

**HISTORIC RESOURCE ASSESSMENT**

5100-5114 Wilshire Boulevard  
Los Angeles, California

*Prepared for*

Kenneth Bley  
Cox, Castle & Nicholson LLP  
2049 Century Park E, 28th Flr  
Los Angeles, CA 90067-3284

*Prepared by*

Chattel, Inc.  
13417 Ventura Boulevard  
Sherman Oaks, CA 91423

May 30, 2013

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This report evaluates 5100-5114 Wilshire Boulevard (subject property), located close to Miracle Mile in Los Angeles, for potential eligibility for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (National Register), California Register of Historical Resources (California Register) and for local designation as a City of Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument (HCM). Based on the following evaluation, the subject property does not appear eligible for listing in the National and California registers or as a local HCM. Thus, the subject property is not a historical resource for the purposes of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Constructed between 1931 and 1933, the two buildings on the property, a retail store building (5100-5108 Wilshire Boulevard) and a theater building (5110-5114 Wilshire Boulevard), have most recently been used as a church.

## II. QUALIFICATIONS

Chattel, Inc. (Chattel) is a full service historic preservation consulting firm with statewide practice. The firm represents governmental agencies and private ventures, successfully balancing project goals with a myriad of historic preservation regulations without sacrificing principles on either side. Comprised of professionals meeting the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualifications Standards (36 CFR Part 61) in architectural history and historic architecture, the firm offers professional services including historic resources evaluation and project effects analysis, and consultation on federal, state and local historic preservation statutes and regulations. Chattel is committed to responsible preservation, but recognizes that we live in a real world. Assessing effects on historic resources requires not only professional expertise, but the ability to work effectively toward consensus and compromise. We invite you to explore our website [www.chattel.us](http://www.chattel.us).

Chattel staff members engage in a collaborative process and work together as a team on individual projects. The report was prepared by Principal Associate Jenna Snow and Associate Marissa Moshier. Additional research was conducted by Intern Erika Trevis. Editorial support and peer review was provided by consulting architectural historian Leslie Heumann. Ms. Snow and Principal Robert Chattel visited the site on March 21, 2013.

### Jenna Snow, Principal Associate, Architectural Historian

Jenna Snow holds a M.S. in Historic Preservation from Columbia University and a B.A. in Fine Arts focusing on architectural history from Brandeis University. With 10 years of historic preservation experience at Chattel, her credentials include meeting the *Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualifications Standards* in architectural history as well as a LEED Green Associate. Her role at Chattel Architecture includes professional work on a wide variety of historic resource assessments, impacts analyses, and construction monitoring projects for conformance with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*. She is a regular contributor to environmental impact reports, historic preservation certification applications, Section 106 reviews and other work associated with historic building rehabilitation, materials conservation and preservation planning. Ms. Snow has been involved in several large historic resources surveys. As project manager for historic resource surveys of three Community Redevelopment Agency's project areas – Westlake, Wilshire Center/Koreatown, and Hollywood – Ms. Snow led a team consisting of two subconsultants and coordinated closely with the Office of Historic Resources. Ms. Snow also contributed to SurveyLA, the City of Los Angeles sponsored city-wide survey, in the south and southeast Los Angeles community plan areas. Ms. Snow has contributed to multiple National Register nominations, including the Twohy Building in San José, CA; the Beverly Hills Women's Club in Beverly Hills, CA; the Sam and Alfreda Maloof Compound in Rancho Cucamonga, CA; and the Boyle Hotel/Cummings Block (in process) in Los Angeles, CA. At the United States Veterans Affairs West Los Angeles campus, Ms. Snow has successfully completed Section 106 review for the

first of eleven buildings proposed for rehabilitation, in addition to completing a draft National Register nomination for the campus. Ms. Snow currently serves as the board secretary for the South Carthay Historic Preservation Overlay Zone.

Marissa Moshier, Associate, Architectural Historian

Marissa Moshier holds a M.S. in Historic Preservation from the University of Pennsylvania and a dual B.A. in Art History and French from Wellesley College. With two years of historic preservation experience at Chattel, her credentials include meeting the *Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualifications Standards* in architectural history. Her work spans several areas of historic preservation, including historic site documentation and preservation planning. At Chattel, Ms. Moshier has conducted historic resource surveys; written historic context statements, and prepared historic resource assessments for purposes of environmental review. For SurveyLA, a comprehensive citywide historic resources survey managed by the Los Angeles Office of Historic Resources, she authored sections of the Historic Context Statement on Industrial Development in the City of Los Angeles related to automobile manufacturing and agriculture. She also participated in survey of historic resources in the southeast Los Angeles community plan area for SurveyLA. Ms. Moshier has worked recently on preparation of a National Historic Landmark nomination for the Las Vegas Post Office and Court House (now the National Museum of Organized Crime and Law Enforcement, Las Vegas, NV) and has completed digital photography classes and a workshop on National Register of Historic Places photo policies. Her other experience includes working in museum education, exhibit research and design, and historic site interpretation at places as diverse as the Louvre in Paris, France and the Woodlands, a mid-19th century cemetery in Philadelphia, PA.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The subject property has been previously surveyed twice for historic and architectural significance under federal, state and local eligibility criteria.<sup>1</sup> Conducted in 1982, the earlier of the two surveys found the subject property (5100-5112 Wilshire Boulevard) eligible for listing in the National Register, specifically for its Art Deco style architecture. However, the later, 1986 survey found the property ineligible for listing in the National Register. Photographs included with the previous surveys indicate the subject property has been substantially altered since the 1980s. As the previous surveys are over 25 years old, the current assessment provides a more in-depth analysis of the subject property, including a discussion of integrity.

Primary research materials include the online image collection at the Los Angeles Public Library, the historical *Los Angeles Times* article database, University of Southern California Digital Library, Huntington Digital Library, Los Angeles City Directories, and California State Library. Additional historic photographs were provided by Bison Archives.

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<sup>1</sup> Terri Jacques and Nancy Michali, WESTEC Services, Inc., Department of Parks and Recreation Historic Resources Inventory, "Four Star Theatre," December 15, 1982.

Sharon Bourstein, SCRTD, Department of Parks and Recreation Historic Resources Inventory, "Four Star Theatre," July 18, 1986.

#### IV. REGULATORY SETTING

##### **National Register of Historic Resources (National Register)**

The National Register is the nation's official list of historic and cultural resources worthy of preservation. Authorized under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, the National Register is part of a national program to coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect the country's historic and archaeological resources. Properties listed in the National Register include districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that are significant in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering, and culture. The National Register is administered by the National Park Service (NPS), which is part of the U.S. Department of the Interior. Resources are eligible for the National Register if they:

- A) are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- B) are associated with the lives of significant persons in our past; or
- C) embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D) have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.<sup>2</sup>

Once a resource has been determined to satisfy one of the above-referenced criteria, then it must be assessed for "integrity." Integrity refers to the ability of a property to convey its significance, and the degree to which the property retains the identity, including physical and visual attributes, for which it is significant under the four basic criteria listed above. The National Register recognizes seven aspects or qualities of integrity: location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. To retain its historic integrity, a property must possess several, and usually most, of these aspects.

The National Register includes only those properties that retain sufficient integrity to accurately convey their physical and visual appearance from their identified period of significance. Period of significance describes the period in time during which a property's importance is established. It can refer simply to the date of construction, or it can span multiple years, depending on the reason the property is important. The period of significance is established based on the property's relevant historic context and as supported by facts contained in the historic context statement.

Evaluation of integrity is founded on "an understanding of a property's physical features and how they relate to its significance."<sup>3</sup> A property significant under Criteria A or B may still retain sufficient integrity to convey its significance even if it retains a low degree of integrity of design, material or workmanship. Conversely, a property that derives its significance exclusively for its architecture under Criterion C must retain a high degree of integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. For some properties, comparison with similar properties is considered during the evaluation of integrity, especially when a property type is particularly rare.

While integrity is important in evaluating and determining significance, a property's physical condition, whether it is in a deteriorated or pristine state, has relatively little influence on its significance. A property that is in good condition may lack the requisite level of integrity to convey its significance due to alterations or other factors. Likewise, a property in extremely poor condition may still retain substantial integrity from its period of significance and clearly convey its significance.

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<sup>2</sup> National Register Bulletin #15, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* (National Park Service, 1990, revised 2002).

<sup>3</sup> National Register Bulletin #15, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* (National Park Service, 1990, revised 2002).

### Relationship to Project

As noted above, the subject property was previously surveyed twice and first received a California Historical Resources Status Code (Status Code) of “3S” or “Appears eligible for NR [National Register] as an individual property through survey evaluation.” The later, 1986, survey assigned a Status Code of 6Y to the theater building, or “Determined ineligible for NR [National Register] by consensus through Section 106 process – Not evaluated for CR [California Register] or Local Listing.” The subject property is not listed in the National Register, and for the reasons stated below, does not appear to meet National Register eligibility requirements either individually or as a contributor to a historic district.

### **California Register of Historical Resources (California Register)**

The California Register was established to serve as an authoritative guide to the state’s significant historical and archaeological resources (Public Resources Code (PRC) §5024.1). State law provides that in order for a property to be considered eligible for listing in the California Register, it must be found by the State Historical Resources Commission to be significant under any of the following four criteria, if the resource:

- 1) is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of California’s history and cultural heritage; or
- 2) is associated with the lives of persons important in our past; or
- 3) embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction, or represents the work of an important creative individual or possesses high artistic values; or
- 4) has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

The primary difference between eligibility for listing in the National and California Registers is integrity. Properties eligible for listing in the National Register generally have a higher degree of integrity than those only eligible for listing in the California Register. There is, however, no difference with regard to significance. A property that meets the significance criteria for California Register eligibility would also be eligible for listing in the National Register, unless there are issues of integrity that decrease the ability of the property to convey its significance.

The California Register also includes properties which: have been formally *determined eligible for listing in*, or are *listed in* the National Register of Historic Places (National Register); are registered State Historical Landmark Number 770, and all consecutively numbered landmarks above Number 770; points of historical interest, which have been reviewed and recommended to the State Historical Resources Commission for listing; and city and county-designated landmarks or districts (if criteria for designation are determined by State of California Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) to be consistent with California Register criteria). PRC §5024.1 also states:

- g) A resource identified as significant in an historical resource survey may be listed in the California Register if the survey meets all of the following criteria:
  - 1) The survey has been or will be included in the State Historical Resources Inventory.
  - 2) The survey and the survey documentation were prepared in accordance with [OHP]... procedures and requirements.
  - 3) The resource is evaluated and determined by the office to have a significance rating of category 1-5 on DPR [Department of Parks and Recreation] form 523.
  - 4) If the survey is five or more years old at the time of its nomination for inclusion in the California Register, the survey is updated to identify historical resources which have become eligible or ineligible due to changed circumstances or further documentation and those which have been demolished or altered in a manner that substantially diminishes the significance of the resource.

