



PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES

DHR No. (to be completed by DHR staff) 180-0028-0117

Purpose of Evaluation

Please use the following space to explain briefly why you are seeking an evaluation of this property.

While the Buchanan Theatre is a contributing structure to the Town's Historic District, it is not listed independently. When we investigated placing a preservation easement on the structure in the past, we were told we could not do so because the Theatre was not independently designated. Receiving an independent designation will make the structure eligible to be considered for a preservation easement. I do believe the majority of comments during the presentation reflect the group's interest in preserving the Buchanan Theatre and its historic character.

Are you interested in applying for State and/or Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits? Yes X No

Are you interested in receiving more information about DHR's easement program? Yes X No

1. General Property Information

Property name: Buchanan Theatre

Property address: 19778 Main St.

City or Town: Buchanan

Zip code: 24066

Name of the Independent City or County where the property is located: Botetourt

Category of Property (choose only one of the following):

Building X Site Structure Object

2. Physical Aspects

Acreage: approx. 0.25 acres

Setting (choose only one of the following):

Urban Suburban Town X Village Hamlet Rural

Briefly describe the property's overall setting, including any notable landscape features:

The Buchanan Theatre is located in downtown Buchanan in the National Register-listed Buchanan Historic District. The theater is flanked on both sides by parking lots and is surrounded by mostly historic-period commercial buildings. To the south of the building are railroad tracks.

3. Architectural Description

Architectural Style(s): Moderne

If the property was designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here: unknown

If the builder is known, please list here: Shank family

Date of construction (can be approximate): _____

Narrative Description:

In the space below, briefly describe the general characteristics of the entire property, such as its current use (and historic use if different), as well as the primary building or structure on the property (such as a house, store, mill, factory, depot, bridge, etc.). Include the architectural style, materials and method(s) of construction, physical appearance and condition (exterior and interior), and any additions, remodelings, or other alterations.

The Buchanan Theatre, located in the heart of the James River town of Buchanan, Virginia, was built about 1917-18 as a theater with apartments on the second floor. The two-story frame building retains its original gable-fronted form. Brick veneer may be the original exterior treatment; photos from the 1930s show brick veneer and evidence of earlier siding has not been discovered. The rear elevation retains the original decorative bevel-cut wood shingles in the gable and a two-tier porch which, although it is likely to have been altered or rebuilt over the years, retains its basic original/early form and extent. The porch includes a weatherboard enclosure for an Arctic Nu-Air evaporative cooler which was likely installed in 1928.

Several early features and finishes survive in the theater section of the building. The mezzanine may be original; its beaded tongue-and-groove wainscoting and railing and a chamfered post are in keeping with the 1910s period of construction. The interior surrounds of at least two windows now bricked up on the exterior survive wholly or in part, the surround near the stage with its original dark stained finish. More early fabric survives on the second floor which retains two relatively unaltered apartment rooms with original four-panel doors with pottery knobs and door and window surrounds. Also early are the Queen Anne door leaves stored in the upstairs, although it is unclear whether they were originally in the building or not.

The brick-faced cinder block front, added in 1949, has Art Deco and Moderne-influenced features popular for movie theaters of the era, most notably a prow-shaped neon marque and concrete accent panels. Moderne features were also added to the interior, most notably the auditorium wall panels consisting of fabric and double-ribbed moldings and the concession stand with its curved and banded frame (the auditorium walls likely date to 1949; the concession stand may date to the 1950s).

Somewhat unusual for the Moderne style is the molded knotty pine paneling in the lobby, although the material was popular for roadhouses and domestic interiors during the period. Molded knotty pine paneling of a slightly different type was also used in the back upstairs apartments as part of a modernization. The diamond-shaped bathroom windows appear to date to around the same (1949) period and may indicate the introduction of indoor plumbing to the apartments at the time, just as the front addition added restroom facilities to the main level.

