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.

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historic name	
other name/site number N/A	
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street & town 824 Broadway	N/A not for publication
city or town Cape Girardeau	N/A vicinity
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As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify the request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. I property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be continuationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.) Signature of certifying official/Title Mark A. Miles/Deputy SHPO Date In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation comments.) Signature of certifying official/Title Date	n the National Register In my opinion, the Insidered significant
State or Federal agency and bureau	
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	Date of Action
Register. ☐ other, (explain:)	

Esquire Theater Name of Property	Cape Girardeau County, MO County and State			
Ownership of Property (check as many boxes as apply)	Category of Property (check only one box)	Number of Resou	rces within Property sly listed resources in the cou	int.)
		Contributing	Noncontributing	
□ private	building(s)	1	0	buildings
public-local	district	0	0	sites
public-State	site	0	0	- structures
public-Federal	☐ structure	0	0	- objects
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Name of related multiple prop	•		outing resources prev	iously listed
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Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 7

Esquire Theater Name of Property	Cape Girardeau County, MO County and State
B. Wisserhalten	
Applicable National Register Criteria	Areas of Significance
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)	(enter categories from instructions)
☐ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of	Architecture
our history.	
■ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.	4
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,	Period of Significance
information important in prehistory or history.	1946-1947
Criteria Considerations (Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)	
Property is:	Significant Dates 1947
A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.	
☐ B removed from its original location.	Significant Persons (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
☐ C a birthplace or grave.	N/A
D a cemetery.	Cultural Affiliation N/A
☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.	
F a commemorative property.	Architect/Builder Roth, Harold
☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.	
•	Woolner, Bernard
Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)	
र अंतर्क इति।(र्क्काकास्त्र) इत्त्रकार्यकः ।	⊠See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 8
Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more con	tinuation sheets.
Previous documentation on file (NPS):	Primary location of additional data:
preliminary determination of individual listing (36	☑ State Historic Preservation Office
CFR 67) has been requested previously listed in the National Register	☐ Other State agency ☐ Federal agency
previously determined eligible by the National	Local government
Register	☐ University
designated a National Historic Landmark	Other Name of repository:
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey	
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #	
	See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 9

Esquire Theater Name of Property	Cape Girardeau County, MO County and State
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Acreage of Property less than one acre	
UTM References (Place additional boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)	
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Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)	
Property Tax No. 21-106-00-02-00900	
Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)	
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name/title Terri Foley, Historic Preservation Consultant organization Terri Foley Consulting	
	date Feburary 7, 2005
street & number 1615 Themis	telephone 573-332-15 <u>30</u>
city or town Cape Girardeau	state MO zip code 63701
Acting process and and its form. Submit the following items with the completed form:	
Continuation Sheets Maps A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the properties having the properties have the properties hav	g large acreage or numerous resources. of the property.
name/title Philip Brinson	
street & number P. O. Box 885	telephone 573-334-4677
city or town Cape Girardeau	state MO zip code 63703
Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for approperties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to arbenefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (nend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a

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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				Cape Girardeau County, Missouri

Esquire Theater

Summary:

Completed in 1947, the Esquire Theater located at 824 Broadway in downtown Cape Girardeau, Cape Girardeau County is an example of the "Commercial Buildings, ca. 1850-1950" property type as described in the "Historic and Architectural Resources of Cape Girardeau" Multiple Property Cover Document. This two story brick building is distinguished from typical historic commercial buildings in the commercial district by its colorful Art Deco façade. A projecting marquee with neon tube lights separates the second floor from the streamlined, curving entrance and ticket booth. The upper story is dominated by a projecting proscenium-like arch that gives the façade the appearance of a theatrical stage. The face is embellished with a variety of materials such as enameled and stainless steel, structural pigmented glass, marble and glass blocks. The building is deteriorated from lack of use and has experienced some interior and exterior alterations. However, the alterations do not diminished the historic character of the building and it retains a high degree of integrity of location, design, materials and workmanship.

Elaboration:

The Esquire Theater is on Broadway, one of the main commercial streets in the downtown district that handles a high volume of traffic. The main façade fronts Broadway to the south, to the east is a paved alleyway that separates it from a one-part commercial block building. The north boundary adjoins a parking lot, and the southwest boundary is separated from a one-part commercial block building by a small walkway. The northwest boundary adjoins the one-part commercial block building. The two-part commercial block, Art Deco theater sits on a zero lot line. The commercial district were the Esquire Theater is located was a thriving business district when the theater opened. With the growing trend of businesses moving to the western part of town into shopping centers or malls, the district experienced a decline in business. However, the Broadway business district is currently experiencing a revitalization movement and the buildings surrounding the theater are undergoing rehabilitation, with many of the once vacant storefronts now occupied.

