



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 Aztec Theater

other names/site number Aztec Theater and Office Building

2. Location

street & number 104 North St. Mary's Street N/A not for publication

city or town San Antonio N/A vicinity

state Texas code TX county Bexar code 029 zip code 78205

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] 14 Sept. 1992
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State Historic Preservation Officer, Texas Historical Commission
State of 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

[Signature]

Entered in the
National Register

Date of Action

10/22/92

Aztec Theater
Name of Property

Bexar County, Texas
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 the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	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

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture: Theater

Commerce/Trade: Office Building

Commerce/Trade: Restaurant

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Vacant/not in use: N/A

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Other: 2-part vertical block

Other: Mayan Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

walls brick

roof asphalt

other concrete (cast stone)

granite, glass

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See Continuation Sheets 7-1 through 7-12.

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Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 1Aztec Theater
San Antonio, Bexar County, TX

Description:

The 1926 Aztec Theater is a 6-story masonry, 2-part vertical block commercial building with applied Mayan Revival detailing. A flat roof caps exterior walls of brown scored brick with cast stone ornamentation. The theater's interior is noteworthy for its opulent references to Mesoamerican design influences. On a corner lot in San Antonio's central business district, the theater and office building faces west onto North St. Mary's Street. It retains a high level of its historic integrity, with few alterations.

In south central Texas, Bexar County is in the interior belt of the coastal plains. Although the northwest portion of the county is hilly with numerous spring fed streams, the City of San Antonio is quite flat, built along the San Antonio River plain. The city (1990 population 989,591) serves as county seat and as the region's economic hub, based on government, military bases, tourism, and other service and industrial businesses. Other commercial buildings surround all but the north side of the theater, which faces the San Antonio River walk, an area filled with lush foliage (see USGS map.)

The building is almost rectangular in plan (see Maps-18). Following a 2-part vertical block form, the lower zone of the building at street level incorporates retail space, while the upper zone houses more secluded office space. The street level of the Aztec Theater's main (west) facade is faced with polished pink granite that replaced the original patterned brick and tile decoration in the late 1960s (see Photograph 1). A central, recessed double door accesses the main ticket booth vestibule; a series of modern plate glass display windows on either side of the entrance was installed in the 1960s. Recessed doors on each end allow access to retail shops. Visually separating the street level from the upper stories, a metal awning extends across this facade and around to the south elevation. The marquee suffered several modifications. Originally it featured glass panels in a stepped configuration over the entrances (on both the west and south sides) as in Figure 1 (see 7-7). Above the marquee, all windows are paired 1/1 wood frame, although some have been enclosed. A cast stone, denticulated string course separates the 2nd and 3rd floors. Three cast stone vertical strips between wider bands of brick establish a strong vertical rhythm of the upper stories. This ornamentation functions visually as large pilasters embracing the fenestration, spanning the height of these upper stories and unifying them. Capitals to these pilasters, with cast stone foliation and Mesoamerican ceremonial heads bedecked with feathered headdresses, rest in the wide cornice. Atop the cornice is a shallow projecting parapet with cast stone cresting colored red to imitate ceramic tile. A flag pole rises from the roof at the center of this facade. A vertical sign projects from the building's southwest corner, announcing the theater's name. The bottom portion of the sign, now a circular disk bearing the numeral "3," was originally a square panel displaying film-related information.

Wider, but with similar detailing, the south facade faces Commerce Street (see Photograph 2). The street level houses five retail shops within recessed doors set between modern plate glass display windows. The westernmost entrances provide admission to the grand foyer; the easternmost doors provide access to retail shops; the central entrances provide access to the office building lobby and the auditorium. The awning continues on this

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San Antonio, Bexar County, TX

facade, as does the vertical rhythm of the upper stories and the adornment to both cornice and parapet. A flag pole rises from the roof at the center of this facade. Behind the flagpole is a small pavilion corresponding to these interior elevator shaft and annotated on original plans as a "penthouse."

The east elevation abuts another building and bears fire escapes and 1/1 windows. It also has two service doors.

The west bay of the north facade has detailing similar to that of the main elevation. However, the unadorned remainder of the north side faces an alley. Three fire escapes, and doors and windows that correspond to interior dressing rooms and the auditorium mark this elevation (see Photograph 3). These doors functioned as service entrances.

The interior of the theater is its principal noteworthy feature. Mesoamerican influenced details lavishly decorate all public areas. The main entrance from North St. Mary's Street leads to the ticket booth vestibule. The floors in this vestibule feature brilliantly colored mosaic and terrazzo tiles laid in a geometric pattern based on frets and other stepped motifs (see Photograph 4). Built to resemble a truncated stepped pyramid, the ticket booth is the focal point of this room (see Photograph 5). Green, black, and yellow ceramic tile in a geometric pattern functions as the base board of the ticket booth. Above these tiles, white plaster walls simulate massive rough cut blocks of stone. Originally identical to ticket windows (see Figure 2; 7-8) on the north and south sides of the west ticket window was enlarged in the 1970s. The original ornamentation remains intact on the north and south ticket booth windows. Horizontal plaster panels above each window display gold figures sculpted in low relief against a blue background. These panels emulate a frieze on the north side of the Maya Temple of the Cross at the ruins of Palenque in south Mexico. Flanking the windows, vertical plaster panels painted green feature applied red and gold plaster Maya glyphs. Black wrought iron bars, resembling arrows, decorate both windows. The east side of the ticket booth has a single door.

The walls of the ticket booth vestibule are similar to those of the booth itself, the same base board surmounted by grayish, turquoise-flecked plaster walls resembling massive rough cut stones. At the tops of the walls and encircling the room is a "snake and talon" molding, representing the winged serpent of Aztec mythology.

An enclosure extends across the north wall of the ticket booth vestibule and hides a storage room. Present access to this room is from the grand foyer; original features inside the room are still intact. The date of this addition is unknown; it is not on the original plans, but was constructed prior to 1967. The enclosure consists of a wall supporting a red tile shed roof. Base board and plaster walls on this addition match the other three sides of the room. The east end of this enclosure covers one of the three original double doors that led to the grand foyer. Between the three original doors leading to the grand foyer are *bas* reliefs of Mesoamerican figures set in large vertical plaster panels.

Beyond the ticket booth vestibule is the 3-story grand foyer (see Photograph 6 and Figure 3; p. 7-9). In this room, the flooring is the only recent element. At least two different carpets have covered the floor of this

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San Antonio, Bexar County, TX

rectangular room in the past; the original carpet was octagonally patterned, while the second was a turquoise, crimson, black, and gold floral print. Currently covering the floor are solid white vinyl tiles on the west side of the room and wide strips of alternating white and dark pink vinyl tiles on the east side. The 1st floor walls of the grand foyer have black Belgian marble base board; massive rough cut plaster blocks like those in the ticket booth vestibule rise above the marble to mezzanine level. Circling the room at regular intervals are 16 polychromatic standards. Their bases are firmly affixed to the floor, while the "heraldic" emblem, with glowing gold lights, is attached to the wall. The standards are similar to ceremonial staffs carried by Mesoamerican priests with Maya influenced detailing.

Above each of the standards at the mezzanine level, 16 equidistant columns rise, reportedly inspired by the pillars in the Hall of Columns at the Mixtec ruins of Mitla in south Oaxaca (see Photograph 7). At the base of the columns are shallow "saucers" decorated with faces of owls, from whose eyes additional gold light emanates. Topping these columns as capitals are massive, brightly hued heads of the Aztec moon goddess Coyolxauhqui. Above the capitals, the walls of the grand foyer (on the 3rd floor level) are adorned with giant order brackets, friezes of decorative plaster moldings, and recessed niches from which red and blue light radiates. Above this level a stepped ceiling rises to the top of the 4th floor, terminating in a flat surface punctured by three coffers painted to resemble blue sky filled with fluffy white clouds. Hanging from the center coffer, a huge chandelier added to the theater in 1929 weighs more than one ton and contains almost 500 light bulbs. The chandelier holds six tiers of "candles," beneath which are numerous bands of Mesoamerican symbols and figurative scenes fashioned of vibrant colored stained glass. A large sacrificial altar originally centered under this chandelier was sold in the 1960s; the San Antonio owner is currently offering it for sale.

Additional Mesoamerican inspired sculptures and motifs adorn the room. Lintels atop each of the doorways leading from this room (five on the east leading to the auditorium, two on the west leading to the ticket booth vestibule, and a few to various exits). On the center of each, a circular disc displays a carved head of the sacred Jaguar. On the east wall of the grand foyer, leading into the auditorium, three Aztec Maize Goddesses rest on black marble stands positioned in recessed niches between doors to the auditorium. Sitting cross-legged and cradling basins in their hands, these plaster sculpted goddesses serenely survey the room as gold light shines up on their faces from the bowls they hold.

At each of the north and south sides of the grand foyer a jade colored, concrete staircase leads to the mezzanine. The opening to the north stairwell, centered in the north wall of the grand foyer, is topped with a sculptured panel that is modeled after Lintel 39 from the Maya ruins of Yaxchilan. At the upper corners of the stairwell entrance is a serpent head, placed there in an effort to duplicate the ancient Aztec practice of stationing such figures at the bases of ceremonial stairways. Centered on the stairs is a wood bannister supported by spiral metal posts. At the first landing, original bronze light fixtures, shaped to resemble the faces of Indian maidens adorned with Mixtec jewelry, flank the stairs (see Photograph 8). Hanging on the north wall of the second landing, a huge, polychromatic relief panel replicates the Panel of the Foliated Cross, originally in the

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San Antonio, Bexar County, TX

Temple of the Cross at Palenque in Mexico (see Photograph 9). An anteroom and manager's office, are tucked west of and under the north stairwell. East of the north stairwell a hall provides access to the auditorium and an exit along the north exterior wall. The south stairwell is identically arranged, and exhibits similar art work. The relief on the south wall is a companion panel, a representation from the Maya Temple of the Sun at Palenque. To the east and west of the south stairwell, hallways lead to double doors (interior), and an auxiliary ticket vestibule that provided access from the south exterior wall. At the second landing of each stairway the steps branch to the east and west.