### Relationship to Project

The subject property is not listed in the California Register, and, for the reasons stated below, does not appear to meet California Register eligibility requirements either individually or as a contributor to a historic district.

### **California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)**

According to CEQA,

an historical resource is a resource listed in, or determined eligible for listing in, the California Register of Historical Resources. Historical resources included in a local register of historical resources..., or deemed significant pursuant to criteria set forth in subdivision (g) of Section 5024.1, are presumed to be historically or culturally significant for purposes of this section, unless the preponderance of the evidence demonstrates that the resource is not historically or culturally significant (PRC §21084.1).

If the proposed project were expected to cause *substantial adverse change* in a historical resource, environmental clearance for the project would require mitigation measures to reduce impacts. "Substantial adverse change in the significance of an historical resource means the physical demolition, destruction, relocation, or alteration of the resource or its immediate surroundings such that the significance of an historical resource would be materially impaired" (CEQA Guidelines §15064.5 (b)(1)).<sup>4</sup> CEQA Guidelines §15064.5 (b)(2)<sup>5</sup> describes *material impairment* taking place when a project:

- (A) Demolishes or materially alters in an adverse manner those physical characteristics of an historical resource that convey its historical significance and that justify its inclusion in, or eligibility for, inclusion in the California Register... or
- (B) Demolishes or materially alters in an adverse manner those physical characteristics that account for its inclusion in a local register... or its identification in an historical resources survey... unless the public agency reviewing the effects of the project establishes by a preponderance of evidence that the resource is not historically or culturally significant; or
- (C) Demolishes or materially alters those physical characteristics of an historical resource that convey its historical significance and that justify its inclusion in, or eligibility for, inclusion in the California Register... as determined by a lead agency for the purposes of CEQA.

### Relationship to Project

The subject property is not a historical resource for purposes of CEQA review. As described more fully below, it is not eligible for listing in the California Register or as local HCM.

### **City of Los Angeles**

Sec. 22.171.7 of Los Angeles Administrative Code defines criteria for designation of a Historic-Cultural Monument (HCM). For ease in applying local eligibility, the following numbers are assigned to the criteria, which align to a large degree with those of the National and California Registers. HCMs are defined as:

- 1) Historic structures or sites in which the broad cultural, economic or social history of the nation, state or community is reflected and exemplified; identified with important events in the main s of national, state, or local history; or

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<sup>4</sup> California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3, Sections 15000-15387

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

- 2) Historic structures or sites identified with personages in the main currents of national, state or local history; or
- 3) Historic structures or sites which embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period style or method of construction or a notable work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual genius influenced his age.

Listing as an HCM is subject to review by the Cultural Heritage Commission and the Planning and Land Use Management Committee of the City Council, and requires approval by the City Council.

The Historic Preservation Overlay Zone (HPOZ) Ordinance was adopted by the City of Los Angeles in 1979, and revised in 1997. As defined in the Cultural Heritage Masterplan Review Draft (March 7, 2000, Cultural Heritage Masterplan), an HPOZ is, "...a planning tool which recognizes the special qualities of areas of historic, cultural, or architectural significance. An HPOZ does not change the underlying zoning; rather it lays an added level of protection over a zone through local board oversight."<sup>6</sup> There are twenty-nine designated historic preservation overlay zones in Los Angeles, incorporating thousands of properties. The Cultural Heritage Masterplan defines HPOZ criteria for evaluation and states that structures, natural features, or sites within the involved area, or the area as a whole, shall meet one or more of the following:

- (A) Adds to the historic architectural qualities or historic associations for which a property is significant because it was present during the period of significance, and possesses historic integrity reflecting its character at that time
- (B) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristics, represents an established feature of the neighborhood, community, or City
- (C) Retaining the structure would help preserve and protect an historic place or area of historic interest in the City

#### Relationship to Project

The subject property is not a designated HCM, nor located within an existing HPOZ, and for the reasons stated below, does not appear meet local eligibility requirements under any criteria.

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<sup>6</sup> Cultural Heritage Masterplan Review Draft, City of Los Angeles, 7 March 2000.



## V. DESCRIPTION

### Physical Description

#### *Setting*

The subject property is located on the south side of Wilshire Boulevard between La Brea and Highland avenues (Maps 1-3). Wilshire Boulevard is a wide, commercial thoroughfare with mid-rise buildings constructed to the property line, forming a street wall, and few street trees. The commercial environment quickly transitions to low-scale residential neighborhoods immediately north and south of Wilshire Boulevard. The subject property is located near the California Register-listed Miracle Mile Historic District (Map 4).

The subject property contains two, buildings constructed as a single project with the façades appearing almost seamless. A theater is located on the west while stores are located on the east (Map 3). While historically there was no interior connection between the two buildings, it is now possible to pass between the two buildings on the interior. The buildings are constructed to the sidewalk line along the main, north (Wilshire Boulevard) façade with no setback, as well as to the sidewalk line along the east (Mansfield Avenue) elevation. The buildings occupy approximately two thirds of the parcel with a surface parking lot in the southeast corner of the parcel.

#### *Exterior*

Both buildings on the subject property are designed in an Art Deco style with smooth stucco siding and decorative elements on the façade such as zigzags and other stylized, geometric motifs (Figures 1-2).

The theater building is two stories high and trapezoidal in plan with no fenestration (Figure 3). Although only visible from aerial photographs, the roof has a slight barrel vault (Figures 22-27). A low parapet runs around the east, west, and south elevations, while a high parapet screens the roof at the north façade. The theater is three bays wide on north façade with the main entrance in the center bay (Figure 4). The main entrance consists of contemporary aluminum and glass doors with glass transoms. Flanking bays are filled with non-original glass block. A contemporary sign is centered above the main entrance. The high, geometric parapet is the most distinctive feature of the building, stepping up with symmetrical blocks that culminate in a zigzag pattern. East, south and west elevations of the theater are unadorned with the board-formed concrete of the structure expressed (Figures 6-9). The east elevation of the theater is partially obscured by the adjacent store building. Structural framework separates the visible portion of the east elevation, as well as the west elevation, into distinct bays. Mechanical and venting systems are located at the south, rear elevation.

The store building is attached to the east elevation of the theater and extends to the corner of Wilshire Boulevard and South Mansfield Avenue (Figures 2 and 5). The corner of the building is accentuated with a squat, two-story tower element. Rectangular in plan, the building has a flat roof with a decorative parapet that consists of stylized, geometric botanical elements. The north façade is one story high and five bays wide with the four west storefronts enclosed by non-original glass block. Two bays have contemporary metal doors set in the glass block. Piers between storefronts culminate in a decorative capital. The east bay, located at the corner, contains contemporary, aluminum and glass doors.

The east elevation of the store building is six bays wide. The two bays in the corner tower have contemporary aluminum windows. Like the north façade, the other four bays are separated by piers with decorative capitals. Highly stylized, decorative metal grilles obscure small, rectangular window openings along upper portions of the east elevation.

The south elevation of the store building is unadorned (Figures 6-7). Three, contemporary metal doors are spaced along the elevation and are reached by ramps. A prefabricated shed is placed adjacent to the elevation.

### *Interior*

The interior of the theater building is separated into two main spaces, the lobby and auditorium. The lobby has contemporary finishes, including linoleum flooring, wood sheathing on a structural pier located close to the entrance door and wainscoting along the south wall (Figures 10-11). A zigzag plaster band runs across the ceiling. Restrooms on either side of lobby have contemporary finishes (Figure 12).

The auditorium, accessed through two pairs of metal doors on the south wall of the lobby, is a high volume space with a raked floor (Figures 13-14). Metal seats are separated into three sections with carpeted aisles separating the wide center section from narrower side sections. The floor within the seating areas is polished concrete. The raked floor leads toward a stage at the south end of the space. The thrust stage is reached via several steps and three large screens hang above the stage. Contemporary florescent lighting hangs from the ceiling, as does a contemporary stage lighting system. Mechanical equipment is also evident along the ceiling. Walls are finished in plaster punctuated by piers. Several sections of decorative fluting are painted a contrasting color to stand out. The north wall of the auditorium has a string of small, fixed window openings.

Stairs at the southeast corner of the lobby lead to the second floor (Figures 15-16). The half-turn stair has carpeting and a metal railing with stylized botanical balusters. The second floor consists of several small rooms (Figure 17). Access to the projection booth was not available. Limited extant historic fabric consists of stepped door openings and plaster bas relief on the ceiling.

A contemporary passage connects the lobby of the theater building to the interior of the store building (Figures 18). Large volume rooms open off of a single-loaded corridor (Figures 19-21). The high volume rooms have contemporary finishes, including smooth plaster walls, carpeted floors, and exposed mechanical equipment at ceilings.

### Alterations

The buildings on the subject property have undergone numerous alterations since construction between 1931 and 1933. Historic photographs show the theater building with a substantial marquee above an inset entrance (Figures 22-40). Terrazzo flooring lined the deeply inset entrance and the earliest photographs shows the box office with highly polished break metal at the sidewalk line (Figure 28-29). The marquee was highlighted in neon with light bulbs on the underside. A blade sign ran along the high parapet. Bas relief appeared in wide panels above the marquee on the parapet. All retail stores along the north elevation had inset entrances with flanking glass storefronts. Glass transoms topped the storefronts. At the store building, decorative grilles were located above glass transoms. A large billboard had been located atop the store building by 1935. Parking was provided on a surface lot immediately adjacent to the west.

A building permit issued in 1946 for interior alterations replaced the entrance and extended the "foyer," resulting in a "better exit condition."<sup>7</sup> A new blade sign was installed between 1947 and 1948 (Figures 24-25 and 39-41), which features four stars shooting over the top of the high parapet. Secondary signage with shooting stars faced east and west. The highly polished metal box office was removed in 1962 and replaced with a new box office.<sup>8</sup> A separate permit was issued later in

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<sup>7</sup> Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety, "Application to Alter, Repair or Demolish," Permit #32505, December 31, 1946.