The exposed concrete foundation can be seen on the north and west elevation. A poured concrete sidewalk meets the edge of the building on the south façade. A paved alleyway meets the edge of the building on the east elevation, with a paved parking lot on the north. Off the west elevation, not adjoined to the neighboring building, is a small strip of grass.

The Esquire Theater measures approximately 100' x 60'. In the construction of the building, no lumber was used for fire safety reasons. The walls are buff brick and are

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Esquire Theater

laid in a common bond pattern on the east, north, and west elevation. The brick appears in excellent condition, with no tuck pointing needed, but there is some graffiti located on the north elevation. The front façade of the theater is dominated by the marquee and is covered by several types of building materials: colored enameled steel panels, stainless steel, marble, neon lights, and clear glass blocks. The façade material wraps around the corners of the building. On the upper east elevation, where the façade wraps around, there are three missing buff steel enameled panels exposing red brick, different from the main brick used in the overall construction (see photograph 1). The missing panels were removed by the property owner within the past year for safety reason and have been stored for future reuse.

The main façade is asymmetrical and divided into three vertical bays. The height of the bays increases from west to east and each bay has an unique pattern of colors and materials. A wide, projecting marquee divides the first and second floors, though material and color patterns extend the height of floors on the far west bay. The western most bay has a stepped parapet and vertical bands of buff, green and white. The bands consist of three columns of buff enamel panels, separated by wide columns of white marble. Thin bands of green marble flank these white bands. Movie poster windows are inset into the two white bands on the first floor. The central bay is the widest, and the projecting proscenium-like arch and marquee, pared with the recessed streamline entrance (see photograph 4), give this bay a top heavy look. The eastern bay is the tallest and has a tower-like appearance, covered in vertical bands of buff and yellow on the second floor.

The first floor on the most eastern side is covered in marble blocks with movie poster windows inset into the blocks. The marble block wraps around to the east elevation and also has a movie poster window. In the center of the lower portion are clear glass blocks that curve inward into the entrance of three sets of red metal double doors with the ticket booth located on the east curved section (see photograph 4). A multiplecolored terrazzo floor of pink, grey, buff and green, blocks in a geometric design runs up to the red doors and into the lobby. Directly above the first floor is the marquee and a marquee tower. The marque is the full width of the front facade and projects in the center from the building in a triangle shape. The marquee doesn't come to apoint, but rather curves to give the impression of a stage. At the curve is a center sign, that currently reads "The Gospel Connection," from a church that once held services in the theater. The sign originally had the name Esquire, back lit and running vertically across the sign. The section of the marquee that runs horizontal across the main façade is constructed of bright blue steel. On the east and west sides of the projecting marquee are yellow lighted movie sign panels (four total). Surrounding the yellow panels are rows of neon tube lights done in a chevron pattern. The underside of the projecting marguee is constructed of metal, with some of the pieces missing. While in use as a theater, the

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Esquire Theater

underside had rows of theatre light bulbs that lit up the entrance to the theater (see photograph 1).

Above the marquee is the marquee tower that looks like a proscenium arch. The exterior frame of the tower is green steel, and at the top center of the frame in stainless steel is an "E." There are three rows of stainless steel bands that make up the rest of the arch. On the exterior sides of the arch in blue neon tube lights is the word "ESQUIRE."

On the east elevation on the lower level are two metal doors and on the upper level is one metal door. There is an entrance to the basement level on the northwest elevation. The north elevation has a set of double metal doors located at the northeast corner.

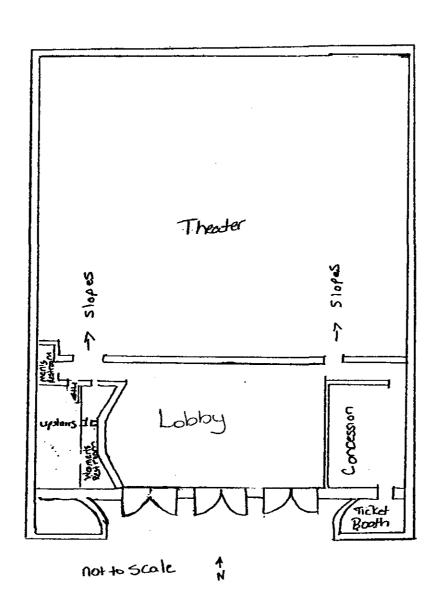
The interior of the theater retains its original space configuration of the lobby, foyer, auditorium, restrooms, and projection room. Many of the original interior finishes, including the mosaic tile, and painted designed walls in the auditorium remain, with the exception of the original seating and screen. Upon entering the theatre, the terrazzo floor continues from the outside. On the west interior of the lobby is a large mirror bounded by showcase poster windows. On the east side of the lobby is the concession stand with a 9' x 3' counter constructed of glass blocks. Located at the north end of the lobby is a foyer with five large mirrors. On either end of the foyer are entrances to the auditorium. To the west side of the foyer are the women's and men's restrooms. Each restroom has a white, black and yellow ceramic mosaic tile floor. The entrance to the projection room is between the two restrooms. Within the main auditorium are a few rows of unattached theater seats and the floor slopes downward toward the screen that has been removed. The current owner has been using the vacant theater for storage.

