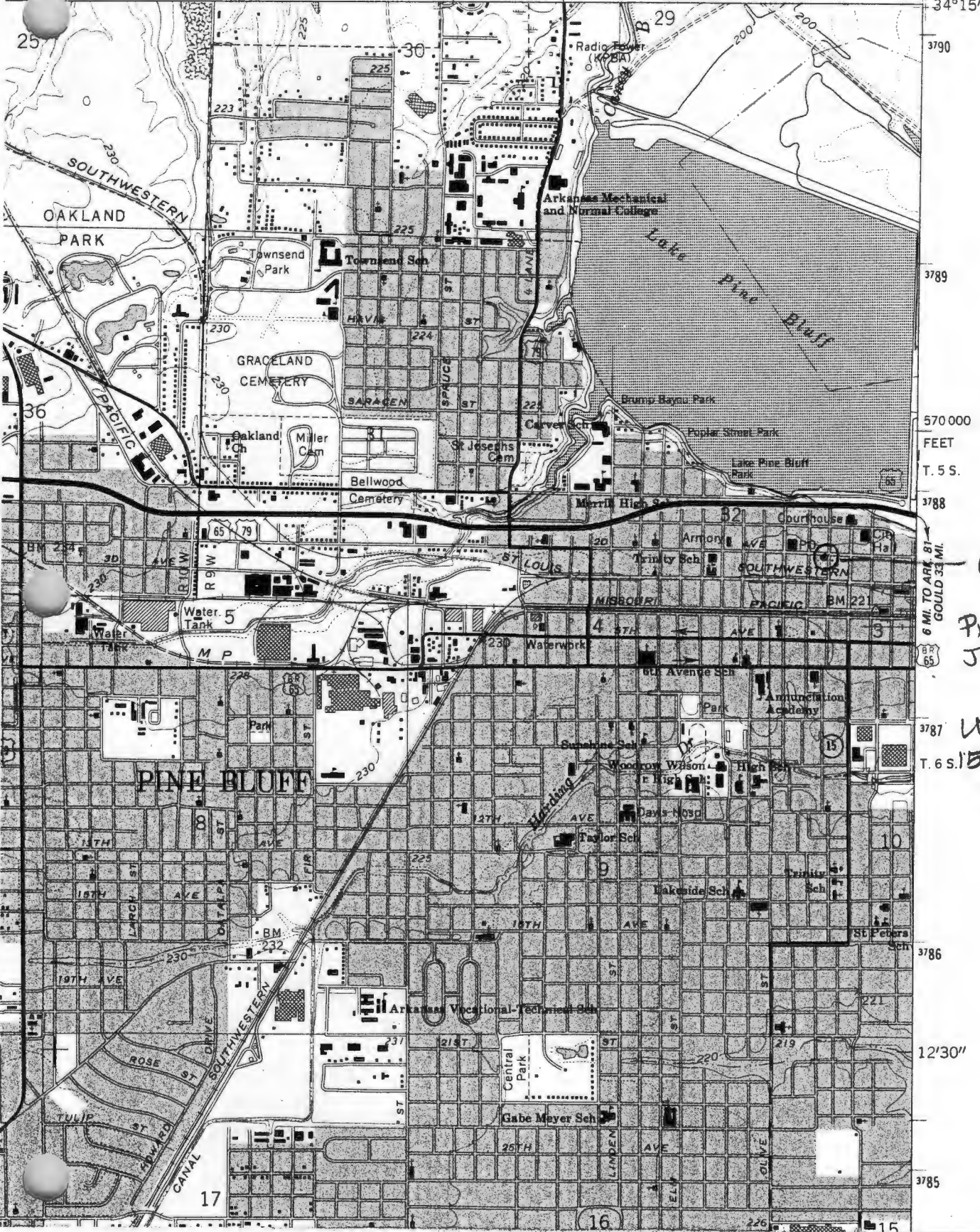
79

STUTTGART 35 MI.

5.2 MI. TO JUNC. U.S. 79 AND ARK. 15

92°00'

34°15'



3790

3789

570 000

FEET

T. 5 S.

3788

6 MI. TO ARK. ST.

GOULD 33 MI.

87 65

3787

T. 6 S. 15

10

3786

12'30"

3785

Community
Theatre
Pine Bluff,
Jefferson Co.,
AR

UTM Ref:
T. 6 S. 15 | 591672 |
3787956