<sup>8</sup> Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety, "Application to Alter, Repair or Demolish," Permit #2552, February 5, 1962.

1962 for “parapet correction.”<sup>9</sup> The storefronts and theater entrance were further altered in 1968 for a cost of \$30,000.00.<sup>10</sup>

By 1982, when the subject property was first surveyed for historic significance, the blade sign had been removed and the survey form noted that “street level store and theater frontage has been substantially altered.”<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, the theater-store complex was judged to have sufficient integrity to be recommended eligible for inclusion in the National Register. The interior was remodeled in 1987.<sup>12</sup> Similar to photographs included with the previous surveys, photographs from 1997 show storefronts still inset with grills above signage (Figures 47-48). Further interior work was completed between 1998 and 2000.<sup>13</sup> Exterior alterations may have also been made at this time. Since 1997, storefronts have been infilled with glass block and metal grills on the north façade have been removed (Figures 47-48). Other alterations on the north façade include a new entry to the theater building at the sidewalk line. The billboard facing east on the corner tower of the store building has been removed, as was the marquee facing west. In addition, bas relief on the pediment above the theater entrance has been removed or covered over.

### Subject Property History

The subject property was constructed as the “Four Star Theatre” and was designed and constructed between 1931 and 1933 by architects Walker & Eisen and Clifford A. Balch.<sup>14</sup> The team concurrently designed four other theaters in Long Beach, Pasadena, El Centro, and Ventura.<sup>15</sup> Four Star Theatre appears to have been constructed by United Artists Theaters, Fox Film Corporation’s rival in the motion picture theater business. In 1931, United Artists Theaters and Fox West Coast Theaters negotiated a deal wherein eleven theatres in California owned by United Artists Theaters would be operated by Fox West Coast Theaters. One of the eleven was Four Star Theatre.<sup>16</sup> The theater opened on November 29, 1933 with the film “Berkeley Square,” starring Leslie Howard and Heather Angel, directed by Frank Lloyd. The film was based on a play of the same name by John Balderston, and Leslie Howard was nominated for an Academy Award for his performance.

Four Star Theatre was intended to show the highest quality first-run films of the era. The *Los Angeles Times* called it the “players’ ‘own’ theater,” presenting “only the best pictures, those in the “Four Star” class.”<sup>17</sup> Quoting the press release for the opening, the *Los Angeles Times* described the origins and purpose of the theater:

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<sup>9</sup> Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety, “Application to Alter, Repair or Demolish,” Permit #15828, July 19, 1962.

<sup>10</sup> Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety, “Application to Alter, Repair or Demolish,” Permit #75579, October 10, 1968.

<sup>11</sup> Terri Jacques and Nancy Michali, WESTEC Services, Inc., “Department of Parks and Recreation Historic Resources Inventory, Four Star Theatre,” December 15, 1982.

<sup>12</sup> Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety, “Application to Alter, Repair or Demolish,” Permit #65860, May 20, 1987.

<sup>13</sup> Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety, “Application for Building Permit and Certificate of Occupancy,” Permit #98016-40000-18617, September 10, 1998;

Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety, “Application for Building Permit and Certificate of Occupancy,” Permit #99016-10000-06565, April 15, 1999;

Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety, “Application for Building Permit and Certificate of Occupancy,” Permit #00016-10000-09750, June 13, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Southwest Builder and Contractor; “Four Star Theatre,” advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, November 29, 1933.

<sup>15</sup> Historic photographs of the Long Beach and Pasadena theatres, available at the California State Library Mott-Merge collection, appear very similar to the subject property.

<sup>16</sup> “Picture House Deal Revealed.” *Los Angeles Times*, September 5, 1931.

Fox West Coast Theaters was a division of the Fox Film Corporation.

<sup>17</sup> “Players’ ‘Own’ Theater to Open.” *Los Angeles Times*, November 24, 1933.

For years it has been the dream of Winfield Sheehan, film producer, to see a theater within easy reach of Hollywood that might, in a sense represent a laboratory where stars, directors, producers, technicians of the film industry might enjoy the finest creations of their fellow-workmen. Concurring in this thought, Charles P. Skou[r]jas, head of Fox West Coast Theaters, has created the Four Star Theatre: a showhouse that will be devoted entirely to the finest achievements of the motion-picture industry, a place where screen devotees, both within the industry, and the lay public, may applaud the outstanding examples of the motion-picture art.

There will be no stage shows or prologues. There will be no ballyhoo, fanfare, lights. There will be none of the gaudy, glittery trappings usually associated with the screening of great pictures. The Four Star Theatre will be a haven where picture lovers, whether they be glamorous celebrities or obscure nonentities, may relax and amid simple settings [and] enjoy the entertainment they came to see.<sup>18</sup>

Although originally conceived as a theater with “no ballyhoo, fanfare, lights,” by the late 1930s, the Four Star Theatre was being used for elaborate movie premieres. Throughout the 1960s and until 1970, bleachers were frequently erected on sidewalks surrounding the theater to accommodate crowds waiting to view stars arriving for the premieres.<sup>19</sup> Major premieres hosted at Four Star Theatre included “The Grapes of Wrath” (1940, directed by John Ford who won an Academy Award for the film); “Julius Caesar” (1953, starring Marlon Brando as Mark Antony); and “Wild is the Wind” (1957, starring Anna Magnani, Anthony Quinn). The *Los Angeles Times* described the premiere of “The Grapes of Wrath” as,

Lights... glamour... color... beautiful ladies gowned in the latest finery with escorts in evening attire... a crowd of 7500 fans, many of them hanging over billboards... wild cheers for the famous stars from a rooting section that resembled a college event... applause as well as cheers... jammed traffic... popping camera bulbs. All these were combined last night at the Four Star Theatre for the Los Angeles premiere of 20<sup>th</sup> Century-Fox's production of John Steinbeck's much-discussed novel.<sup>20</sup>

The last premier to be held at the subject property was “The Magic Christian,” starring Peter Sellers and Ringo Starr in 1970.

The building also included retail stores and offices in the small storefronts flanking the theater entrance. These storefronts were occupied by a variety of tenants, some of which were related to the theater business, such as the confectionary, Wilshire Nut Shop. The following table summarizes the tenants in each storefront from 1936 to 1987, based on research in available Los Angeles city directories. Long term tenants of the retail spaces include a beauty shop in 5102 Wilshire Boulevard (1939-1973), Vaidaphone Company in 5104 Wilshire Boulevard (1956-1973), Lee De Forest in 5106 Wilshire Boulevard (1936-1942), and Ryders Tuxedo Shop in 5108 Wilshire Boulevard (1956-1987).

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<sup>18</sup> Edwin Schallert, “New Art Theater,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 1933, 7.

<sup>19</sup> City of Los Angeles building permits for 5102-5114 Wilshire Boulevard.

<sup>20</sup> Read Kendall, “Premiere at Four Star Attracts Crowd of 7500,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 28, 1940, 13.

	5102	5104	5106	5108	5110	5112	5114
1936	Vacant	Noyes, Lyman W real est	De Forest Lee Laboratories	Rosenberg Ruth (wid H J) gift shop	Hamilton Modena dresses	Vacant	Baker Cath M confr
1938	Vacant	Noyes, Lyman W (Eva A) Realtor, Investments, Loans, Insurance, Rentals	Whiston, Raleigh W (Marjorie) radio labty	Friedman Jacob H (Eva) gift shop	Kohn Marie dresses	Four Star Theatre Bruce Fowler mgr	Baker Cath M Mrs (wid F A) nuts
1939	Bonadeer Dolly Mrs beauty shop	Noyes L W	De Forest Lee (Marie) radio lab	Vacant	Kohn Marie dresses	Four Star Theatre	Baker Cath M Mrs (wid F A) nuts
1942	Bonadeer Dolly Mrs beauty shop	Adler Albt F (Lacy R) real est	De Forest Lee (Marie M) electro- therapist	Vacant	Kohn Marie dresses	Four Star Theatre	Baker Kath Mrs confy
1956	Dolly's Beauty Parlor	Vaidaphone Co telphn eq, Vaida J E	Ohio Natl Life Ins Co inv dept	Ryders Tuxedo Shop	Mehren Edw Walsh rl est, Spitzer Co rl est	Four Star Theatre, United Artists Theatre Circuit Inc	Wilshire Nut Shop
1960	Dolly's Beauty Parlor	Vaidaphone Co telphn eq, Vaida J E	Ohio Natl Life Ins Co inv dept	Ryders Tuxedo Shop	Spitzer Real Estate Co, American Assn for the United Nations LA Chapter	Four Star Theatre, United Artists Theatre Circuit Inc	Paul's Sandwich Shop
1961	Don DS Beauty Salon	Vaidaphone Co	None	Ryders Tuxedo Shop	Spitzer Co, American Assn- United Nations	United Artists Thtre	Pauls Sandwich S
1962	Don DS Beauty Salon	Vaidaphone Co	Wilshire Electrnics	Ryders Tuxedo Shop	Spitzer Co, American Assn- United Nations	United Artists Thtre	Pauls Sandwich S
1963	Don DS Beauty Salon	Vaidaphone Co	Wilshire Electrnics	Ryders Tuxedo Shop	Vacant	United Artists Thtre	Pauls Sandwich Shop
1964	Don DS Beauty Salon	Vaidaphone Co	Wilshire Electrnics	Ryders Tuxedo Shop	Vacant	United Artists Thtre	Pauls Sandwich Shop
1965	Don DS Beauty Salon	Vaidaphone Co	Wilshire Electrnics	Ryders Tuxedo Shop	Bowzer Beautiful	United Artists Thtre	Pauls Sandwich Shop
1967	Don DS Beauty Salon	Vaidaphone Co	Wilshire Electrnics	Ryders Tuxedo Shop	Bowzer Beautiful, Veras-Dog Grooming	United Artists Thtre	Vacant

	<b>5102</b>	<b>5104</b>	<b>5106</b>	<b>5108</b>	<b>5110</b>	<b>5112</b>	<b>5114</b>
<b>1968</b>	Don DS Beauty Salon	Vaidaphone Co	Wilshire Electronics	Ryders Tuxedo Shop	Bowzer Beautiful	United Artists Thtre	Vacant
<b>1969</b>	Don DS Beauty Salon	Vaidaphone Co	None	Ryders Tuxedo Shop	Bowzer Beautiful	United Artists Thtre	4 Star Theatre
<b>1973</b>	Don-D's Beauty Salon, Josef's Beauty Salon	Vaidaphone Co	Postal Instant Press	Ryders Tuxedo Shop	Bowzer Beautiful	United Artists Thtre Circuit Inc, Richard Smith	Vacant
<b>1987</b>	June Art Gallery	A Aalbert Machine Co, Everbest Business Machines	A-1 Quick Printing	Ryders Tuxedo Shop	Bowzer Beautiful	Four Star Theatre	Vacant

Of the several long term tenants, one, Lee de Forest (1873-1961), is noteworthy. He called himself the "father of radio,"<sup>21</sup> as he invented the three-element radio vacuum tube and devised the first vacuum tube amplifier and oscillator. His phonofilm was the first patent to record sound directly onto film. California State Historical Landmark No. 836, the Pioneer Electronics Research Laboratory, where Lee de Forest worked, was the original site of the laboratory and factory of Federal Telegraph Company.<sup>22</sup> Lee de Forest sold one of his companies to RCA in 1931. As all of his patents and important inventions occurred prior to 1931, it is unclear what work he was engaged in at the subject property, although it is clear that his most important work did not occur there.