The green damask curtains in the backstage probably date to the 1940s or 1950s. Their foliated chevron pattern echoes the pattern of the strip of bronze-colored damask at the top of the auditorium walls. This fabric, which might also be described as antique gold, is presumed to have been the original fabric for the rest of the walls. Its metallic sheen was matched by the sheen of the double-ribbed moldings which were

originally painted gold. The metallic color palette, which created an atmosphere of glamor and luxuriousness, is also expressed in the gold lettering of the restroom signs, the gold “Buchanan Theatre” sign in the ticket booth, and the silver and gold and silver and red sign placards that survive in storage.

Red was another color theme established in the 1940s, most evident in the 1940s marquee and seats and the modern red wall fabric. The incongruous pale blue and yellow of the concessions booth is a color palette more characteristic of the late 1950s and early 1960s and may indicate that the booth dates to the 1958 renovation, although as noted before the banding and curved forms are in keeping with the Moderne style introduced in the 1940s. The 1999-2001 renovation respected the historic features and finishes of the theater, even evoking the ribbed Moderne aesthetic in the design of the front sign boards.

Briefly describe any outbuildings or secondary resources (such as barns, sheds, dam and mill pond, storage tanks, scales, railroad spurs, etc.), including their condition and their estimated construction dates.

N/A

4. Property's History and Significance

In the space below, briefly describe the history of the property, such as significant events, persons, and/or families associated with the property. Please list all sources of information used to research the history of the property. (It is not necessary to attach lengthy articles or family genealogies to this form.)

If the property is important for its architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, or other aspects of design, please include a brief explanation of this aspect.

Draft Statement of Significance

The Buchanan Theatre has served as the principal entertainment venue and an important social hub for the Botetourt County town of Buchanan since the 1910s. Originally known as the Star Theatre, the two-story gable-fronted building was built by the Shank family ca. 1917-18 and operated by the family during its early years. Jack and Homer Jackson purchased the theater in 1946 and in 1949 remodeled it in the Moderne style, adding a new brick front, neon marquee, ticket booth, and restaurant wing. The interior, with its knotty pine lobby, streamlined concession stand, and Art Deco seating dates to the remodeling and a subsequent, less extensive 1950s remodeling, although there are also vestiges of the original interior. The Buchanan Theatre, a contributing building in the National Register-listed Buchanan Historic District, is potentially individually eligible for the Register under Criterion A in the Entertainment/Recreation area of significance as Buchanan's principal entertainment venue during the historic period. The theater is also potentially eligible under Criterion C in the Architecture area of significance as an intact 1940s Moderne small town movie theater. The potential period of significance extends from ca. 1917-18, the date of the building's construction as a theater, until 1968, encompassing the first half-century of its operation. The Buchanan Theatre, which remains in use as a movie theater and event venue, is potentially eligible at the local level of significance.

Historic Context

In March 1912, for \$3,000, F. W. and Lillie T. Steger sold lot 39 in Buchanan to local resident John F. Shank. Botetourt County land book records for 1912 valued buildings on the lot at \$900, a value that remained constant through 1917. In 1918 the value of buildings doubled to \$1,800, an increase that represents construction of the core of the current building. The Town of Buchanan website states that the Star Theatre, as Shank's theater was known, opened in 1919 and that "Elmer Shank purchased the A.E. McCurdy's Open Air Theatre and built the current building with lumber that his family cut themselves." Suzanne Stinnet, the great-granddaughter of John F. Shank, confirms that the lumber for the building was cut on the Shank family farm and that John's son Elmer Shank assisted with construction. Elmer's children Margaret Delong Sprinkle, Ralph Edwin Shank, and Betty Jean Jones assisted with the operation of the theater during its early years.

A July 1928 advertisement in the *Buchanan News* noted the theater was cooled with "Arctic New Air." The following month the spelling was corrected to "Arctic Nu-Air," the name that appears on the evaporative cooling unit inside the back porch. The Arctic Nu-Air Corporation of Chicago was a major supplier of evaporative cooling and ventilation systems to movie houses in the 1920s and 1930s. In January 1946 Elmer Shank and his wife, Louise, sold the theater to Jack Lee Jackson and Homer Elvin Jackson. In 1949 the tax value of the building increased from \$1,170 to \$3,000, an indication of substantial improvement, and in fact in the August 4, 1949, issue of the *Buchanan News* the theater announced that it would "close for remodeling and re-seating August 22 and will remain closed about 10 days." The remodeling resulted in the theater's current Moderne appearance and the addition of the one-story side wing which historically was used as a restaurant. A later upgrade to the theater was the installation of a CinemaScope screen. This upgrade may have occurred in 1958. Another feature of the theater which speaks to the times is the existence of the separate mezzanine entrance. This entrance, plus the separate drinking fountain in the mezzanine, probably reflect segregated mezzanine seating for African American patrons.