The auditorium stretches eastward beyond the grand foyer. Five sections of seats face the stage, some with their original red velveteen upholstery, others recovered in shiny red vinyl; at the front of the auditorium is a small orchestra pit. Aisles that were originally carpeted now lay bare, the jade concrete floor exposed. Under the seats circular metal ventilation grilles originally dispersed water-cooled air. The walls of the auditorium, like those throughout the theater, simulate massive, rough cut plaster blocks. Rising to ceiling level, these massive blocks create the illusion of an open courtyard in a Mesoamerican temple complex as depicted in Figure 4 (see 7-10). Stretching above the "courtyard" walls, climbing over the organ grilles, and resting on the Maya influenced sacred serpent Quetzalcoatl panel are bands of stepped plaster blocks with carved symbols that interpret the 20 days of the Aztec calendar. In former years an atmospheric ceiling intensified the feeling of being in an outdoor courtyard under a starry sky. Originally 100 twinkling and stationary lights studded the ceiling; four cloud machines sent wafts of wispy clouds drifting overhead; and electrical switches changed the ceiling-sky from nighttime to sunrise, to midday, to sunset, and back to night again. Although not recently used, the mechanisms to activate these atmospheric devices still survive *in situ*. In the auditorium, as throughout the entire theater, hardware fixtures are shaped in stepped configurations.

The focal point of the auditorium the original asbestos fire curtain stretches across the 31 x 101 foot stage at the east end. Its vivid color, undiminished by time, depicts the 1519 meeting of conquistador Hernando Cortez and Aztec ruler Montezuma on 1519 at the outskirts of the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan (see Photograph 10). Above the stage proscenium, a huge rectangular panel carved in low relief replicates the tableros on the sides of the Temple of the Plumed Serpent at Xochicalco with the sacred serpent Quetzalcoatl undulating across the proscenium arch. Centered within this immense panel, an enormous gold leaf sunburst rises 20 feet (see Photograph 11). Still functioning, this sun disc traditionally glowed gold at the end of each theater presentation. Enormous organ grilles, decorated with writhing serpents positioned between symbols representing sand and water, are on either side of the stage (see Photograph 12). A gigantic head of Coyolauhqui sits upon each huge column that flanks each grille; atop each head sits an enormous disc, patterned after the Aztec Sun Stone. Behind the curtain, the stage has a central "trap door" and an elevator shaft (with access to the alley service door) at its southeast corner. Stairs from the south side of the stage terminate in an exit onto the east alley.

Additional Mesoamerican symbols, patterns, and motifs embellish the balcony. Mesoamerican patterns are painted on the ceiling under the balcony from which sunburst-shaped light fixtures. Painted glyphs decorate the front

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Aztec Theater
San Antonio, Bexar County, TX

of the curved balcony ledge. The balcony itself was curtained off from the main auditorium in the 1960s and split in half to form two separate theaters.

Centered at the north edge of the auditorium is an exit onto Crockett Street; a passageway leads east to another exit and three former dressing rooms, each with its own double door exit. Centered at the south edge of the auditorium is an exit that leads to the office building lobby and two elevators and one stairwell to the upper levels all to offices. The lobby exits onto Commerce Street.

The mezzanine level acts as an intermediate story that forms a balcony and promenade to the grand foyer that offers access to dressing rooms (along the east side of the north wall), theater offices and rest rooms (along the west wall), commercial office space (along the east half of the south wall), and the balcony of the theater (see Maps-19). Originally the mezzanine was carpeted, but now red and white vinyl tiles cover the floor in a checked pattern. A plaster block wall with stepped frets and cast stone coping rises to waist level and serves as railing. Plaster walls around the mezzanine also simulate large blocks of stone.

Numerous and varied decorative features adorn the mezzanine. On the north side is a large, built-in, cement finished settee and a drinking fountain. The base of the water fountain, duplicates columns that support an altar table at the Toltec Temple of the Warriors at Chichen Itza in the Yucatan (see Photograph 13). On the east side the ceiling slopes upward in a stepped configuration. Painted on diagonal beams and on other portions of the slanted ceiling, a multitude of Maya glyphs, and stepped frets that mimic those decorating the temples of the Mixtecs at Mitla. Also on this east side are four benches with lavishly carved, curvilinear sides (see Photograph 14). Beneath each curved arm rest, the sculptured head of a tattooed priest protrudes out of the mouth of a serpent, a motif at the Pyramid of the Musicians at Uxmal in the Yucatan. A deeply recessed niche behind each bench holds three massive, gold columns each with a polychromatic decorative capital. Beside each bench is a gigantic vase embellished with colorful Mesoamerican figures and designs (see Figure 5; p. 7-11).

On the south side of the mezzanine, hidden from the grand foyer by the south staircase, the promenade served as a lounge. This space was labeled "museum" on the original plans. Three niches in its walls once held massive carved chairs; however, these were sold during the 1960s and the San Antonio owner is currently offering them for sale [same person owns the aforementioned sacrificial altar]. Positioned against the far wall of the west side, seven sculptures with red lights shining through their eyes perch atop tall plaster block bases eyes (see Photograph 15). These figures resemble miniature headdressed Mesoamericans adapted from Zapotec funerary urns found in the ruins of Monte Alban in south Mexico. Also on the west side a large ornate bench is centered in front of three relief panels. The center panel imitates the Panel of the Tapir, found at the Maya ruins at Copoyade in Chiapas (see Figure 6; p. 7-12), while the Panels of the Priests from Palenque inspired the flanking reliefs. An emergency passage runs along the south wall of the auditorium with an exit to a fire escape at the east end; it can only be accessed through the mezzanine.

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Aztec Theater
San Antonio, Bexar County, TX

At the southeast corner of the mezzanine is a single door that provides access to the 2nd floor commercial offices. These offices can also be accessed by the elevators and stairs centered on the south side of the building (see Photograph 17). The fenestration pattern in these corridors follows a window-door-door-window pattern, with transoms over each window. Each door leads to a small anteroom, behind which is a small office. Offices on the remaining upper stories run along the south and east sides of the building.

Less embellished, but important to the building, the basement housed a restaurant, several storage rooms, a boiler room, and theater offices.