When constructed, the subject property was owned by lawyer Albert Lee Stephens, Sr. (1874-1965).<sup>23</sup> Nominated by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1935, Albert Lee Stephens, Sr., held a seat on the U.S. District Court Southern District of California until 1937. Between 1937 and his death in 1965, he served as a judge at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.<sup>24</sup> Albert Lee Stephens, Jr. (1913-2001), and his brother Clark E. Stephens, inherited the property in 1953 from their mother, Marie Clark Stephens, who had passed away two years earlier.<sup>25</sup> Albert Lee Stephens, Jr., along with his daughters Marylee Stephens Thomason and Virginia Stephens Newton, owned the subject property until 1978.<sup>26</sup> Albert Lee Stephens, Jr., followed his father into law and was President John F. Kennedy's first appointee to the federal court, serving as a U.S. District Court judge between 1961 until the early 1990s.

The Stephens family leased the theater to United Artists Theatres. In 1975, a report was presented by Police Chief Edward M. Davis to the Los Angeles City Council, accusing of the theater of being used for "lewd conduct and assignation."<sup>27</sup> United Artists Theaters had subleased the theater to Mitchell Brothers Film Group between 1973 and 1976. The Mitchell Brothers, James Lloyd "Jim" Mitchell and Artie Jay Mitchell, were infamous for their operation of 11 adult cinemas and producing and directing many adult films, most notably "Behind the Green Door" (1972).<sup>28</sup> The report stated that "this theater [Four Star Theatre], presents strictly pornographic material, much of which is of the hard-core variety."<sup>29</sup> While Judge Stephens acknowledged his ownership of the theater, he noted that the lease with United Artists Theaters from 1931, when there were no pornographic movie houses, allowed for any type of sublease. However, Judge Stephens had objected to the sublease in writing when he became aware of it.<sup>30</sup> The Mitchell Brothers had one last blow-out "Bicentennial Tribute" on June 11, 1976, before vacating the theater.<sup>31</sup>

After Mitchell Brothers ceased showing adult films, the Four Star Theatre increasingly showed second-run and independent, art house films.<sup>32</sup> The Stephens family sold the subject property

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<sup>21</sup> His autobiography of that title was published in 1950.

<sup>22</sup> California State Parks, California Office of Historic Preservation, <[http://ohp.parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=21522](http://ohp.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=21522)>.

<sup>23</sup> Dennis McLellan, "Albert Stephens Jr., 88; Federal Judge, Courtroom Innovator," *Los Angeles Times*, September 19, 2001.

<sup>24</sup> Federal Judicial Center, "History of the Federal Judiciary," <<http://www.fjc.gov/servlet/nGetInfo?jid=2284&cid=43&ctype=dc&instate=ca>>.

<sup>25</sup> Grant Deed #2593, August 27, 1953; California Death Records, <<http://vitals.rootsweb.ancestry.com/ca/death/search.cgi>>.

<sup>26</sup> Grant Deed #78-297615, March 22, 1978; Grant Deed #78-297616, March 22, 1978; Grant Deed #78-297617, March 22, 1978.

<sup>27</sup> Dennis McLellan, "Albert Stephens Jr., 88; Federal Judge, Courtroom Innovator," *Los Angeles Times*, September 19, 2001.

<sup>28</sup> The Mitchell Brothers also rose to notoriety in 1991 when Jim was convicted of killing Artie.

<sup>29</sup> Kenneth Reich, "Davis Ties 2 Judges to L.A. Porno Theater," *Los Angeles Times*, September 5, 1975, C1.

<sup>30</sup> Kenneth Reich, "Judge Named in City Case on 'Red Light' Law," *Los Angeles Times*, October 25, 1975,

A1.

<sup>31</sup> Display Ad, *Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 1976, H20.

<sup>32</sup> Jon Krampner, "Theater Bargains; Low-Priced Movie Houses Bring Down the High Cost of a Night Out," *Los Angeles Times*, October 20, 1988, F6.

shortly after the scandal to Ben A. and Maran A. Karbelnig.<sup>33</sup> The Karbelnigs owned the property for only one year, after which they sold it to four couples: Bruno and Luissetta Forti, Albert and Frieda Cavalier, Maurice and Fortune Castiel, and Sol and Mireille Cohen.<sup>34</sup> The theater continued showing movies until 1997, when the subject property was sold to Oasis Church.<sup>35</sup>

### Designers

#### *Walker & Eisen*

Walker & Eisen, the collaboration from 1919 until 1941 of Albert R. Walker (1881-1958) and Percy Eisens (1866-1946),<sup>36</sup> was one of the top architectural firms in Los Angeles for several decades. The firm was larger than close rivals Parkinson & Parkinson,<sup>37</sup> and some argued that their work was more varied and imaginative. Walker was later described as having had “a definite flair for the spectacular, façade-wise and even plan-wise... anything that would give... [a building] sparkle and interest.”<sup>38</sup> Both partners were classically trained and the office was known for the quality of commercial and institutional building designs. Their work was always done as a group effort. Walker & Eisen’s large roster of projects included (in Los Angeles unless otherwise noted): the Fine Arts (Signal Oil) Building, Oviatt Building, Texas Company Building/United Artists Theater, Taft Building (Hollywood), California Lutheran Hospital (with a later additions by Albert Walker’s successor firm), Torrance City Hall, Municipal Auditorium and Public Library (City Hall still extant, currently used as a bank) and San Luis Obispo County Court House.<sup>39</sup> The firm’s notable hospitality industry work included the Beverly Wilshire Hotel, Hollywood Plaza Hotel, El Cortez Hotel (San Diego), El Mirador Hotel (Palm Springs), William Penn Hotel (Whittier), Mar Monte Hotel (Santa Barbara), Hilton Hotel and Breakers Hotel (latter two both in Long Beach).

#### *Clifford Allison Balch*

Clifford Allison Balch (c. 1880-1963)<sup>40</sup> graduated high school in Oakland in 1897 and from Throop College in Pasadena in 1901.<sup>41</sup> He worked as a draftsman for Reginald D. Johnson in Pasadena for three years, followed by seven years as draftsman for W.C. Pennell in Los Angeles.<sup>42</sup> Architects he worked for included: William B. Edwards (Pasadena, 1911-13); Greene and Greene (Pasadena, 1913-14); Reginald D. Johnson (Pasadena, 1914-16); W.C. Pennell (Los Angeles, 1920-28); and in his own practice (Los Angeles, 1928-46).<sup>43</sup> Clifford Balch was granted admission into the American Institute of Architects (AIA) on January 17, 1946.<sup>44</sup> Despite the fact that Balch was older than his brother William Glenn Balch, his application to join the AIA was proposed by William, who had joined

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<sup>33</sup> Grant Deed #78-297617, March 22, 1978.

<sup>34</sup> Grant Deed #79-1225396, October 31, 1979; Grant Deed #79-1225397, October 31, 1979; Grant Deed #89-1813590; Grant Deed #97-234087, February 12, 1997.

<sup>35</sup> Grant Deed #97-234087, January 17, 1997.

<sup>36</sup> Henry F. Withey, AIA and Elsie Rathburn Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)* (Los Angeles: Hennesy & Ingalls, 1956) reprinted 1970, 194.

<sup>37</sup> Between 1923 and 1924, Walker & Eisen employed 50 draftsmen, while the Parkinsons had only 18.

<sup>38</sup> Donald J. Schippers, “Walker & Eisen: Twenty Years of Los Angeles Architecture, 1920-1940,” *Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly* 46, 378.

<sup>39</sup> Schippers 379.

<sup>40</sup> “Obituary 2,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 18, 1963, B15.

<sup>41</sup> The American Institute of Architects Application for Corporate Membership for Clifford Allison Balch, dated 1 Nov 1946, 2 (The AIA Historical Directory of American Architects, <<http://www.aia.org/about/history/aiab082017>>).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Date based on handwritten correspondence from Clifford Allison Balch stamped as “received” on 23 Dec 1946 by the American Institute of Architects. The correspondence is presumably in response to a letter to Balch regarding his membership status in the American Institute of Architects, and the need to document his previous relevant work experience (The AIA Historical Directory of American Architects, <<http://www.aia.org/about/history/aiab082017>>).

<sup>44</sup> The American Institute of Architects Record of Registration for Clifford Allison Balch, 19 Nov 1946, signed by Jeanette Dolsberry of the California State Board of Architectural Examiners (The AIA Historical Directory of American Architects, <<http://www.aia.org/about/history/aiab082017>>).



the AIA several years before him, in 1943.<sup>45</sup> Clifford Balch lived in Los Angeles, California and had an office at 1725 Silver Lake Boulevard in 1946.<sup>46</sup>

Clifford Balch is associated with design of at least sixteen other theaters in Southern California, including:<sup>47</sup> the Sunbeam Theatre, Highland Park (1914); California Theatre, San Diego (1919); Alameda Theatre, East Los Angeles (date unknown); Imperial Theatre, Long Beach (1925); United Artists Pasadena Theatre, Old Town, Pasadena (1931-32); Adams Theater, San Diego (1935); Brawley Theatre, Brawley (1936-37); Lido Theatre, Los Angeles (1936-37); Lido Theatre, Newport Beach (1939); Newport Theatre, Newport Beach (1939); River Theatre, Bakersfield (date unknown); Rivoli Theatre, Van Nuys (date unknown); San Gabriel Theatre, San Gabriel (1941); and State Theatre, Pomona (1939-41). Several websites credit Clifford Balch with design of over thirty Southern California movie theaters, although more research is needed with primary sources to confirm extent of Clifford Balch's work.<sup>48</sup> Clifford Balch is also associated with the design of Sardi's Restaurant #1, Hollywood (date unknown).<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> The American Institute of Architects Application for Corporate Membership for Clifford Allison Balch, dated 1 Nov 1946, 3 (The AIA Historical Directory of American Architects, <<http://www.aia.org/about/history/aiab082017>>).