The Esquire Theater was not built just as a neighborhood theater but as a vibrant addition to the city and to draw attention. Upon completion, the theater had over one mile of neon lights to add to its glamour and glitz. With the color scheme on the façade, the glass blocks, steel, marble, painted steel, colored steel enameled panels, and curved walls, it is an excellent representation of Art Deco. Although it has experienced some alterations over the years, it still retains a high level of integrity. As stated in the Multiple Property Cover Document "Historic and Architectural Resources of cape Girardeau, Missouri," there are limited example of the Art Deco in Cape Girardeau. There have been very few alterations of the exterior, only to removed panels for safety reason. The interior alterations include the removal of the screen, and chairs. However, the alterations do not diminished the historic character of the building and it retains a high degree of integrity.

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Continued – architect/builder Gerhardt Construction Company Preston Neon Sign Company

SUMMARY

The Esquire Theater, 824 Broadway, in Cape Girardeau, Cape Girardeau County. Missouri is locally significant under CRITERION C in the area of Architecture. Noted in the "Historic and Architectural Resources of Cape Girardeau, Missouri" Multiple Property Cover Document as the "most notable building" constructed in the Art Deco style in Cape Girardeau, the Esquire meets the registration requirements for "Commercial Buildings, 1850-1950" under that document. Completed in 1947, near the end of the "golden age" of movie theater design, the ultra-modern materials and use of dramatic neon lights advertised the business and evoked the glitz and glamour associated with movies and movie stars. As the last downtown theater constructed in the city, the building represents the evolution of theater design. Theaters like the Esquire housed the latest in move-viewing technology and catered to the comfort of movie views with concessions and air-conditioned interiors. Though one of several theaters in operation during its historic period, the Esquire is now one of only three intact move houses in the downtown Cape Girardeau. The period of significance of the building is 1946 to 1947, the date of construction, and the building retains a high degree of integrity from that period.

ELABORATION

History of the Esquire Theater

The Esquire Theater designed by Harold Roth and Bernard Woolner of Memphis, Tennessee was completed in January of 1947. W.G. Bartels, a Cape Girardeau merchant and owner of the Esquire, commissioned the construction of the theater and hired a local construction company, Gehardt Construction Company, to oversee the project. Preston Neon Sign Company in Cape Girardeau, installed all of the neon lighting on the exterior and interior of the theater.¹

Cape Amusement Company was the first company to manage the Esquire Theater with Edward Bonns, as the first theater manager. When construction of the Esquire began in 1946, it was estimated it the overall cost of the project would be \$75,000, but upon completion the total cost of the project was \$150,000. The Esquire Theater, while not the largest in seating capacity in town, the local paper reported that it was the largest theater of the Art Deco style in the Mid-west and had more neon lighting than any

New \$150,000 Cape Theater to Formally Open Tomorrow Night. Southeast Missourian, 21, Jan. 1947.

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theater in the South. Considering the location and modest size of the theater, this claim is doubtful, but this does not take away from the significance of the theater.

The overall design of the theater was to attract attention, and it succeeded with dramatic use of marble, steel, enameled steel panels, glass blocks, neon lighting, and large marguee. Upon completion, the theater seated 800 people, but upon closure in 1984 the seating had been reduced to 630. The Esquire Theater was equipped with the latest sound equipment located at the back of the screen. The walls and ceiling of the auditorium were acoustically designed to eliminate any echoes and to guarantee the inter-mix of sound vibrations. The projection room was outfitted with two Peerless machines and a stereopticon machine, plus a utility room used by the projectionists. Located off of the projection room was the manager's reception room that served as a lounge for quests who could view the movie being shown through a one-way glass panel. To keep the moviegoers comfortable, the theater was equipped with air conditioning and heating systems located in the basement. Access to the basement was through the north end of the building. The systems were designed to maintain a consistency in temperature with a total change of the air within the building every minute. Movie goers were greeted by male ushers to guide them down the aisles, and female cashiers tended the needs of the customers at the ticket booths and concession stand.2

