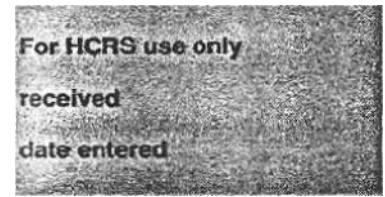


VLR- 9/18/79 NRHP- 11/20/79

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**



See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Loew's Theater

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 6th & Grace streets ___ not for publication

city, town Richmond (city) ___ vicinity of Third {David E. Satterfield, III}
congressional district

state Virginia code 51 county (in city) Richmond code 760

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Richmond Symphony

street & number 15 South 5th Street

city, town Richmond ___ vicinity of Richmond state Virginia 23219

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Richmond City Hall

street & number 900 East Broad Street

city, town Richmond state Virginia

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title None previously recorded has this property been determined eligible? yes ___ no

date ___ federal ___ state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Designed by the renowned theater architect John Eberson, Richmond's Loew's Theater opened to capacity crowds on April 9, 1928. Located at Sixth and Grace streets in the heart of Richmond's commercial sector, Loew's was boasted of as being the most up-to-date theater in the South at the time of its opening. Though altered during the 1960s by a change of marquee and a repainting of the interior in a scheme unsympathetic to the original color layout, the building continues to be a major visual focus to downtown Richmond.

Reflecting the 1920s taste for eclectic historicism, the theater was designed in a mixture of Moorish and Spanish Colonial Revival styles. The focal point of the building's exterior is the curved Baroque corner tower, six stories in height. The tower is set off from the main building by paired, giant order, terra-cotta pilasters; an elaborately decorated cornice with a broken scallop pediment encrusted with fanciful finials; and a large terra-cotta quatrefoil in the sixth-floor level, open in the center to allow views of open sky from the street level. Raised brick crisscross the tower with diamond-shaped, terra-cotta tiles placed at points of intersection. A simple, more rectilinear marquee replaced the original corner and vertical signs. New entrance doors were installed in the mid-1960s when the original marquee was removed.

The Grace Street facade is five stories in height. This facade is divided into five bays by corbelled brick pilasters (capped by terra-cotta capitals at the fourth-story level) and by five storefronts at the street level. These storefronts exhibit moderate alterations to the original window displays. The ends of the Grace Street facade are defined by paired giant order terra-cotta pilasters with crowning finials. A heavily encrusted terra-cotta frieze lies beneath a wide overhanging cornice. Centered within the second story of the Grace Street facade is a stained-glass window with elaborately decorated, richly colored, terra-cotta surrounds. The window opens onto a small balcony. The colors presented on the terra-cotta surrounds reflect the color scheme of the theater's original interior.

A "Moorish" arcade two stories in height and eight bays across defines the Sixth Street facade. No transition is made into the taller corner tower. The arcade is composed of attenuated terra-cotta rope pilasters supporting richly encrusted arches. Shops are located in each first-story bay. Offices occupy each bay of the second floor. The floors are externally separated by decorative metal panels placed between each bay.

Entrance to the theater is made through a corner, circular lobby. This entrance vestibule in turn leads to a long, two-story, cross-vaulted foyer lying parallel to Grace Street. The foyer walls are of rough stucco to simulate the texture of adobe. These walls were originally adorned with paintings and tapestries to project a romanticized image of a Baroque Spanish palace. To the east and west ends, two round-arched windows with turned wood grilles are set into the second-story level. Flanking the windows are two blank niches. Recessed blank arches line the first floor of the hall's south side.

A grand stairway in the center bay of this wall leads to the Spanish Colonial Revival promenade above. Dominating the stair landing is a large, richly carved "tabernacle" window with stained-glass lights. The promenade overlooks the foyer and is fronted by a wooden balustrade. The center bay slightly projects and is supported visually by six consoles. Across from this balcony projection on the north wall is a large quatrefoil medallion. Entrance to the loge and balcony seats of the auditorium is gained from this promenade. Access to the orchestra seats is made through the five archways on the foyer's north side.