<sup>46</sup> The American Institute of Architects Application for Corporate Membership for Clifford Allison Balch, dated 1 Nov 1946, 1.

<sup>47</sup> List of projects from the Pacific Coast Architecture Database (PCAD), Balch, Clifford A., <<https://digital.lib.washington.edu/architect/partners/421/>>.

<sup>48</sup> "Clifford Balch," Cinematresasures.org, <<http://cinematresasures.org/architects/188>>; "Clifford Balch," Sanclementetheatre.com, <<http://www.sanclementetheatre.com/Architect.html>>.

<sup>49</sup> List of projects from the Pacific Coast Architecture Database (PCAD), "Balch, Clifford A.," <<https://digital.lib.washington.edu/architect/partners/421/>>.

## VI. HISTORIC CONTEXTS

The following discussion presents historic themes relevant to the evaluation of the subject property.

### Wilshire Boulevard

The subject property is located on Wilshire Boulevard, close to Miracle Mile, which is located two and a half blocks to the west. Wilshire Boulevard is a major thoroughfare extending west from downtown Los Angeles. While initial development along Wilshire Boulevard in the early 1900s was largely residential, increasing automobile ownership made possible development of a linear commercial district, or “linear downtown,”<sup>50</sup> as described below:

During the 1920s, commercial real estate values in the survey area soared and Wilshire Boulevard gained its moniker, “Fifth Avenue of the West”... The development of Wilshire Boulevard as a commercial area was closely tied to the rise of the automobile. Los Angeles embraced the automobile earlier and to a greater extent than other American cities during the interwar years. As driving downtown to conduct one’s business became increasingly inconvenient, the amenities along Wilshire Boulevard provided a pleasant and attractive alternative. While the commercial decentralization out of downtown Los Angeles began in the early 1920s, it wasn’t until the late 1920s and 1930s that commercial centers west of downtown, like Wilshire Boulevard, became true retail destinations. With the increased use of the automobile and a growing residential population near Wilshire, developers touted Wilshire Boulevard’s diverse selection of department stores and wide, auto-oriented streetscape.<sup>51</sup>

The commercial area of Wilshire Boulevard, spanning from roughly La Brea to Fairfax avenues, known as Miracle Mile, is renowned as one of the first outlying commercial corridors developed to challenge the hegemony of downtown Los Angeles and to take advantage of the emerging popularity of automobiles.<sup>52</sup> The development of this commercial corridor, which began with A.W. Ross’s purchase of 18 acres along Wilshire Boulevard in 1920,<sup>53</sup> was dubbed a “miracle” for several reasons. First, it occurred in spite of restrictive residential zoning that had been established by previous owner, Gaylord Wilshire. Second, it was developed in the absence of a previously established residential or retail community. According to historian Richard Longstreth,

the Miracle Mile codified and intensified those characteristics that made Wilshire so important to Los Angeles: a linear structure, punctuated by freestanding towers that rose amid low-density development, the whole anchored to a broad street where traffic flowed unimpeded – a place that was easy to reach, that always seemed busy but never crowded, a place permeated with natural light and air...<sup>54</sup>

At the time that A.W. Ross, a relatively unknown real estate agent, began to assemble property along Wilshire Boulevard, the area he had selected was substantially undeveloped and his goal of establishing a major business district was ridiculed. However, in hindsight, it appears that Ross’s selection of the area was carefully considered. The area was within a “four mile radius of Los

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<sup>50</sup> Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971, 87.

<sup>51</sup> Marlise Fratinardo, PCR Services Corporation. California Department of Parks and Recreation 523B (Building, Structure and Object Record) survey form for 3100 Wilshire Boulevard, recorded September 4, 2008.

<sup>52</sup> Richard Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall: Architecture, the Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920-1950* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1998), 127.

<sup>53</sup> Amanda Schachter, “The Miracle Mile: An Historical Tour,” prepared for the Los Angeles Conservancy, 1984.

<sup>54</sup> Longstreth, 133.

Angeles' wealthiest residential districts of the period: Westlake, Hollywood, and Beverly Hills.<sup>55</sup> It promised to be in the path of western expansion from downtown, and its lack of established infrastructure allowed the developer to orient construction toward the newly popular automobile. Ross gambled that people living within a few miles of his new retail district would "prefer the drive to the Miracle Mile to the journey downtown if the right goods were available,"<sup>56</sup> and if parking was easy and accessible. To diffuse traffic and make the whole development look larger, Ross placed each of the major buildings at "least one block from one another rather than clustered around an intersection."<sup>57</sup>

The restrictive zoning that seemed such a limiting factor – requiring variances for commercial buildings on a project-by-project basis – proved over the long-term to be a blessing, in that it allowed Ross a great deal of control over each project. Ross presented each project individually to the Planning Commission and in so doing he established a "more decisive role in determining the choice and arrangement of tenants as well as the size, location, and character of the buildings"<sup>58</sup> than would have been possible otherwise.

The first major retail establishment that Ross persuaded to locate in the Miracle Mile was Desmond's, a prominent clothing store with three downtown locations. The Desmond's building (1928), located at 5500-5514 Wilshire Boulevard, designed by Gilbert Stanley Underwood, was the first multi-story office space anywhere along the boulevard. The building, with a large, low-slung retail footprint and relatively small tower, established several design themes that became prevalent in the district. It had a large footprint to maximize retail square footage and an unobstructed office tower, which gave the building a metropolitan character, provided tenant space, and acted as a built-in billboard for advertising. This retail store also featured its own surface parking lot at the rear of the building, which became a popular method for providing parking relatively easily and cheaply.

After Desmond's, a number of other retailers were lured to the new Miracle Mile. Myer Siegel (women's apparel) and C.H. Baker (shoes) opened stores in the Dominguez-Wilshire Building (1930-1931), located at 5410 Wilshire Boulevard and designed by Morgan, Walls and Clements. Other major retailers included Ralph's Grocery (1928), Coulters (1937, demolished), and the May Company (1938). Marking the eastern edge of the precinct was the E. Clem Wilson Building (Mutual of Omaha, 1929-1930), located at 5217 Wilshire Boulevard and designed by the architectural firm of Meyer and Holler. Between these large anchor buildings at each major intersection, low-rise retail structures were designed to front on Wilshire.

Built during the late 1920s and 1930s, the majority of buildings in the Miracle Mile exhibit aspects of the Art Deco style – Zig Zag Moderne and Streamline Moderne – popular during the period.<sup>59</sup> Zig Zag Moderne, most prevalent in the 1920s, is epitomized in the use of vertical massing, towers, polychromatic terra cotta, metal, and neon-lighting. Streamline Moderne, more common in the 1930s, is characterized by curved corners, horizontal lines, use of glass, and undecorated surfaces.<sup>60</sup> Today, this area contains one of the best and most concentrated collections of Art Deco buildings in Los Angeles.

### Movie Theaters

Commercially produced motion pictures began to be shown in the early twentieth century, emerging from the tradition of live stage performances, such as vaudeville. The earliest movie theaters were existing buildings modified to accommodate film screenings, typically shorts which were

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<sup>55</sup> Schacter.

<sup>56</sup> Longstreth, 128.

<sup>57</sup> Longstreth, 131.

<sup>58</sup> Longstreth, 129.

<sup>59</sup> Schacter.

<sup>60</sup> Miracle Mile Historic District Request for Determination of Eligibility, Significance section.

accompanied by live entertainment. As films developed into feature-length movies, theaters were purpose-built to enhance the viewing experience. As attendance increased, building exteriors and interiors became more elaborate, featuring lighted marquee and blade signs, decorative box offices, and ornamental prosceniums. Movie theaters from the 1920s were frequently designed in exotic or revival styles, and amenities included opulent lobbies and lounges, served by ushers.

Movie theaters developed during this period can be divided into several different categories, depending on building design and types of films shown. These categories include first-run de luxe theaters, movie palaces, and neighborhood theaters.<sup>61</sup> First-run de luxe theaters, like the Four Star Theatre, were typically located in central shopping districts and showed exclusively first-run films, newly released films that were guaranteed to particular theaters within a designated geographic area without competition from other theaters in that district for a set period of time.<sup>62</sup> The feature film played until a new film was released and was frequently supplemented by short comedies or newsreels. With seating capacity of up to one thousand, these were the finest movie theaters in smaller cities and large suburbs. In large cities, such as Los Angeles, numerous first-run de luxe theaters were developed to serve different commercial districts in the city, including Miracle Mile. As major movie studios began to acquire theaters and develop theater chains, they frequently focused on first-run theaters which produced the largest percentage of ticket sales.

Movie palaces were first-run de luxe theaters built on an even grander scale. With seating for up to six thousand, these theaters' lobbies, lounges, and other amenities were extravagant and opulent. Displaying the most current architectural trends, these exotic and revival style buildings were dripping in elaborate ornamentation of the finest materials. Frequently subsidized by major movie studios, movie palaces were used for the most ostentatious film premieres in large cities, featuring star actors and actresses and crowds of fans.

Neighborhood theaters were typically located in residential areas, rather than commercial districts. These theaters were considerably smaller than first-run de luxe theaters or movie palaces, seating as few as four hundred. Amenities and ornamentation, though still opulent, were scaled down to accommodate the surrounding neighborhood and smaller audiences. Neighborhood theaters typically showed first- or second-run films after the premieres in first-run de luxe theaters or movie palaces.

After the extravagant building campaigns of the 1920s, movie theaters were hard hit by the Great Depression. In 1930, weekly attendance totaled approximately 90 million in the United States. By 1932, that number had dropped to 60 million and more than eight thousand theaters had closed.<sup>63</sup> Although movie theaters (both first-run de luxe theaters and neighborhood theaters) continued to be constructed in large cities, they typically were more subdued in design than earlier, opulent theaters. Theater design also began to respond to automobile traffic by emphasizing larger marquee signs and taller towers at theater entrances.