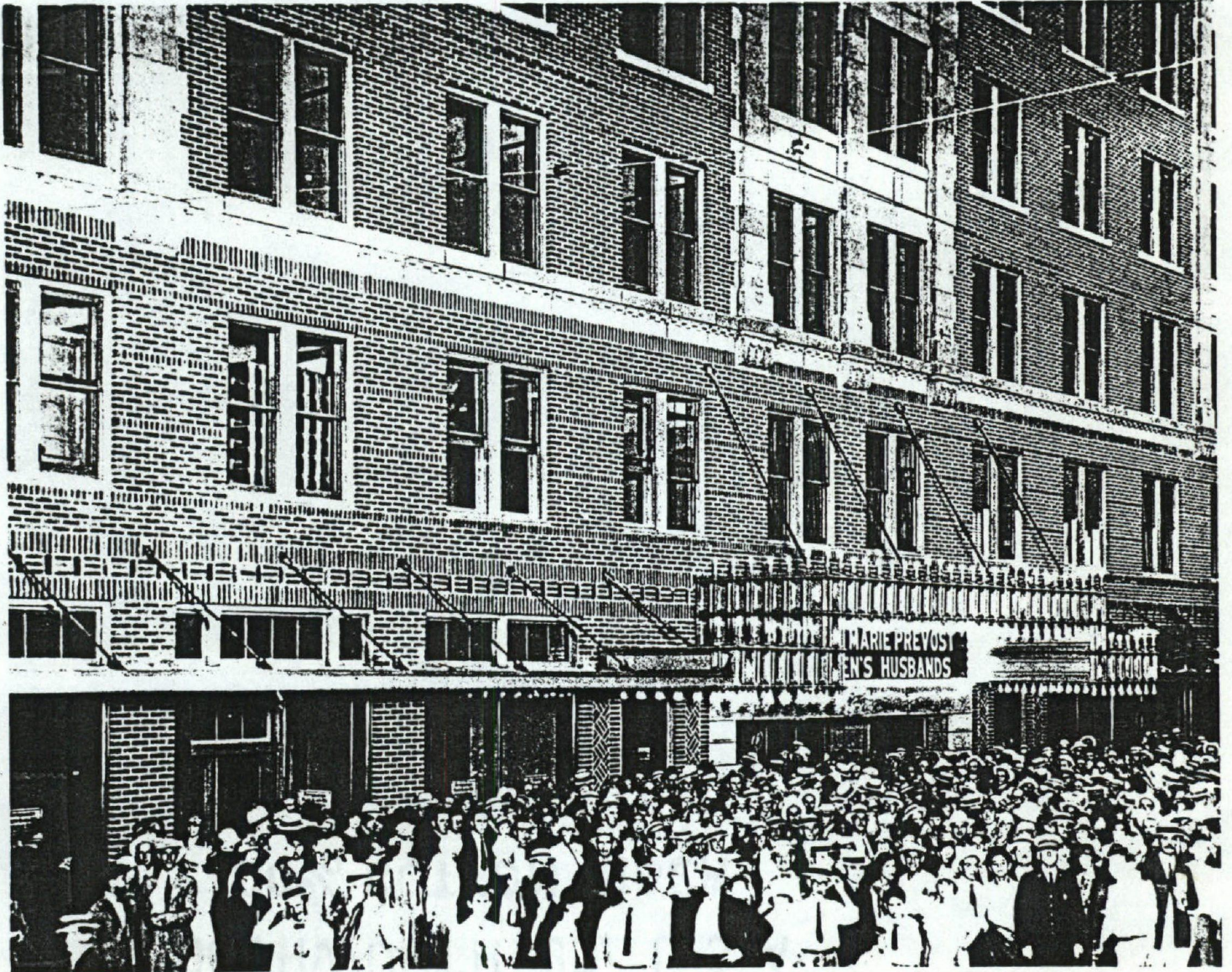
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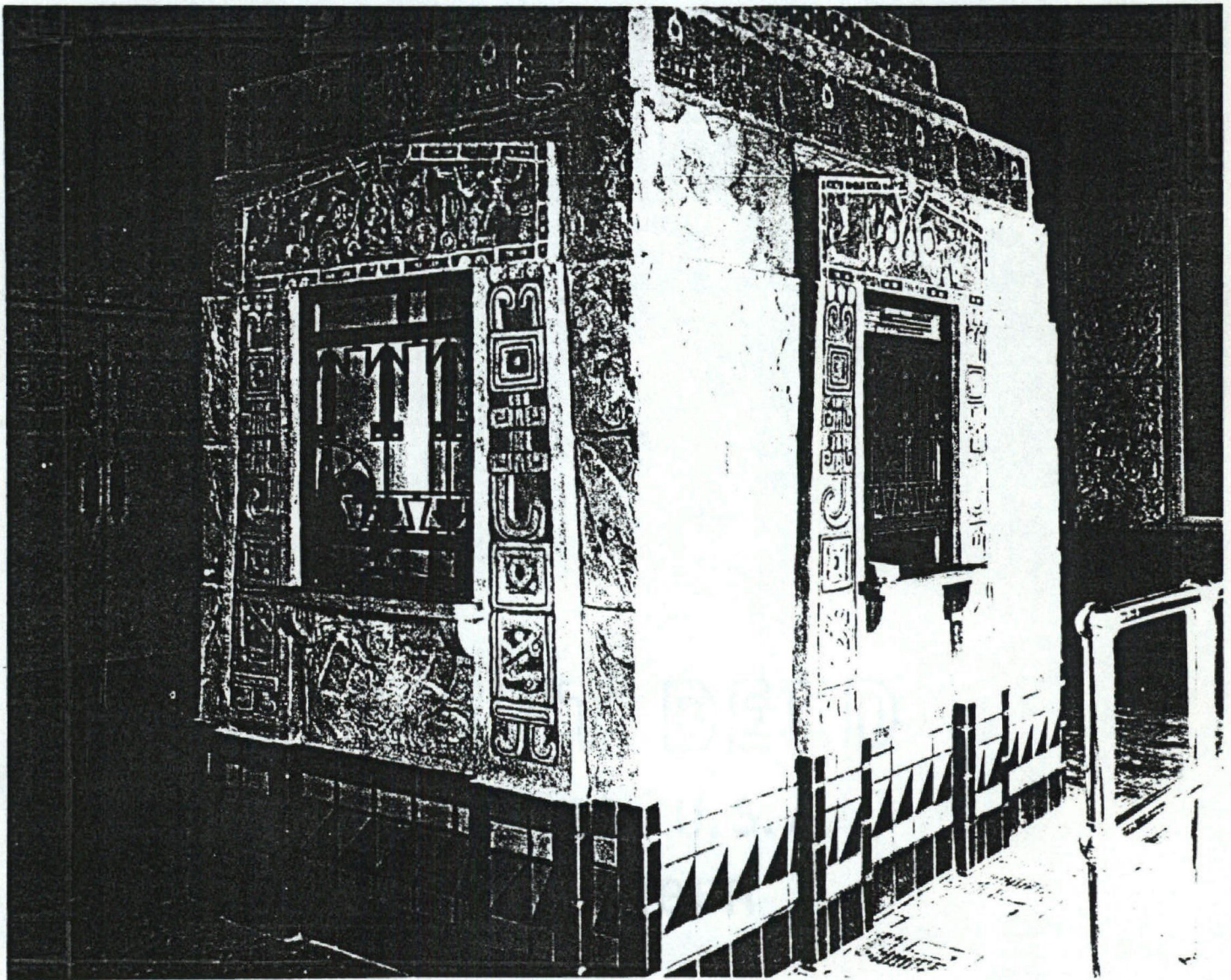
Aztec Theater
4 June 1926
West facade

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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Aztec Theater
San Antonio, Bexar County, TX



Aztec Theater
4 June 1926
Ticket booth

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

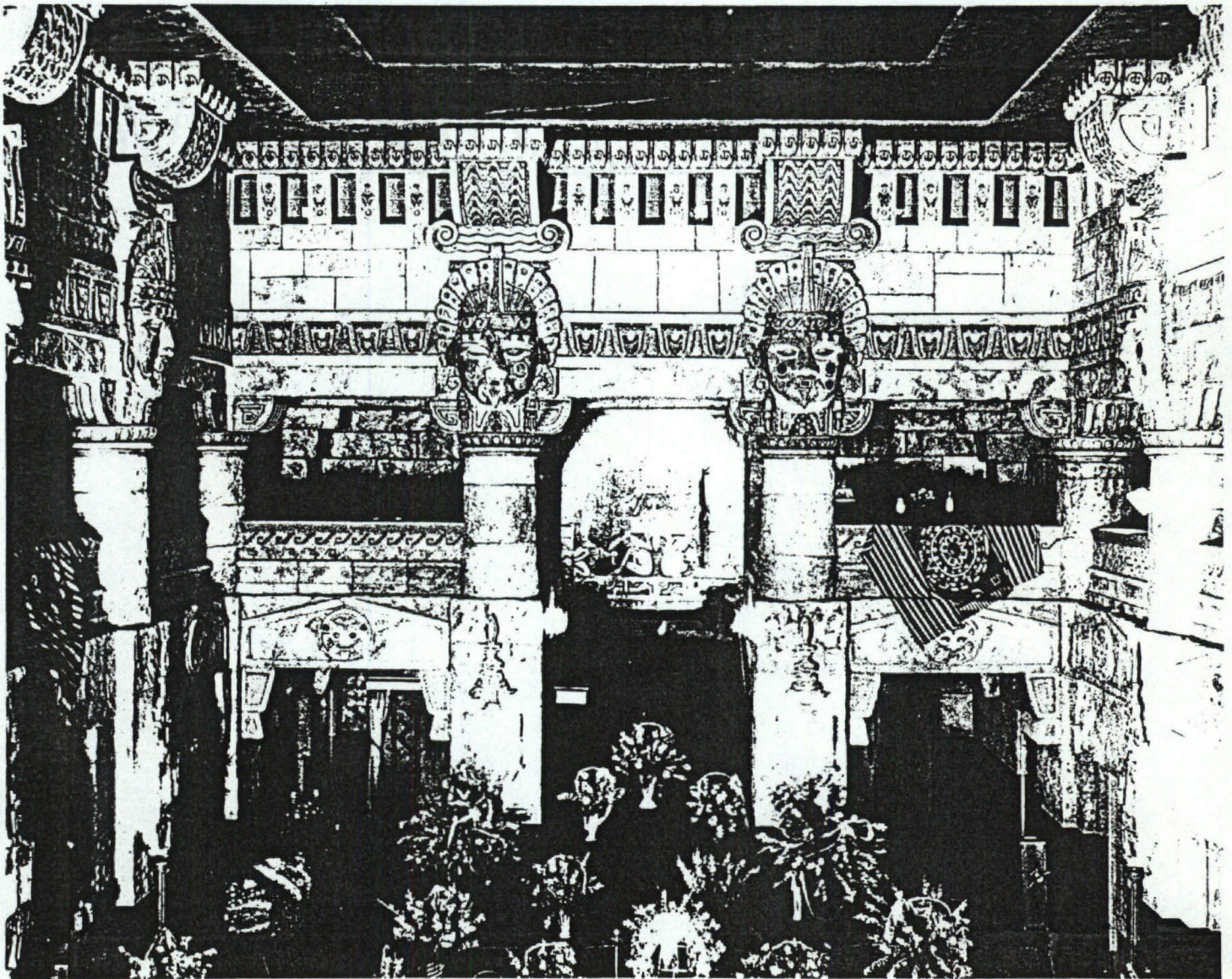
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Aztec Theater
4 June 1926
Grand Foyer