The auditorium originally seated 2,217 people. A large proscenium arch laden with rich

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> theater (movie)
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) Entertainment
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1928

Builder/Architect John Ebersson

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Loew's Theater at 6th and Grace streets in Richmond is a handsome example of movie palace architecture of the 1920s. Designed by the renowned theater architect John Ebersson, Loew's was considered the most up-to-date theater in the South when it opened to capacity crowds on April 9, 1928.¹ Richmond's Loew's displays all the theater accoutrement deemed necessary for a successful (financially and aesthetically) theater of the twenties. On the exterior these include an exotic, romanticized image of a distant land; an imposing corner tower establishing the building as a major visual and cultural landmark within the urban landscape; and a large marquee woven into the facade by day and a blazing standard by night.

A mixture of Moorish and Spanish Colonial Revivals provided the appropriate fanciful image for Richmond's Loew's Theater. The image on the interior begins in the entrance lobby and foyer with stuccoed walls, turned woodwork, and colorful Spanish tile designs and culminates in the auditorium. Here Churrigueresque false facades line the sides of the theater, presenting the illusion of an open Spanish plaza. To the front a large proscenium arch heavily encrusted with Spanish Baroque details separates the audience from the stage. A sky-colored ceiling completes the illusion of sitting in an outside Spanish court. One reviewer attested to the success of Ebersson's special atmospheric effects, remarking at the theater's grand opening. "Going into the theatre was like going out of doors, except it was raining out of doors. Stars twinkled in a cerulean ceiling and clouds drifted slowly by."²

While movie theater architects of the 1920s tried to capture the romantic essence of a foreign land through the emulation of historic artifacts, in this case Spain, there was never any real attempt for archaeological correctness in their imagery. Architects and the movie industry felt by housing movie shows in an exotic, fictionalized setting, the fantasy of the film would be enhanced. The viewer, set in the "proper" atmosphere would thus achieve the greatest satisfaction from the film. The interior design, one critic observed, "must stimulate the imagination of those who enter that the spirit of romance in them may be immediately quickened."³

Given this, theater architects allowed themselves considerable artistic license in their architectural interpretations of other cultures.⁴ Working with decorators, architects included such interior accessories as antiques, sculpture, paintings, and decorative lighting fixtures in their schemes. Exoticism was the key. At the Loew's opening six brightly colored parrots (two alive, four stuffed) were on hand to greet guests. The Richmond Times-Dispatch observed after a peek at the theater prior to the official opening:

The auditorium is, in effect, an open-air Spanish garden circled by walls of antique pattern and embellished with art work, standing in bold relief against a sky of summer blue in which by an ingenious electrical arrangement, the twinkling stars will wink and lazy clouds will drift in remarkable imitation of a semi-tropic night. . . .

The circular lobby has been tastefully decorated in the elaborate Spanish scheme. From this is gained entrance to the foyer, appointed in the manner suggestive of a Spanish castle of the first order--at least

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Loew's Theater, Richmond, Virginia

CONTINUATION SHEET #1

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PAGE 1

7. DESCRIPTION

Baroque decoration dominates the stage. Terra-cotta floral designs occur in serpentine fashion up the arch surrounds. Mechanical show-title card machines (no longer functioning) are at the base of each side of the arch. Flanking the arch are adobe-textured walls with terra-cotta seashells in a diagonal crisscross pattern. Nearby double ogee-arch doors are topped by a large curtained niche with curvilinear Baroque surrounds.

Scallop-topped niches containing urns and fronted by turned balustrades ascend the balcony walls and join with a once-blue (now red) ceiling to give the illusion of an open Spanish plaza. Tiny lights in the ceiling mimic twinkling stars to help further this image. The illusion was completed by two cloud machines which have been removed.

The original orchestra pit has been filled and the Wurlitzer organ removed. However, the theater retains its original light controls, its spotlights in the balcony rim, and its full set of foot-and border lights. The theater contains fifteen dressing rooms beneath its stage and on the two floors in the left (south) stage wing.