The Esquire Theater on its opening night, January 21, 1947, exhibited the importance of the new larger modern theater's arrival in Cape Girardeau. The theater was an instantaneous success and soon became a community landmark. It welcomed over 1,300 customers on its opening night. Moviegoers were treated to a double feature, playing "Blue Skies" starring Bing Crosby, Fred Astaire and Joan Caulfield. Opening night was witness to a line of moviegoers a block long, waiting for the doors to open at 6:15 p.m. Another large crowd of movie goers stood in line for the second showing at 9:00 p.m. Bing Crosby sent Roth and Woolner, the designers of the Esquire, a telegram congratulating them on the opening of their latest theater. According to the many members of the community, the new theater was a success.

On October 10, 1966, Bartels sold the Esquire Theater to Dubinsky Brothers Theatres, Inc., a Missouri corporation. Dubinsky Brothers ran the theater until its closure on October 7, 1984 and maintained ownership of the theater until selling it to J.S.B. Amusement Corporation, an Iowa Corporation, on March 26, 1985.

Ibid.

^{*}First Night Jam at New Theater. " Southeast Missourian, 23 Jan. 1947.

General Warranty Deed, Book 254 Page 425. Recorder of Deeds, Cape Girardeau County Deeds Office, Jackson, Missouri.

Quit-Claim Deed, Book 430 Page 365. Recorder of Deeds, Cape Girardeau County Deeds Office, Jackson, Missouri.

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The Esquire Theater gave its last first-run movie show on October 7, 1984 with four shows at 2:00, 5:00, 7:15, and 9:00 p.m. The last picture to be shown at the Esquire Theater was "Purple Rain" featuring Prince, the musician. The closure of the Esquire Theater, due to a decline in business, marked the passing of an era in Cape Girardeau's history of downtown theaters, and was the last theater to close in downtown Cape Girardeau. However, for a short time, the Esquire Theater experienced a renewed life when J.S.B. Amusement Company took over the ownership of the theatre. It re-opened its doors on March 22, 1985, as second-run movie theatre, charging \$1.50 per person, but closed its doors again in December 1985, citing it was not a successful venture.

The Esquire Theater was the last of the big neighborhood movie houses in Cape Girardeau to close its doors. Within eighteen months, Cape Girardeau experienced all its downtown theaters closing, with Esquire being the last, ending an era of the great neighborhood movie houses.

Architectural History

The Art Deco style was a very distinctive style that first developed in Europe from the pre-war Viennese Secession movement. Art Deco style broke with the traditional building style to create a sense modernity and freedom with the use of dynamic shapes like sunbursts, zigzags, chevrons, floral motifs, geometric shapes, and dramatic angles. Art Deco style was designed to provide a taste for opulence and glamour.

The style was quickly and well received in America. Art Deco, a style that broke away from tradition, created a modernity and freedom from convention in the architectural world. It focused on the glamour, glitz and theatrical atmosphere making it perfect for movie theatres. Due to its uniqueness, it was the perfect style to invoke marketing and advertisement. With the Depression, architecture would change again to the needs and atmosphere of the country by becoming less ostentation and extravagant.⁸

The Esquire Theater personifies the new style of large modernistic movie theaters that started sweeping the movie industry across the country. The 1930s and 1940s were known as the Golden Age of Hollywood because studio ownership lease agreements peaked during this period of history. While the Great Depression did affect the overall economy of the country, people still went to movies as a form of recreation. Movie theaters did not necessarily prosper but adapted to meet the needs of the times. Large, opulent movie palaces gave way for a new style of theater to be built, smaller in scale

[&]quot;New Life for Esquire." Southeast Missourian, 13 March 1985 and "Esquire Theater Closes once again." Southeast Missourian, 8 Jan. 1986.

Gelernter, Mark. A History of American Architeture: Buildings in Their Cultural and Technological Context. Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1999, p. 244-250.

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than before and more streamlined and economical in design. Instead of expensive ornamentation, more color, fabrics, lighting were used to create a new modernistic theater. Many new theaters were built with the latest in sound equipment and airconditioning.