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

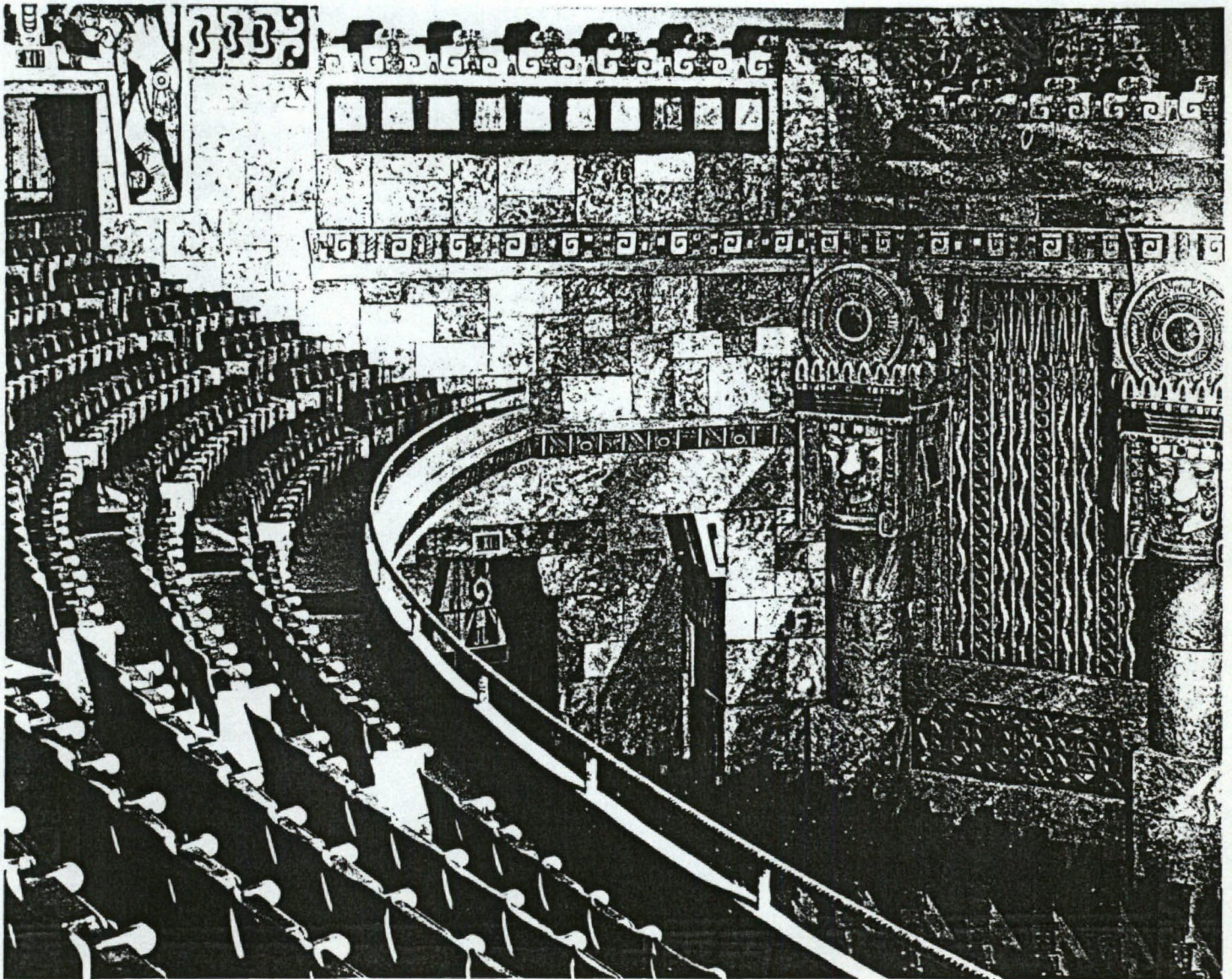
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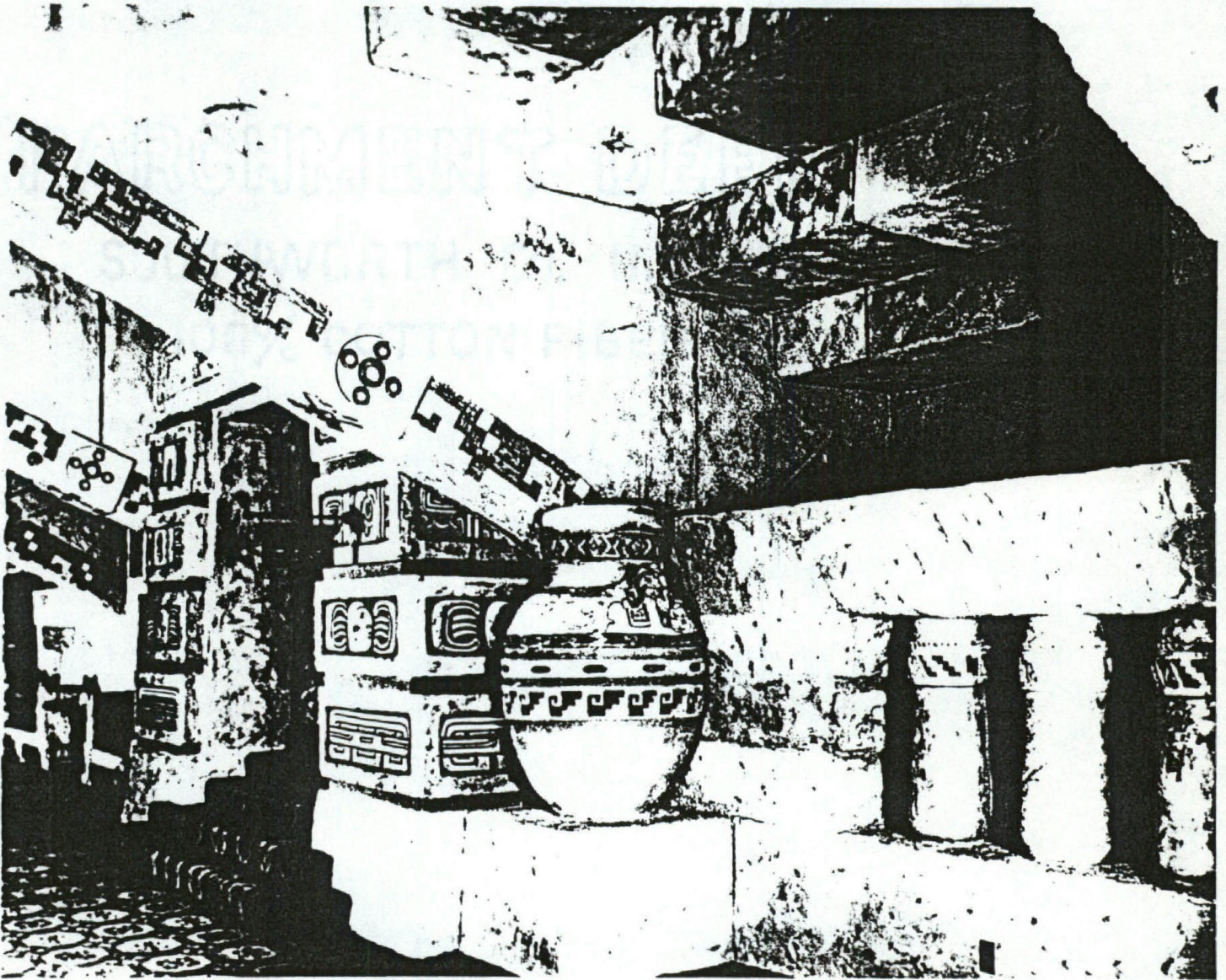
Aztec Theater
4 June 1926
View from balcony

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National Park Service

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Aztec Theater
San Antonio, Bexar County, TX



Aztec Theater
4 June 1926
East wall of mezzanine

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Aztec Theater
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Aztec Theater
4 June 1926
Center panel on west wall of mezzanine

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 N/A

(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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1926

Significant Dates

1926

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Kelly, Robert B. (Kelwood Company)

Pianta, Hannibal (contractor)

Narrative Statement of Significance See Cont. Sheets 8-13 through 8-15.

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography See Continuation Sheet 9-16.

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

- 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:

Texas Historical Commission, Austin, TX
San Antonio Conservation Society, San Antonio, TX

Aztec Theater
Name of Property

Bexar County, Texas
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1

1	4
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5	4	9	4	0	0
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3	2	5	4	9	4	0
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Zone Easting Northing

3

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Zone Easting Northing

2

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4

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification See Continuation Sheet 10-17.

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jody Williams (assisted by Amy E. Dase, Historian, THC staff)

organization San Antonio Conservation Society date January, 1992

street & number 107 King William Street telephone 512/224-6163

city or town San Antonio state TX zip code 78204

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 San Antonio Conservation Society

street & number 107 King William Street telephone 512/224-6163

city or town San Antonio state TX zip code 78204

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 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.

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Aztec Theater
San Antonio, Bexar County, TX

Statement of Significance:

Constructed in 1926, the Aztec Theater is a notable example of the distinctly American motion picture palace, a product of the prosperous and extravagant 1920s. The theater is a spectacular representative of the "exotic theme" motion picture palace, which took its stylistic direction from cultures distant in time or place. A rare illustration of the short-lived Mesoamerican inspired architectural and decorative style of the early 20th century, this 2-part vertical block commercial building and its Mayan Revival influenced theater meets Criterion C in the area of Architecture at the state level of significance.

Movie theater construction proliferated in the United States during the 1920s. Dramatic evolution in the motion picture industry (such as improved quality of films and projectors, lengthened features, and "talkies" with associated advancements in equipment) promoted movies into a national pastime. The economic boom of the decade provided readily available funds for most any business venture, and made it profitable to build entertainment facilities like theaters. This prosperity created the optimistic and flamboyant mood of the era and influenced the architectural design of these lavish palaces. As a result, more motion picture theaters were built in those 10 years than at any other time in the history of film entertainment.

Theaters constructed in the 1920s were considerably larger and more elaborate than earlier arcades or immediate post World War I "combination houses" that presented both vaudeville acts and short film features. Architects designed theaters to resemble European opera houses, often utilizing Italian Renaissance or French Second Empire styles. Breaking from tradition in the 1920s, architect John Eberson is credited with devising the "atmospheric" theater, in which the auditorium resembled an outdoor courtyard. Eberson's office was in Chicago, but he worked throughout the nation. Walls were usually decorated with 2- and 3-dimensional features, such as building facades and trees; the ceiling most often depicted a starlit sky. Interiors frequently employed Spanish Colonial and Mission Revival stylistic detailing. While other architects imitated this innovation, Eberson's reputation as a theater designer was unrivalled.

"Exotic theme" picture palaces were a variation of the atmospheric theater, usually smaller in scale. In the last half of the 1920s, exotic theme theaters were built throughout the United States including examples of Persian, Egyptian, Oriental, Arabian, Cambodian, Byzantine, Polynesian, Mesoamerican, and other types of unusually styled theaters appeared throughout the country.

In 1925 a group of eight prominent businessmen in San Antonio formed the Commerce Realty Company and proceeded with plans to construct a motion picture "palace" in San Antonio. William Epstein is credited with leading this group, while the Kelwood Company offered its principal architect Robert B. Kelly as the project's architect. Kelly (1892-1932) practiced in San Antonio after 1920, also producing El Jardín Hotel in Brownsville, the San Antonio Light Building, the Bushnell Apartments (National Register 1982), and the Mayan Revival Casino Club (National Register 1980) all in San Antonio.

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San Antonio, Bexar County, TX

The San Antonio theater borrowed its name from the Aztec Theater in Eagle Pass, Texas, with the approval of that city's mayor, Sam Schwartz. Architect Leonard F. Seed designed that 1915 building imitating details from the ruins at Mitla in south Oaxaca.