#### Other Nearby Movie Theaters

##### *El Rey Theater, 5515 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles*

El Rey Theater was designed by Clifford A. Balch and opened in 1936 as part of the Pacific States theater chain. El Rey served as a first-run theater, similar to Four Star Theatre, though El Rey does

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<sup>61</sup> These categories are adapted from Maggie Valentine's *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: an Architectural History of the Movie Theatre* (see pages 54-55). Valentine includes several other categories, such as third- and fourth-run, vaudeville, and double-feature theaters, which are not relevant to evaluation of Four Star Theatre and are thus excluded from this context.

<sup>62</sup> Maggie Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: an Architectural History of the Movie Theatre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 54.

<sup>63</sup> Valentine, p. 91.

not appear to have hosted movie premieres.<sup>64</sup> El Rey was later operated by Fox West Coast Theaters and Mann Theaters. Since 1994, it has been used as a live music venue. The building retains many features of its original Art Deco design, including the blade sign, marquee, terrazzo sidewalk, and box office. El Rey was designated an HCM in 1991.

*Fox Wilshire (Saban) Theater, 8440 Wilshire Boulevard, Beverly Hills*

Fox Wilshire Theater was designed by S. Charles Lee and opened in 1930 as a movie palace for Fox West Coast Theaters. The building includes an office tower above the theater. In addition to the opulent lobby, the theater had a stage for live performances before the film. Fox Wilshire hosted numerous movie premieres, including "How to Marry A Millionaire" (1953), starring Marilyn Monroe. The theater closed as a film venue in 1977 and was reopened for live stage performances in the 1980s. It was renamed the Saban Theater in 2009 and was listed in the National Register in April 2012 under criteria A and C. The National Register nomination describes the significance of Fox Wilshire as follows:

The iconic exterior of the building with its simple Art Deco ornamentation and central office tower is one of the first buildings seen by pedestrians and drivers entering the eastern boundary of the city of Beverly Hills. Over its 80 year history, the Wilshire has been the site of numerous film premieres, exclusive first-run film engagements, live concerts and touring Broadway shows. Despite several renovations, the largely intact interior of the theater continues to delight and amaze theater-goers with its columned two-story rotunda lobby, spacious orchestra and balcony level seating for 2,000, and its breath-taking silver, gold and black proscenium and organ screens. The connection with architect S. Charles Lee, a long-time resident of the city of Beverly Hills, make the Wilshire significant also as a virtually intact example of Lee's transition from the French Regency style of the Tower and Los Angeles Theatres to the nascent Art Deco style that would come to dominate movie palace architecture in the 1930's.<sup>65</sup>

*Elite (Music Hall) Theater, 9036 Wilshire Boulevard, Beverly Hills*

Elite Theater was designed by Wilfred P. Verity and opened in 1936. In 1948, it was renamed Music Hall Theater, one of a group of three theaters with the same name which frequently ran the same films. The other two Music Hall Theaters were located at 8<sup>th</sup> and Broadway in downtown Los Angeles and 6523 Hollywood Boulevard in Hollywood.<sup>66</sup> The theater was converted into a television studio in 1950 and eventually housed production of "the Liberace Show" and "Life with Elizabeth" starring Betty White. It returned to showings film in 1956 and became part of the Laemmle circuit in the 1970s. The theater was divided into three auditoriums in the 1990s.<sup>67</sup> It is listed in the Historic Property Data File for Los Angeles County under status code 5S2, meaning "individual property that is eligible for local listing or designation."

*Wilshire Regina (Fine Arts) Theater, 8556 Wilshire Boulevard, Beverly Hills*

Wilshire Regina opened in 1937 and was designed by an unknown architect. In 1948, the theater was acquired by Fox West Coast Theaters and was reopened under the name Fine Arts Theater on December 26 with the premiere of "The Red Shoes."<sup>68</sup> It later was operated by Mann Theaters and Laemmle, before closing in 2009. It is listed in the Historic Property Data File for Los Angeles County under status code 3S, meaning "appears eligible for listing in National Register as an

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<sup>64</sup> Based on cursory review of the Historical Los Angeles Times database.

<sup>65</sup> Edward J. Kelsey, "The Wilshire Theatre: National Register of Historic Places nomination form," August 10, 2011.

<sup>66</sup> "Display Ad," *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, 1950, p. A10.

<sup>67</sup> Movie Palaces along Wilshire Boulevard, "Music Hall Theatre," <<https://sites.google.com/site/wilshiremoviepalaces/music-hall-theatre>>.

<sup>68</sup> Movie Palaces along Wilshire Boulevard, "Fine Arts Theatre," <<https://sites.google.com/site/wilshiremoviepalaces/fine-arts-theatre?>>.

individual property through survey evaluation.”

*Fox La Brea Theater, 857 S. La Brea Avenue, Los Angeles*

Fox La Brea Theater was designed by Richard D. King and opened in 1926. In 1960, the theater was renovated and reopened as Art La Brea. Shortly thereafter, it became Toho La Brea, showing primarily Japanese films.<sup>69</sup> It has since been converted into a church. The building does not appear to have been previously evaluated.

*Fox Ritz Theater, 5214 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles*

Fox Ritz Theater was designed by Lewis A. Smith and opened in 1926 under the management of Fox West Coast Theaters. The building served as a major first-run theater, comparable to Four Star Theatre, until 1963 when became the Lindy Opera Company, offering live stage performances.<sup>70</sup> The building was demolished in 1977.

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<sup>69</sup> Movie Palaces along Wilshire Boulevard, “Fox La Brea,” <<https://sites.google.com/site/wilshiremoviepalaces/fox-la-brea>>.

<sup>70</sup> Movie Palaces along Wilshire Boulevard, “Fox Ritz Theater,” <<https://sites.google.com/site/wilshiremoviepalaces/ritz>>.

## VII. HISTORIC RESOURCE ASSESSMENT

### Individual Eligibility

Because eligibility criteria for local HCM designation align in large degree with eligibility criteria for National and California Registers, the following evaluation considers eligibility under each of the criteria at federal, state and local levels under a single heading. **A DPR survey form is provided in Exhibit E.**

#### *Criterion A/1/1*

Based on the information presented above, the following eligibility criteria may be considered for evaluation of movie theaters:<sup>71</sup>

- Originally constructed to exhibit films
- Constructed during the period of significance (1918-1949), although most of the significant examples were constructed in the 1920s
- Features elaborate design, often an expansive forecourt to accommodate crowds and arriving stars
- May also be significant as a good example of an architectural style from its period (particularly Fantasy and Art Deco architectural styles) and/or the work of a significant architect or builder
- May be located in proximity to a major motion picture studio
- May include first-floor commercial storefronts
- Retains most of the essential physical features from the period of significance
- May have been designed to accommodate movie premieres and other major entertainment industry events

The subject property meets most of the above eligibility criteria as a de luxe movie theater and appears to have made a significant contribution to broad patterns of our history. Constructed around 1931 on Wilshire Boulevard, the theater was operated by United Artists Theaters. The subject property included first-floor commercial storefronts, both in the theater building as well as the adjacent store building on the property. The theater showed many premieres, most notably, "The Grapes of Wrath" and "Julius Caesar." Entrance to the theater was inset to accommodate crowds and arriving stars. The period of significance for the Four Star Theatre, as a de luxe movie theater, extends from its construction between 1931 and ending in 1970, the date of the last premier. The subject property is potentially eligible under National and California register criteria (A/1), as well as local HCM criteria (1). However, due to loss of integrity, described more fully below, the subject property is no longer able to convey its significance under this criterion.

#### *Criterion B/2/2*

Research has not shown the subject property to be associated with the lives of persons important in local, state or national history. While the Stephens family owned the subject property for almost five decades, they are best known for their work as judges in the U.S. court system and did not do their important work at the subject property or in connection with the subject property. Furthermore, while the Mitchell Brothers Film Group operated the theater for three years, they are most closely associated with the O'Farrell Theatre in San Francisco, which continues to run as an adult theater, showing both movies and live performances. Additional investigation, which is outside the scope of this report, would be required to determine if the Mitchell brothers on their own are significant persons in our past and their contribution to the history of the adult film industry. While Lee de Forest is also an important person in our past, his most important work was not conducted at the

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<sup>71</sup> Eligibility criteria were adapted from those established for SurveyLA, the City of Los Angeles city-wide historic resources survey. The relevant context/theme is Entertainment Industry, 1908-1980/ Movie Theaters Associated with the Entertainment Industry, 1918-1949.

subject property, rather he has been associated with Pioneer Electronics Research Laboratory. Therefore, the subject property is not eligible under National or California register criteria (B/2) or local HCM criteria (2).

#### *Criterion C/3/3*

The following eligibility criteria may be considered for evaluation of Art Deco style architecture:<sup>72</sup>

- Emphasis on verticality
- Smooth wall surfaces, such as stucco
- Zigzags, chevrons and other stylized and geometric motifs as decorative elements on façade
- Metal windows, often fixed sash and casement

When constructed, the subject property met the above criteria as an excellent example of Art Deco style architecture. With its high geometric parapet, the building exhibited decorative features including zigzags, chevrons, and stylized, geometric motifs. Fenestration was fronted by decorative grill work. In addition, Walker and Eisen are important local architects. The period of significance for its Art Deco style architecture is 1931, the year of construction. Therefore, the subject property is potentially eligible under National and California register criteria (C/3), as well as local HCM criteria (3). However, due to loss of integrity, described more fully below, the subject property is no longer able to convey its significance under this criterion.

#### *Criterion D/4*

The subject property cannot be reasonably expected to yield information important in prehistory or history. It is not eligible under National or California register criteria (D/4).

### **Historic District Eligibility**

#### Miracle Mile Historic District

The Miracle Mile Historic District, which spans Wilshire Boulevard between La Brea and Burnside (5320-5519 Wilshire Boulevard), was surveyed in the early 1980s as part of the Los Angeles Rail Rapid Transit Program. While the survey identified contributing properties to the historic district as far east as South Sycamore Avenue, these properties were not included within the district boundaries (Map 4). As a result of this survey, the Miracle Mile Historic District was identified and assigned a status code of "2S2," or "individual property determined eligible for National Register by consensus through Section 106 process." The 19 contributing resources of the National Register-eligible district are significant as a commercial corridor of Art Deco buildings from the 1920s and 1930s. Properties officially determined eligible for listing in the National Register are automatically listed in the California Register. As such, the district is an historical resource under CEQA.