The Art Deco style theaters were designed to offer movie goers the best in movie presentation, to attract attention, and to give the atmosphere of a modernistic style with more modern style than the previous movie houses built in the 1920s. Movie houses came to represent a more luxurious place for people to watch movies. The facades of theaters were seen as inviting and attractive and more streamlined. Huge, highly decorated "movie palaces" gave way to more modern Art Deco and Streamline designs during and after the depression. There was still a demand for style, but most Americans wanted to remove themselves (or not be reminded of) the excess of the roaring twenties. Art Deco and Streamline architecture met the demand for "style" and glitz related to the movie industry while its geometric pattering, use of modern materials, and colorful (though not extravagant or excessive) decoration projected a sense of the modern era and hope for the future. Its flatness, which relied heavily on material, color and shallow incised designs was more compatible with modern movie technology. Although, the Esquire Theater was built after the main movement of Art Deco, it was not an uncommon for buildings to still be designed and constructed of that style into the 1940s, especially movie theaters.

Art Deco style, can be seen in the Esquire Theatre, with the use of geometric shapes, colored enameled steel panels, marble, chevron design, neon, colored steel that is used to draw attention and the setbacks. Streamline Moderne influence can be seen in the Esquire Theater with the curved glass blocks at the entrance, the metal doors, and metal poster cases.

CONCLUSION

The Esquire Theater meets the requirements set forth in the National Register of Historic Places eligibility requirements for placement on the National Register of Historic Places. It meets the requirements under **CRITERION C** for its embodiment of a distinctive characteristic of architectural style, period, method of construction, of the Art Deco cinema. It is the only theatre in Cape Girardeau of the Art Deco style with some Streamline Modern influence and one of the few buildings built of this style in town. The Esquire Theater maintains its original location, association, feeling, workmanship, materials, and design. The Esquire Theater maintains its since of period of significance 1947 to 1955, and meets the requirements for placement on the National Register of Historic Places.

Bayer, Patrica. <u>Art Deco Architecture</u>, New York: Thames & Hudson Inc., 1999, p. 144-146.

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Esquire Theater Historic and Architectural Resources of Cape Girardeau, Missouri Cape Girardeau County, MO

THURSDAY EVENING, JANUARY 23, 1947. taken CROWD Wednesday lined await the S, modernistic formal opening lines of the new Esquire Theater is shown are apparent.

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Esquire Theater
Historic and Architectural Resource
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Cape Girardeau County, Missouri

9. Bibliography

Bayer, Patrica. Art Deco Architecture, New York: Thanmes & Hudson Inc., 1999.

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"First Night Jam at New Theater." Southeast Missourian, 23 Jan. 1947.

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- "New \$150,000 Cape Theater to Formally Open Tomorrow Night." Southeast Missourian, 21 Jan. 1947.
- "New Life for Esquire." Southeast Missourian, 13 March 1985
- Quit-Claim Deed, Book 430 Page 365. Recorder of Deeds, Cape Girardeau County Deeds Office, Jackson, Missouri
- Snider, Felix Eugene and Earl Augustus Collins. <u>Cape Girardeau: Biography of a City</u>. Cape Girardeau, MO: Ramfre Press, 1956.

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Esquire Theater
Historic and Architectural Resource
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Cape Girardeau County, Missouri

10. Verbal Boundary Description

All that part of Lot 50 in Range E in the City of Cape Girardeau, Missouri, described as follows: Commencing at the southeast corner of said Lot 50; thence west upon and along the south line of said Lot, 59 feet 1.4 inches; thence north parallel to the East line of said Lot, 25.36 feet; thence west parallel to the South Line of said Lot, 13 inches. Thence North parallel with the East line of said Lot, 75.84 feet; thence parallel to the east line of said Lot, 20.8 feet; thence East parallel to the South line of said Lot, 65 feet to a point in the east line of said Lot; thence South along the east line of said Lot, 122 feet to the point of beginning. The boundary includes the following parcel on the Cape Girardeau County Tax Map 21-107-00-25-00100.

Boundary Justification

The selected boundary includes all property historically associated with the Esquire Theatre.

Photographs

The following information is the same for all photographs:

Esquire Theater

Cape Girardeau, Cape Girardeau County, Missouri

Photographer: Terri L. Foley

Negatives in possession of Terri Foley, 1615 Themis, Cape Girardeau, MO 63701.

Photo No. 1: View from south, looking north. Showing the main façade, and east elevation.

Photo No. 2: View from southwest, looking northeast. Showing the main façade and west façade.

Photo No. 3: View from west, looking east. Showing the marquee.

Photo No. 4: View from the south, looking north. Showing main entrance and ticket booth.

Photo No. 5: View from the west, looking east. Showing the side of the marquee.

Photo No. 6. View from the north, looking south. Showing the north elevation.

Photo No. 7: View from west looking east. Showing the ticket booth.

Photo No. 8: View from east looking west. Showing the Broadway business district.