A team from the Kelwood Company, lead by chief designer R.O. Koenig, traveled to Mexico to research Mesoamerican sculpture, architecture, and iconography. The group reportedly spent several months making sketches and models of Aztec, Maya, Zapotec, Mixtec, and Toltec sculptures, symbols, and architectural elements on view at archeological sites and at the National Museum in Mexico City. In particular, they implemented designs from ruins at Yaxchilan, Palenque, Monte Alban, Xochicalco and Mitla in south Mexico, and Chichen Itza and Uxmal in Yucatan. They employed their research in the design and lavish ornamentation of the Aztec Theater, described as "the only existing simon-pure Aztec modern building in the world" (Forward Southwest Magazine, 1927).

Nevertheless, analysis reveals that the details are not authentic Aztec designs, rather they are abstractions of Mesoamerican art and architecture concepts. For example, the square and straight lines of the floor in the ticket booth vestibule and the fire curtain refer to Aztec forms, while the curvilinear patterns of the panels allude to Temple of the Cross that Maya culture produced. The propensity toward rounded shapes, especially in the grand foyer and the auditorium, lean more heavily toward Maya stylistic influences.

The interior ornamentation of the Aztec Theater is exuberant. All public areas--the ticket vestibule, the grand foyer, the mezzanine, and the auditorium--are embellished with fixtures, furnishings, sculpture, relief carvings, plaques, and painted symbols derived from Mesoamerican artifacts that the design team studied. Talented San Antonio artisans contributed significantly to the interior. Herbert Bernard designed the fire curtain that hides the stage (executed by Volland Scenic Studios of St. Louis). Henry Wedemeyer sculpted the relief panels on the landings of the stairways and along the mezzanine. Johannes Scholz built the benches on the mezzanine level.

Although period architects occasionally utilized the Mayan Revival, it never became a conventional or recurrent design influence. Typical exterior and interior features include embellishments like geometrically patterned brick representing symbols and architectural elements, and relief carvings, step back ziggurat masses, vigorous colors, and hieroglyphs. The Aztec opened to 3,000 members of the public on 4 June 1926; another 5,000 reportedly were turned away. Those admitted marvelled at the spectacular sights of this flamboyant and unusual architectural specimen while viewing the feature movie "Other Women's Husbands," starring Marie Provost and Monte Blue, and the stage revue, "The Court of Montezuma."

The Great Depression brought a halt to construction of these conspicuous palaces across the nation. Fewer movie theaters were built in succeeding decades and those were in much less grandiose designs.

Maurice Braha and two partners purchased the Aztec in 1965. They made several alterations to the interior, most of which appear to be reversible.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 15

Aztec Theater
San Antonio, Bexar County, TX

In 1989 the San Antonio Conservation Society purchased the building and briefly operated the movie theaters before closing the box office. The Society will sell the building with the stipulation that the future owner will restore the theater to meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

Arguably the only extant Mayan Revival theater in Texas and one of few examples of the style in the country, the building retains a high degree of integrity. The Aztec Theater serves as a reminder of the spirited, optimistic expectations that prevailed on urban landscapes prior to the Great Depression.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 16

Aztec Theater
San Antonio, Bexar County, TX

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 17

Aztec Theater
San Antonio, Bexar County, TX

Verbal Boundary Description:

New City Block 116, Block 3, Lots 2-9

Boundary Justification:

The boundary includes the area that has been historically associated with the property and that retains its historic and architectural integrity.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

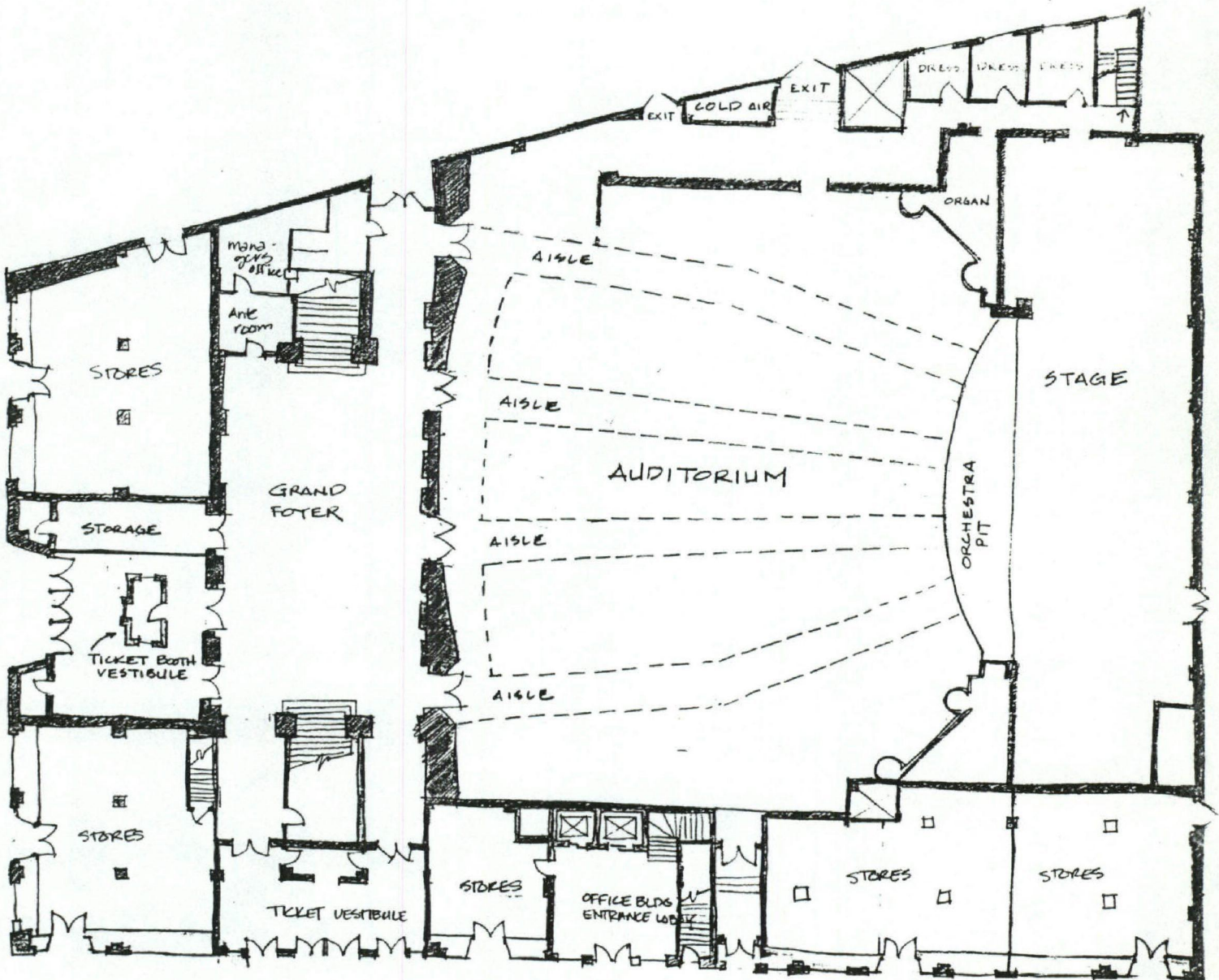
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

MAPS

18

Aztec Theater
San Antonio, Bexar County, TX

Section number _____ Page _____



FIRST FLOOR SKETCH
NOT TO SCALE



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

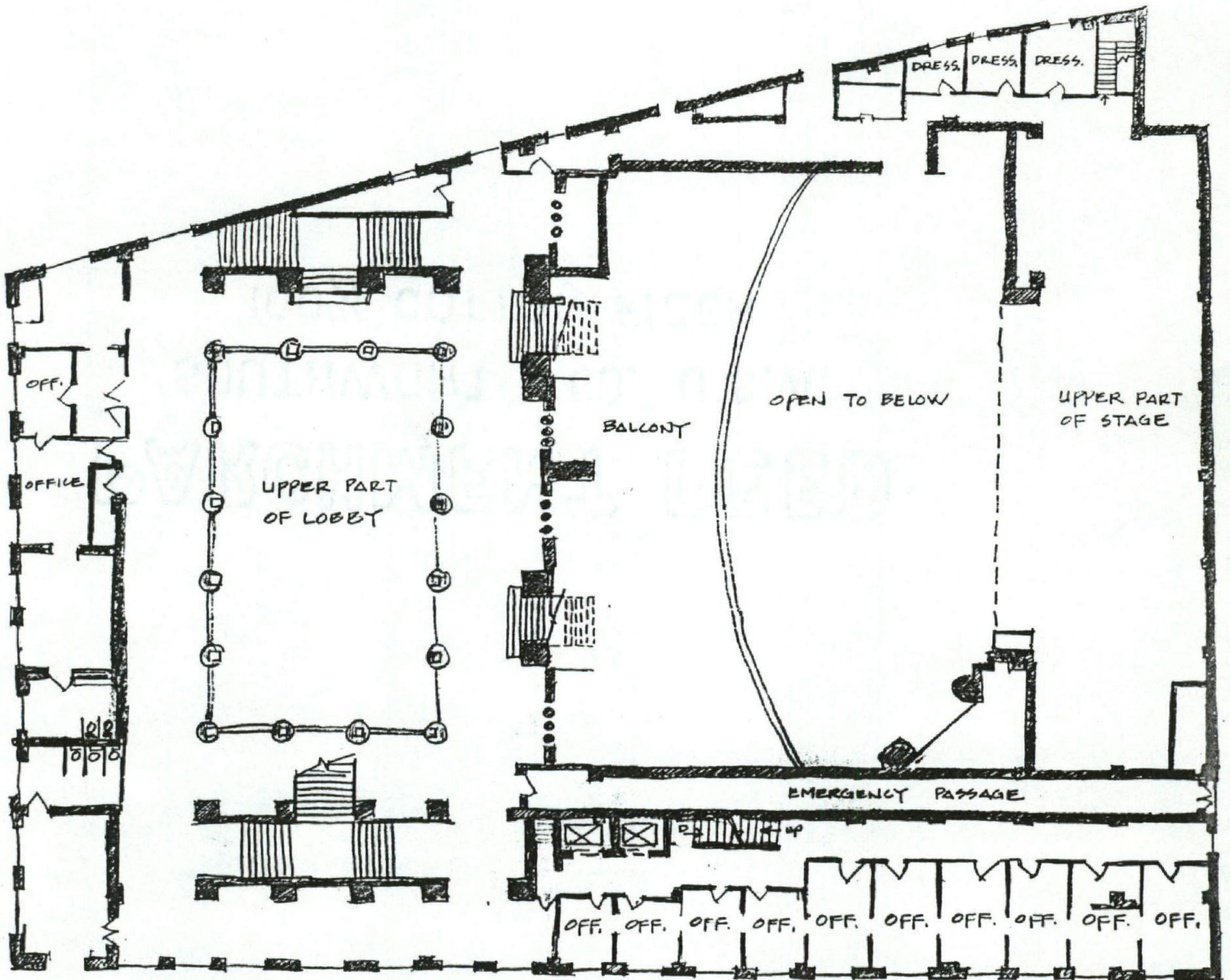
National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