BNZ

8. SIGNIFICANCE

such Spanish castles as described by the fancy of fictionalists. The foyer actually conveys the idea of greater luxury than the average castle open to tourists would contain. Paintings, tapestries, bronze weapons and colorful drapes adorn the walls.⁵

To keep construction and design costs down for these elaborate schemes and to insure a consistent level of workmanship in the numerous decorative elements, Eberson formed Michelangelo Studios, his own manufacturing company. Using stock theater models, Eberson could vary his designs by interchanging decorative elements mass produced in his factory. Elroy E. Quenroe noted, "The various elements were used and reused in theatre after theatre, and even though the statuary of Houston's Italian garden was the same as that of Tampa's Spanish courtyard, and the proscenium arch of Richmond also appeared in Detroit, each Eberson creation was an original and individual success."⁶ It should be noted, however, even with the use of mass-produced, terra-cotta decorative tile, Richmond's Loew's Theater cost \$1,250,000 to build.

Technologically Loew's was considered the most up-to-date movie theater in the South. Promoters boasted the theater's large screen was specially, (if not scientifically) treated to relieve eyestrain. As to the partially automated projection room containing three Simplex projection machines, a dual stereopticon, and a main spotlight, the Times-Dispatch

(See Continuation Sheet #2)

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Loew's Theater, Richmond, Virginia

CONTINUATION SHEET #2

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 2

8. SIGNIFICANCE

boasted, "...there is none more modern or well equipped."⁷

The opening of the Loew's in Richmond was anticipated with great excitement. Advertisements in the Times-Dispatch teasingly hinted at the splendor inside through the publication of selected architectural views and details. A large ad appeared on April 8 in the paper exclaiming:

Tommorrow at 10:30 A.M. It Opens!--and the theatregoers of Richmond will catch their breath in amazement! Watch their faces! Listen to their exclamations! EVERYONE will be there to enjoy the wonders of this unbelievable place--the ten thousand surprises of luxury, color, charm, music, design, courtesy and the whole spirit of entertainment without rush, hurry or commercial taint!⁸

A contest was held by the newspaper with free tickets to the theater as prizes. Members of the Loew's Theater Company's hierarchy including Col. Edward A. Schiller, vice-president and general manager, and David Loew, vice president in charge of real estate and son of the founder of the theater chain, were to be in town for the event. A number of celebrities were expected to attend as well as prominent city and state officials. Among the noted guests were Governor Harry F. Byrd, Richmond Mayor J. Fulmer Bright, and Mr. and Mrs. George Haines of Richmond, parents of William Haines, star of West Point, the opening attraction.⁹

The opening was, of course, a success. Over 12,000 people streamed into the theater on opening day. The dedicatory program included ushers dressed "in the splendor of Bulgarian generals," Speeches by Eugene B. Sydnor, president of the Richmond Chamber of Commerce, Mayor Bright, and the reading of a telegram sent by William Haines.

In addition to the speeches and movie, the audience was treated to several patriotic orchestral tunes, a short comedy, and, what one reviewer called "the most impressive part of the bill... 'Wild Oscar', an organist of parts, a deft exponent of syncopation, a nimble musical trickster and a singer of pleasant and agreeable voice."¹⁰ Accompanying "Wild Oscar" and his music was a series of stereopticon slides.

Aside from its role as a theater, Loew's was also landlord to several retail businesses and offices. The incorporation of retail stores within the theater complex was common practice by the mid-twenties. Not content to make most of their profits by night and weekend shows, movie theater management realized that additional profits were to be had in the creation of shop fronts flanking the theater. In Richmond's Loew's Theater this thinking is seen in the seven original stores forming the 6th Street arcade and the five stores on Grace Street.

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Loew's Theater, Richmond, Virginia

CONTINUATION SHEET # 3

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PAGE 3

8. SIGNIFICANCE

Entering into a period of decline during the late 1970s, Richmond's Loew's Theater closed in June 1979. During its last years as a movie house it played mostly grade "B" movies catering to fans of Bruce Lee and Kung Fu. In June 1979 the theater was purchased by the Richmond Symphony with the intent of using the building as the symphony's home theater.