The subject property was not included within the boundaries of the historic district, nor was it identified as a contributing property outside of the historic district boundary; the survey found the subject property ineligible for listing in the National Register. Given distance and new construction in the intervening blocks, the subject property continues to not appear eligible for inclusion in the Miracle Mile Historic District. There is no other possible historic district in the vicinity to which the subject property could contribute.

### **Integrity**

In addition to meeting one of the four criteria, National and California register-eligible properties must also retain sufficient integrity to convey historic significance from their period of significance. A property either retains its integrity, the physical and visual characteristics necessary to convey its

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<sup>72</sup> Eligibility criteria were adapted from those established for SurveyLA. The relevant context/theme is Architecture and Engineering, 1850-1980/L.A. Modernism, 1919-1980/Related Responses to Modernism, 1926-1970/Art Deco, 1926-1939.



significance, or it does not. Evaluation of integrity is founded on “an understanding of a property’s physical features and how they relate to its significance.”<sup>73</sup> The seven aspects of integrity are Location, Design, Setting, Materials, Workmanship, Feeling, and Association.

California Register defines integrity as “the authenticity of an historical resource’s physical identity evidenced by the survival of characteristics that existed during the resource’s period of significance.” California Register regulations (Title 14, Chapter 11.5, §4852 (c)) state that “it is possible that historical resources may not retain sufficient integrity to meet the criteria for listing in the National Register, but they may still be eligible for listing in the California Register.” OHP has consistently interpreted this to mean that a California Register-eligible property must retain “substantial” integrity.

The subject property retains its integrity of *location*, as it has not been moved. Its integrity of *design* has been greatly compromised. As it appears today, the subject property retains very few of its character defining features. While it was originally constructed in an Art Deco style, little characteristic features of this style remain (compare Figures 3 and 5 with Figures 28-29, 40, 42, 47-48). All entryways into storefronts and theater have been significantly altered. Openings into the stores have been enclosed by glass brick at the sidewalk line and there is no evidence of transoms or insets. The theater box office has been removed as has the inset entrance to the theater building. New aluminum and glass doors provide access to the theater at the sidewalk line. Windows with metal grills have been removed along the north façade. The high parapet has been altered with the bas relief covered or removed with blank panels. The blade sign and marquee have also been removed. The interior retains almost no historic fabric. Aside from the volume of the auditorium, there are no features that would suggest the building had been used as a de luxe theater.

The subject property retains its integrity of *setting* (defined in part as relationships between buildings and other features, or open space), but its integrity of *materials* has been significantly compromised by the loss of character defining features. These alterations outline the loss of *workmanship*, or evidence of artisans’ labor and skill in constructing or altering a building. Because of these changes, the subject property’s *feeling*, or presence of physical features that, taken together, convey the property’s original character, is no longer present, as there are no features other than its basic configuration that remain.

For its integrity of *association* to be retained, the property must be sufficiently intact to convey its earlier relationships to an observer. As evidenced by historic photographs, the subject property’s association as a de luxe movie theater has been lost. Like feeling, association requires the presence of physical features that would convey the historic character of a property. Therefore, the subject property lacks integrity from its period of significance.

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<sup>73</sup> Rebecca H. Shrimpton, editor, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* (Washington, DC: National Park Service, Department of the Interior, 1998) 44, <<http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb15/>>.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

This historic resource assessment finds that while subject property is significant as a de luxe movie theater designed in an Art Deco style, it does not retain sufficient integrity to be eligible for listing in the National and California registers or for designation as a City of Los Angeles HCM. Furthermore, the subject property is not located within the boundaries of a potential historic district. Therefore the proposed project, demolition of the subject property, will not cause material impairment of the significance of a historical resource and constitutes a less than significant impact on historical resources under CEQA.

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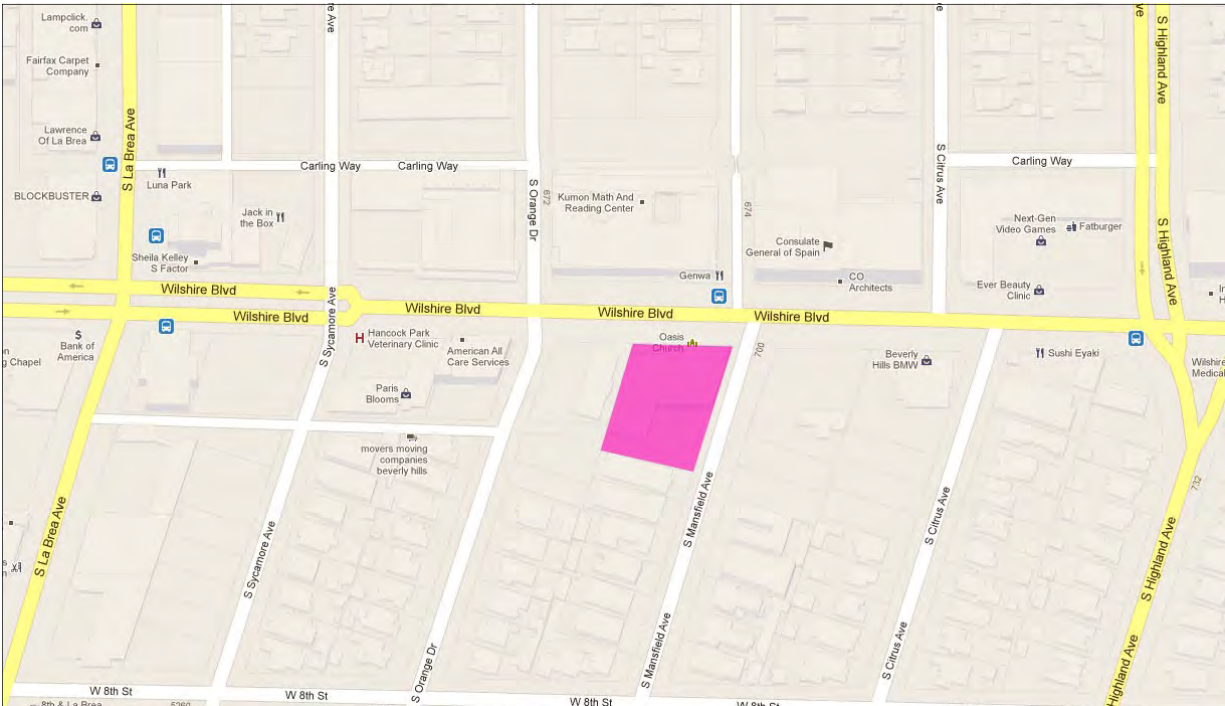
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## **EXHIBIT A: MAPS**



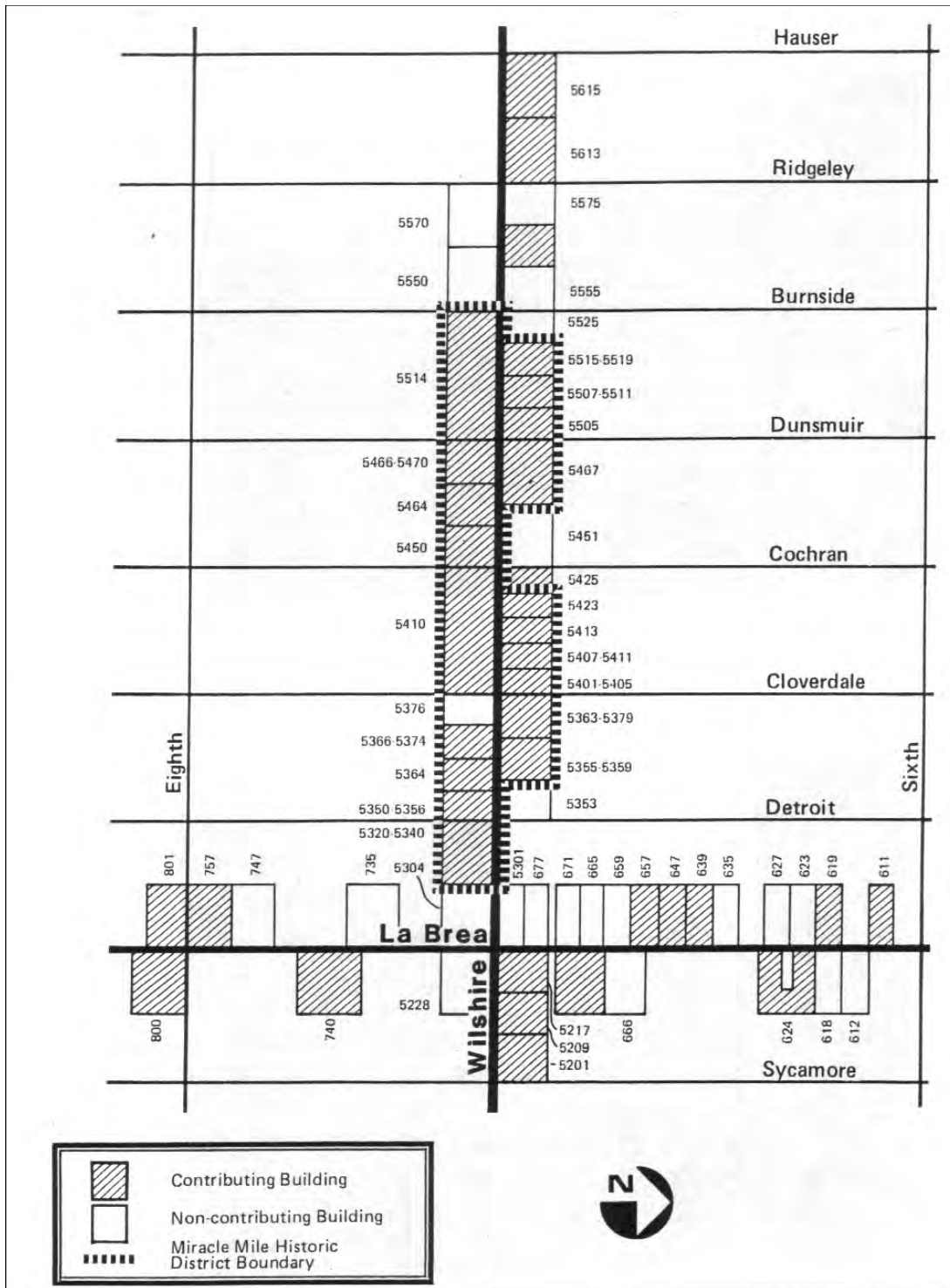
Map 1: Vicinity map, subject property highlighted pink (Google, 2013)



Map 2: Assessor map, subject property highlighted pink (Los Angeles County Assessor, 2013)



Map 3: Sanborn Fire Insurance map, subject property highlighted pink, updated to 1951.