MAPS

19

Aztec Theater
San Antonio, Bexar County, TX

Section number _____ Page _____



SECOND FLOOR SKETCH
NOT TO SCALE



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number _____ PHOTOS _____ Page 20 _____

Aztec Theater
San Antonio, Bexar County, TX

Photograph Log

Aztec Theater
104 North St. Mary's Street
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas
Ron Bauml photographer
May 1992
Negative with San Antonio Conservation Society
West facade, camera facing northeast
Photograph 1 of 17

Aztec Theater
104 North St. Mary's Street
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas
Ron Bauml photographer
May 1992
Negative with San Antonio Conservation Society
South facade, camera facing northeast
Photograph 2 of 17

Aztec Theater
104 North St. Mary's Street
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas
Ron Bauml photographer
May 1992
Negative with San Antonio Conservation Society
North facade, camera facing northwest
Photograph 3 of 17

Aztec Theater
104 North St. Mary's Street
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas
Ron Bauml photographer
May 1992
Negative with San Antonio Conservation Society
Interior, tile floor and base board in ticket booth vestibule, south wall,
camera facing south
Photograph 4 of 17

Aztec Theater
104 North St. Mary's Street
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas
Ron Bauml photographer
May 1992
Negative with San Antonio Conservation Society
Interior, ticket booth, camera facing northwest
Photograph 5 of 17

Aztec Theater
104 North St. Mary's Street
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas
Ron Bauml photographer
May 1992
Negative with San Antonio Conservation Society
Interior, grand foyer, camera facing north
Photograph 6 of 17

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number _____ PHOTOS _____ Page 21 _____

Aztec Theater
San Antonio, Bexar County, TX

Aztec Theater
104 North St. Mary's Street
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas
Ron Bauml photographer
May 1992
Negative with San Antonio Conservation Society
Interior, mezzanine columns, camera facing southeast
Photograph 7 of 17

Aztec Theater
104 North St. Mary's Street
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas
Ron Bauml photographer
May 1992
Negative with San Antonio Conservation Society
Interior, light fixture at first landing of stairwell, camera facing east
Photograph 8 of 17

Aztec Theater
104 North St. Mary's Street
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas
Ron Bauml photographer
May 1992
Negative with San Antonio Conservation Society
Interior, north stairwell relief, camera facing north
Photograph 9 of 17

Aztec Theater
104 North St. Mary's Street
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas
Ron Bauml photographer
May 1992
Negative with San Antonio Conservation Society
Interior, fire curtain, camera facing northeast
Photograph 10 of 17

Aztec Theater
104 North St. Mary's Street
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas
Ron Bauml photographer
May 1992
Negative with San Antonio Conservation Society
Interior, sunburst above fire curtain, camera facing east
Photograph 11 of 17

Aztec Theater
104 North St. Mary's Street
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas
Ron Bauml photographer
May 1992
Negative with San Antonio Conservation Society
Interior, grillework north of stage, camera facing northeast
Photograph 12 of 17

Aztec Theater
104 North St. Mary's Street
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas
Ron Bauml photographer

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

PHOTOS 22

Aztec Theater
San Antonio, Bexar County, TX

Section number _____ Page _____

May 1992

Negative with San Antonio Conservation Society
Interior, drinking fountain north side of mezzanine, camera facing northeast
Photograph 13 of 17

Aztec Theater

104 North St. Mary's Street
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas
Ron Bauml photographer

May 1992

Negative with San Antonio Conservation Society
Interior, bench on east mezzanine, camera facing east
Photograph 14 of 17

Aztec Theater

104 North St. Mary's Street
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas
Ron Bauml photographer

May 1992

Negative with San Antonio Conservation Society
Interior, west mezzanine including bench, camera facing north
Photograph 15 of 17

Aztec Theater

104 North St. Mary's Street
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas
Ron Bauml photographer

May 1992

Negative with San Antonio Conservation Society
Interior, sculpture on west mezzanine, camera facing north
Photograph 16 of 17

Aztec Theater

104 North St. Mary's Street
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas
Ron Bauml photographer

May 1992

Negative with San Antonio Conservation Society
Interior, office corridor, camera facing south
Photograph 17 of 17

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Aztec Theater
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: TEXAS, Bexar

DATE RECEIVED: 9/21/92 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 10/06/92
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 10/22/92 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 11/05/92
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 92001403

NOMINATOR: STATE

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT RETURN REJECT 10/22/92 DATE

Entered in the
National Register

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

RECOM./CRITERIA _____
REVIEWER _____
DISCIPLINE _____
DATE _____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

CLASSIFICATION

___count ___resource type

STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

FUNCTION

___historic ___current

DESCRIPTION

___architectural classification
___materials
___descriptive text

SIGNIFICANCE

Period Areas of Significance--Check and justify below

Specific dates Builder/Architect
Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

___summary paragraph
___completeness
___clarity
___applicable criteria
___justification of areas checked
___relating significance to the resource
___context
___relationship of integrity to significance
___justification of exception
___other

BIBLIOGRAPHY

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

___acreage ___verbal boundary description
___UTMs ___boundary justification

ACCOMPANYING DOCUMENTATION/PRESENTATION

___sketch maps ___USGS maps ___photographs ___presentation

OTHER COMMENTS

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to

_____ Phone _____

Signed _____ Date _____



2

AZTEC

3

YOUR'S
CALL 224 6163

The Aztec Theatre Building
1111 Broadway
New York 10001
Phone BR 3-3333

LOCAL EXPRESS

COLORE

① AZTEC THEATER
BEXAR COUNTY
TEXAS

AZTEC THEATER
104 NORTH ST. MARY'S STREET
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 1 of 17



② AZTEC THEATER
BEXAR COUNTY
TEXAS

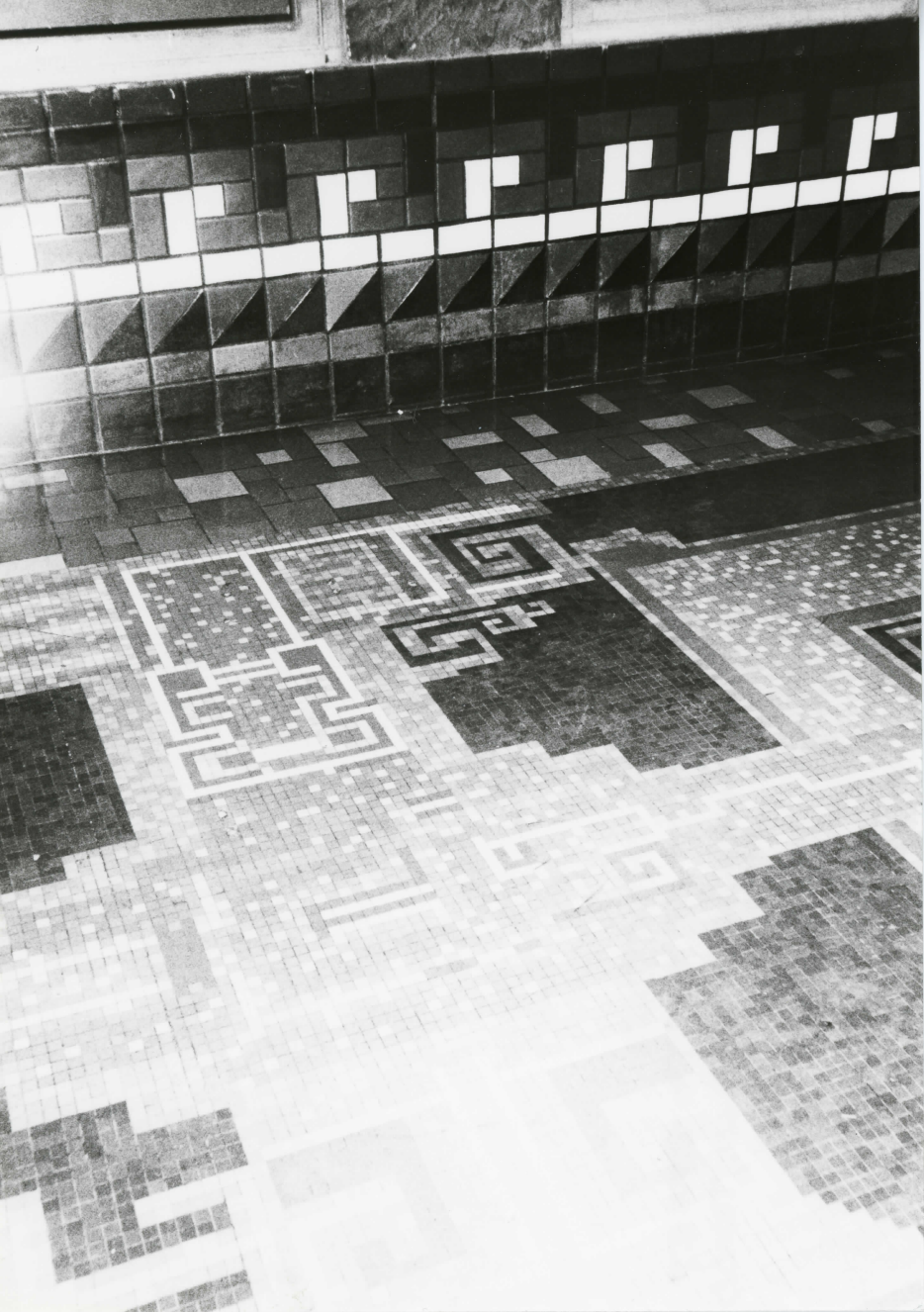
AZTEC THEATER
104 NORTH ST. MART'S STREET
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 2 of 17