Movie advertisements in old issues of the *Buchanan News* provide glimpses into the operation of the theater. An ad in the June 20, 1929, issue listed “Tarzan the Mighty,” “The Shop-worn Angel” (with Gary Cooper), and “The Hit of the Show,” as well as unidentified offerings such as a “two reel western and Paramount News” and a “two reel comedy.” A May 7, 1942, ad noted that the show started at 8:15 PM “War time” and tickets cost 25 cents for adults and 15 cents for children under twelve. Those admission prices differed from 1937 (25 cents and 10 cents) and 1945 (30 cents and 16 cents). Featurettes continued with “News of the Day” and a “Technicolor cartoon comedy” as a part of the fare, and in May 1946 the theater hosted an “All-Fun Show,” possibly geared to youngsters. Bluegrass musicians Donald Wesley Reno (1926-84) and Arthur Lee “Red” Smiley (1925-72) played at the theater, probably in the 1950s or 1960s, and later owner Dale Carter has been told Grand Ole Opry comedian Minnie Pearl (1912-96) performed there.

The theater closed on November 5, 1985, the date of a devastating flood which struck Buchanan. In 1999 Dale and Gloria Carter purchased the theater and began renovations. A nonprofit called Standing Room Only was formed to manage operations and the theater reopened on November 1, 2001, with a showing of “The Majestic,” a Jim Carrey romantic comedy about a small-town movie theater. The Carters made few changes to the building, the main one being the replacement of the auditorium wainscot which had extensive water damage. In 2012 the theater upgraded to a digital projector. The Buchanan Theatre has won a number of awards and has served as the venue for film festivals.

Sources

Botetourt County deed and tax records, Botetourt County Courthouse, Fincastle, Va.

Buchanan Area Guidebook (2017-18 Edition).

Buchanan News.

Carter, Dale. Personal communication with the author, July 17, 2017.

Richardson, D. Darlene. “Buchanan Historic District.” National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 1998.

Stinnet, Suzanne. Personal communication with the author, July 19, 2017,

Town of Buchanan website (<http://www.townofbuchanan.com/news/12-virginia-theaters-offering-an-unforgettable-experience/>), accessed July 14, 2017.

5. Property Ownership (Check as many categories as apply):

Private: X Public\Local _____ Public\State _____ Public\Federal _____

Current Legal Owner(s) of the Property (If the property has more than one owner, please list each below or on an additional sheet.)

name/title: Standing Room Only, Inc. AKA: SRO

organization: SRO

street & number: 19778 Main St

city or town: Buchanan state: VA zip code: 24066

e-mail: standingroomnews@aol.com telephone: 540-254-1155

Legal Owner's Signature: Jo Eggers - Board Chair - SRO, INC Date: 5/22/18

•• Signature required for processing all applications. ••

In the event of corporate ownership you must provide the name and title of the appropriate contact person.

Contact person: Jo Eggers

Daytime Telephone: 540-254-2202 or 540-816-7159

Applicant Information (Individual completing form if other than legal owner of property)

name/title: J. Daniel Pezzoni

organization: Landmark Preservation Associates

street & number: 6 Houston St.

city or town: Lexington state: Virginia zip code: 24450

e-mail: gilespezzoni@rockbridge.net telephone: (540) 464-5315

6. Notification

In some circumstances, it may be necessary for DHR to confer with or notify local officials of proposed listings of properties within their jurisdiction. In the following space, please provide the contact information for the local County Administrator or City Manager.

name/title: Gary Larrowe, County Administrator

locality: Botetourt County

street & number: 1 West Main Street, Box 1

city or town: Fincastle state: VA zip code: 24090

telephone: (540) 928-2006