BNZ

¹For biographical information on Eberson see: Elroy E. Quenroe, "John Eberson in Richmond, Virginia - Architect for the Twenties," Master's thesis, University of Virginia, 1975.

²Cloud machines were introduced into theater design by Eberson in Holblitzell's Majestic Theater (Houston, 1923), his first atmospheric theater. Ben Hall, The Best Remaining Seats, pp. 94-103.

³Randolph W. Sexton, American Movie Theatres of Today, v. 1, p. 13.

⁴This argument is augmented by the interest in historicism across the United States during this and the following decade. Spanish Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival and Colonial Revival are only a few examples of architectural historicism popular in both commercial and residential design at this time. It is significant to note, however, apologists for the modern movement took exception to this type of theater design. Norman Bel Geddes wrote in 1932, "The judgment, taste and design exemplified in ninety-five percent of the theaters of America is the most atrocious display of bad taste and waste of money that I know of anywhere. The theaters of no country in the world can compare with those of the United States in vulgar and cheap architectural decoration." Norman Bel Geddes, Horizons, p. 143. By 1940 many designers abandoned historicism in theater design stating the fanciful images hindered the escapist function of the film. Ben Schalnger appearing before the 1948 meeting of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers noted, "The cinema-goer...comes to the theater to forget all his problems completely and be in the world of what he is looking at in the cinema. And that is what we need greatly, a theater auditorium where a person can sit down and look at what is ahead of him and not be conscious of the physical shelter in which he is

(See Continuation Sheet #4)

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

Loew's Theater, Richmond, Virginia

CONTINUATION SHEET #4

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8. SIGNIFICANCE

enjoying the picture. He has to be able to look at that picture, lose himself in it completely, and have no reminder of the fact he is in an enclosure looking at the picture." Schalnger observed, "I think we are finally impressing the motion picture exhibitor with the importance of having an auditorium treatment subordinated and made complementary to the picture and not an auditorium of twinkling stars and outdoor pergolas..." Helen M. Stote, The Motion Picture Theater, pp. 12, 21.

⁵Richmond Times-Dispatch, 6 April 1928.

⁶Elroy E. Quenroe, "Movie House Architecture, Twenties Style," Arts in Virginia, 26 (Fall 1976): 28.

⁷Richmond Times-Dispatch, 6 April 1928. Given the needs of theaters in such metropolitan areas as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, this claim remains in doubt.

⁸Richmond Times-Dispatch, 8 April 1928.

⁹Richmond Times-Dispatch, 6 April 1928; 8 April 1928; 10 April 1928.

¹⁰Richmond Times-Dispatch, 10 April 1928.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

. "Movie House Architecture." Arts in Virginia, Fall 1976, pp. 22-31.
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9. Major Bibliographical References

- Hall, Ben M. The Best Remaining Seats: The Story of the Golden Age of the Movie Palace. New York: Charles N. Potter, Inc., 1961.
- Meloy, Arthur S. Theatres and Picture Houses. New York: Architects' Supply and Publishing Company, 1916.
- Quenroe, Elroy E. "John Eberson in Richmond, Virginia - Architect for the Twenties." Master's thesis, University of Virginia, 1975. (See Continuation Sheet #4)

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 1 acre

Quadrangle name Richmond

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A

1	8	2	8	4	6	0	0	4	1	5	7	4	5	0
Zone				Easting				Northing						

B

Zone				Easting				Northing						

C

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

D

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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification

Located on Block W, Lot # (Map Reference) W000-0009/018 which measures 130.21' x 151.83'. Deed Book reference DB751 2103. The register bounds coincide with the limits of said lot.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission Staff

organization Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission date August 1979

street & number 221 Governor Street telephone (804) 786-3144

city or town Richmond state Virginia 23219

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Tucker Hill, Executive Director

title Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission

date SEP 18 1979

For HCERS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

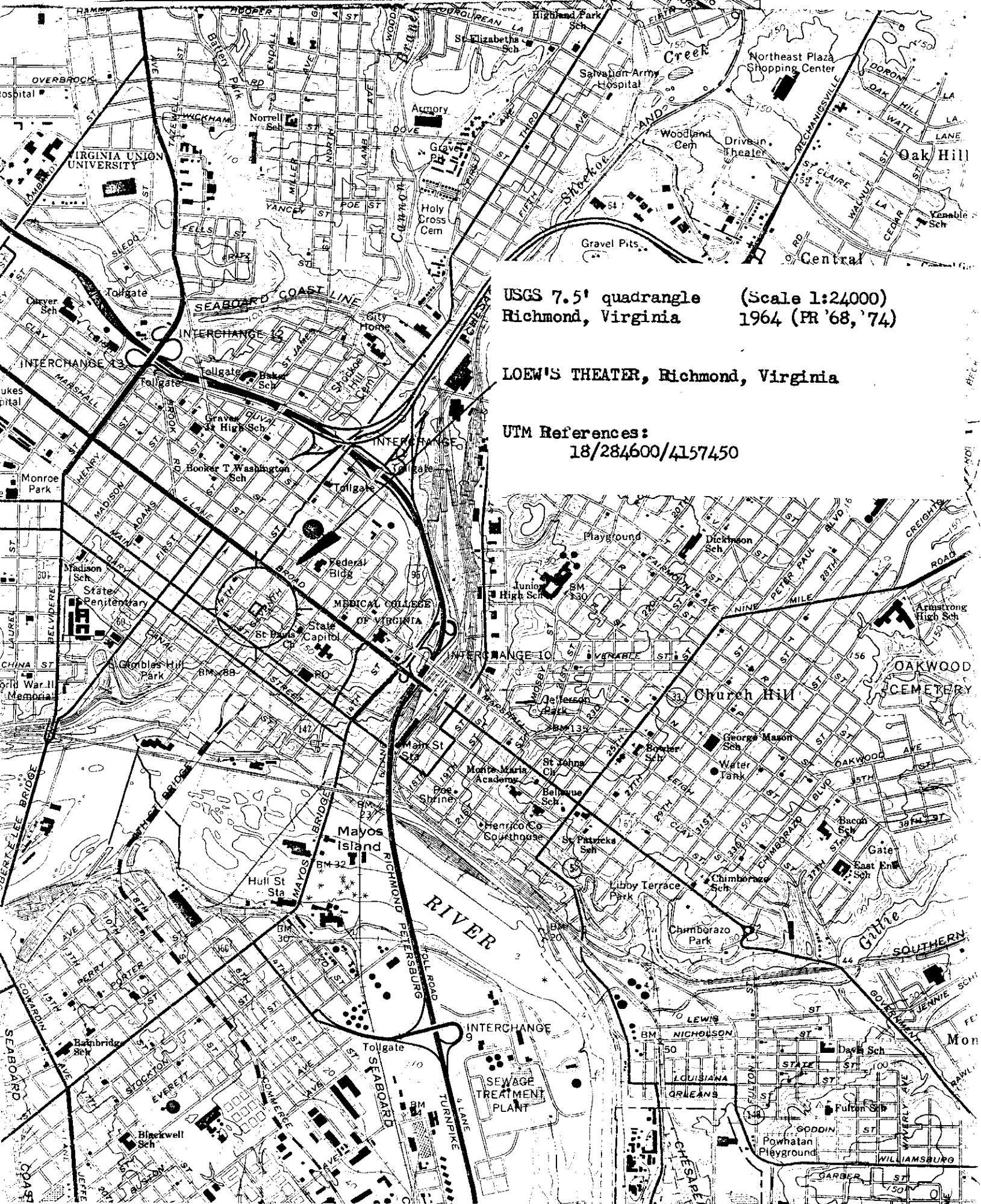
date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest

date

Chief of Registration



USGS 7.5' quadrangle (Scale 1:24000)
Richmond, Virginia 1964 (PR '68, '74)

LOEW'S THEATER, Richmond, Virginia

UTM References:
18/284600/4157450