AZTEC THEATER
104 NORTH ST. MARY'S ST.
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO.,
TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 3 of 17



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AZTEC THEATER
BEXAR COUNTY
TEXAS

AZTEC THEATER
104 NORTH ST. MART'S STREET
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 4 of 17



74

AZTEC THEATER
BEXAR COUNTY
TEXAS

AZTEC THEATER
104 NORTH ST. MARY'S STREET
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 5 of 17



85

AZTEC THEATER
BEXAR COUNTY
TEXAS

AZTEC THEATER
104 NORTH ST. MARY'S STREET
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 6 of 17



AZTEC THEATER
104 NORTH ST. MARY'S STREET
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO. TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 7 of 17



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AZTEC THEATER
BEXAR COUNTY
TEXAS

AZTEC THEATER
104 NORTH ST. MARY'S STREET
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 8 of 17

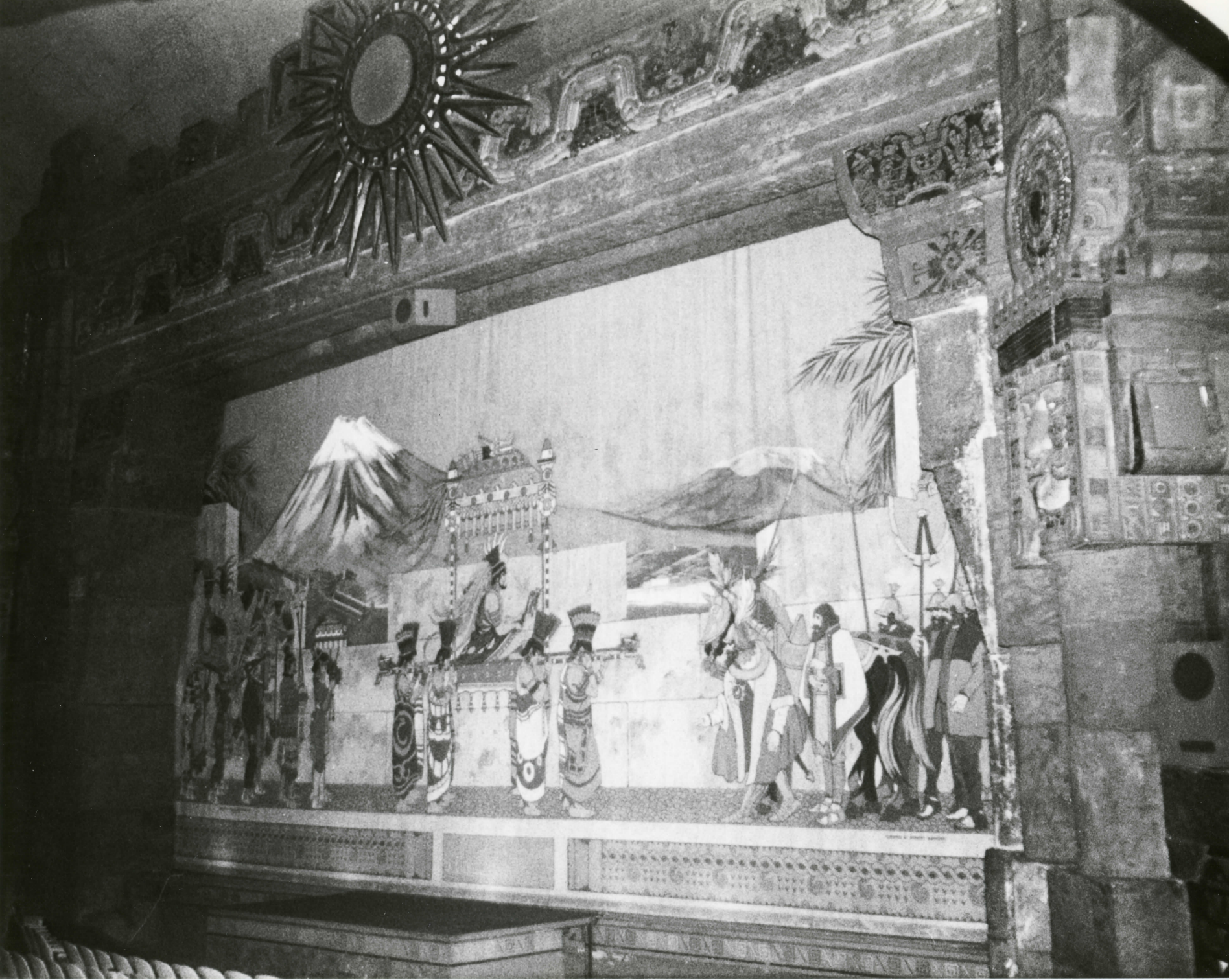


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AZTEC THEATER
BEXAR COUNTY
TEXAS

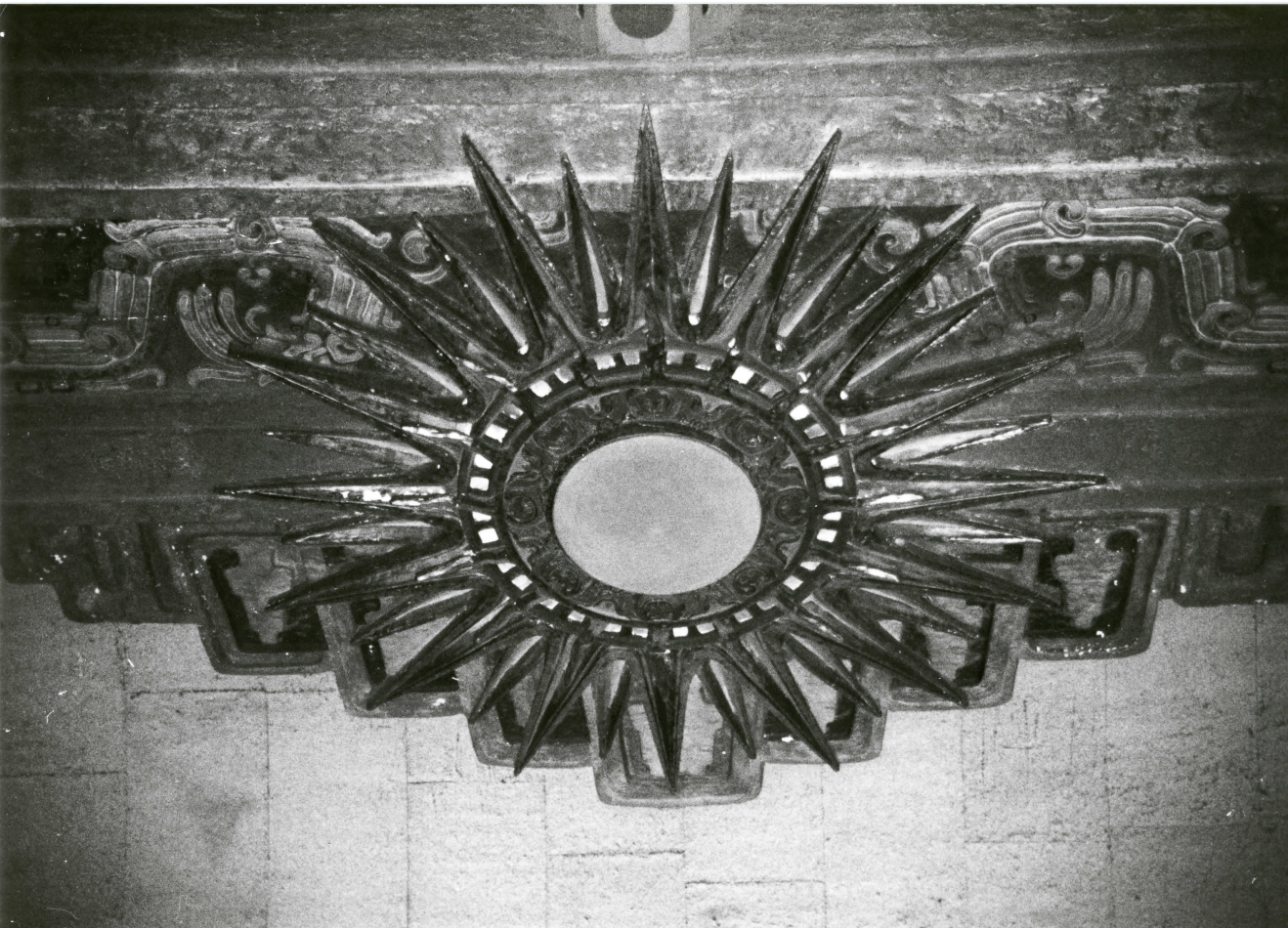
AZTEC THEATER
104 NORTH ST. MARY'S STREET
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 9 of 17



AZTEC THEATER
104 NORTH ST. MARY'S STREET
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 10 of 17



AZTEC THEATER
104 NORTH ST. MARY'S STREET
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 11 of 17



~~12~~ 11

ARTEC THEATER
BEXAR COUNTY
TEXAS

ARTEC THEATER
104 NORTH ST. MARY'S STREET
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO.,

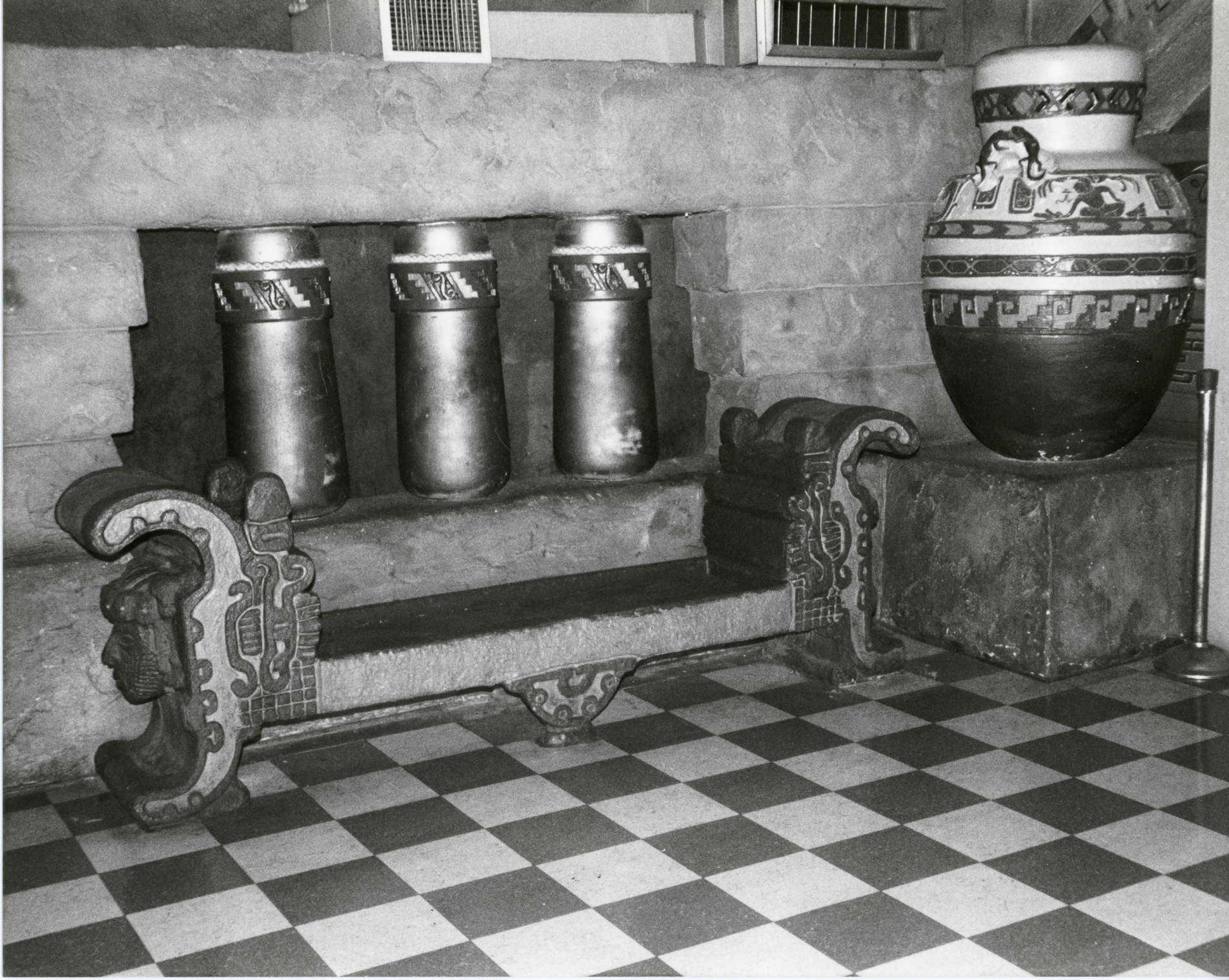
PHOTOGRAPH 12 of 17



~~11~~ 12
ARTEL THEATER
BEXAR COUNTY
TEXAS

ARTEL THEATER
104 NORTH ST. MARY'S STREET
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 13 of 17



AZTEC THEATER
104 NORTH ST. MARY'S STREET
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 14 of 17



AZTEC THEATER
BEXAR COUNTY
TEXAS

(R) 14

AZTEC THEATER
104 NORTH ST. MART'S STREET
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 15 of 17



17 6 17

104 NORTH ST. MARY'S STREET
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

BEXAR COUNTY
TEXAS

AZTEC THEATER
104 NORTH ST. MARY'S STREET
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 16 of 17

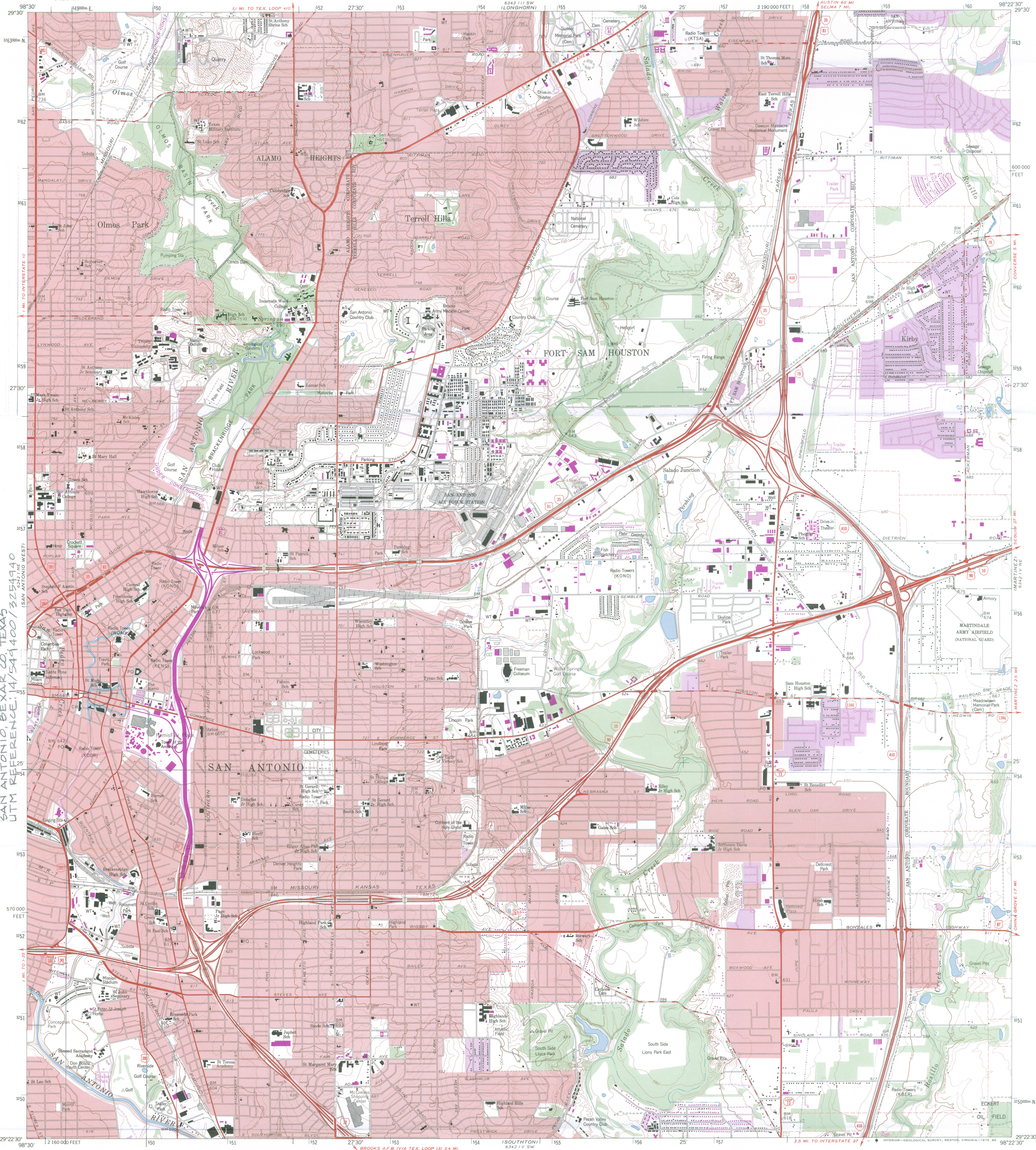


310
ENTRANCE 311 →

J. E. ARIZOLA
RECTOR

AZTEC THEATER
104 NORTH ST. MARY'S STREET
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 17 of 17



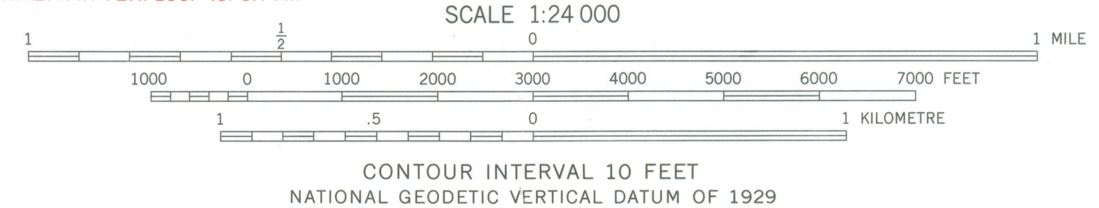
AZTEC THEATER
104 NORTH ST. MARY'S STREET
SAN ANTONIO, BEXAR CO. TEXAS
UTM REFERENCE 14/549400/3251940

Mapped by the Army Map Service
Edited and published by the Geological Survey
Control by USGS, NOS/NOAA, and USCE
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs
taken 1952. Field annotated 1953. Revised by Geological Survey
from aerial photographs taken 1966. Field checked 1967.

Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum
10,000-foot grid based on Texas coordinate system,
south central zone
1000 metre Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,
zone 14, shown in blue

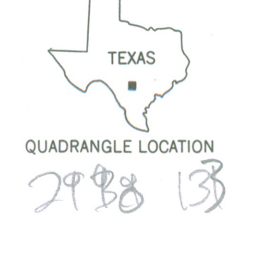
Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence lines
Revisions shown in purple compiled by the Geological Survey from
aerial photographs taken 1973. This information not field checked

UTM GRID AND 1973 MAGNETIC NORTH
DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway, hard surface	Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
Secondary highway, hard surface	Unimproved road
Interstate Route	U.S. Route
	State Route



THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

SAN ANTONIO EAST, TEX.
N2922.5-W9822.5/7.5
1967
PHOTOREVISED 1973
AMS 6342 IV NW-SERIES V882