**Map 4:** Map of Miracle Mile Historic District from Request for Determination of Eligibility for Inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places, no date. Note, subject property located off of map to the east.



**EXHIBIT B: CURRENT PHOTOGRAPHS**



**Figure 1:** Main, north elevation, view southeast (Chattel, 2013)



**Figure 2:** North elevation (right) and east elevation (left), view southwest (Chattel, 2013)



**Figure 3:** North elevation, main entrance, view south (Chattel, 2013)



**Figure 4:** North elevation, main entrance, view east (Chattel, 2013)



**Figure 5:** East elevation, view southwest (Chattel, 2013)



**Figure 6:** East elevation, view west (Chattel, 2013)



**Figure 7:** South elevation (right) and east elevation (left), view northwest (Chattel, 2013)



**Figure 8:** Rear, south elevation, view northeast (Chattel, 2013)



**Figure 9:** Rear, south elevation, from across parking lot of adjacent parcel, view north-east (Chattel, 2013)



**Figure 10:** Lobby, view southeast (Chattel, 2013)



**Figure 11:** Lobby, view west (Chattel, 2013)



**Figure 12:** Women's restroom (Chattel, 2013)

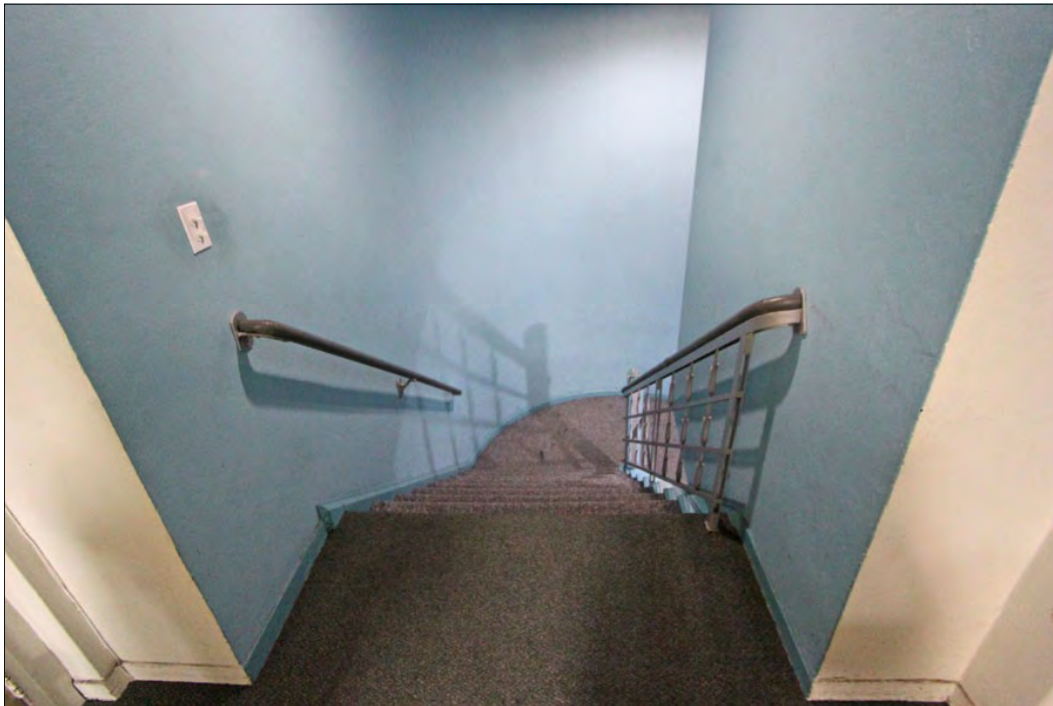


**Figure 13:** Auditorium, view north (Chattel, 2013)

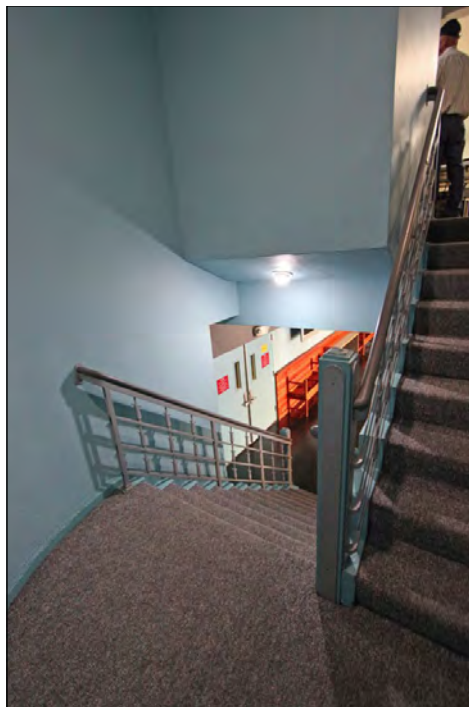


**Figure 14:** Auditorium, view southwest (Chattel, 2013)





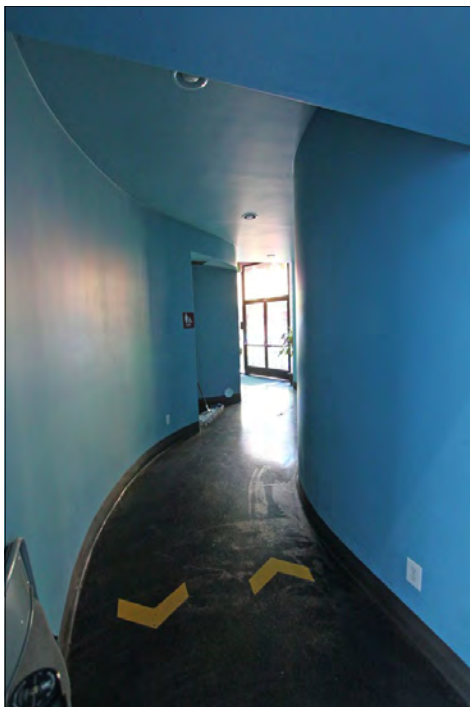
**Figure 15:** Stair at second floor, view south (Chattel, 2013)



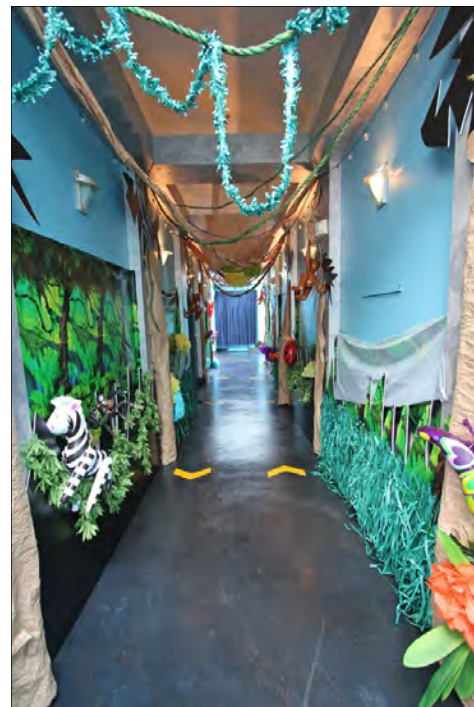
**Figure 16:** Half turn stair from lobby to second floor, view southwest (Chattel, 2013)



**Figure 17:** Second floor corridor, view west (Chattel, 2013)



**Figure 18:** Contemporary passage from theater building to store building, view northwest (Chattel, 2013)



**Figure 19:** Central corridor in store building, view east (Chattel, 2013)



**Figure 20:** Typical interior space of store building (Chattel, 2013)

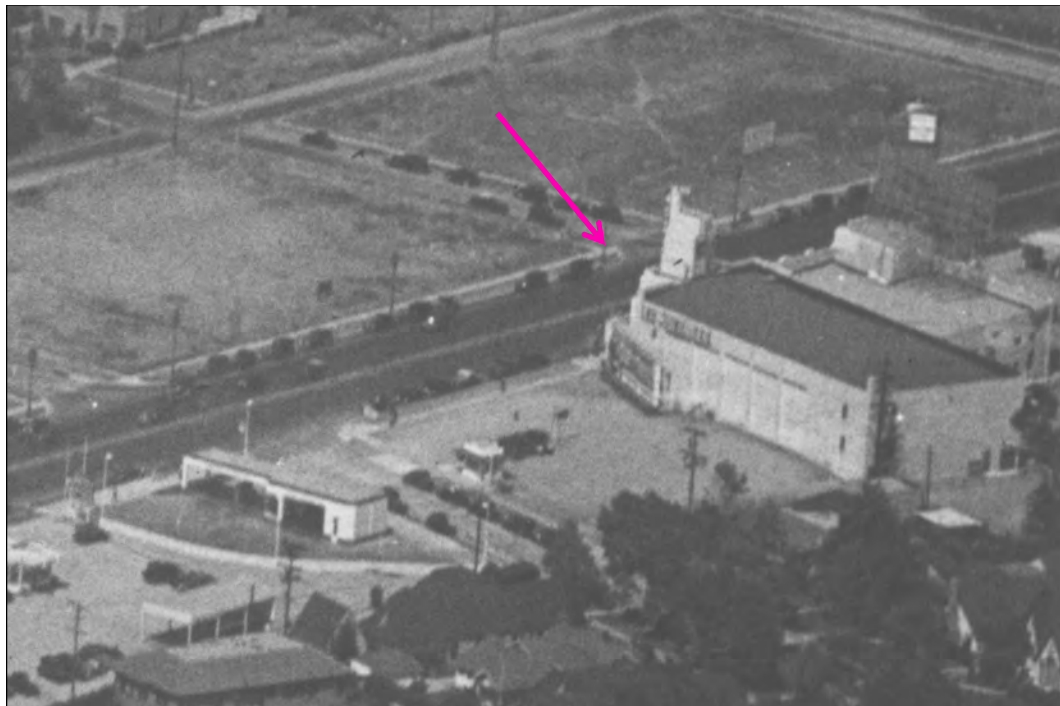


**Figure 21:** Typical glass block store-front in store building, view north (Chattel, 2013)

## **EXHIBIT B: HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS**



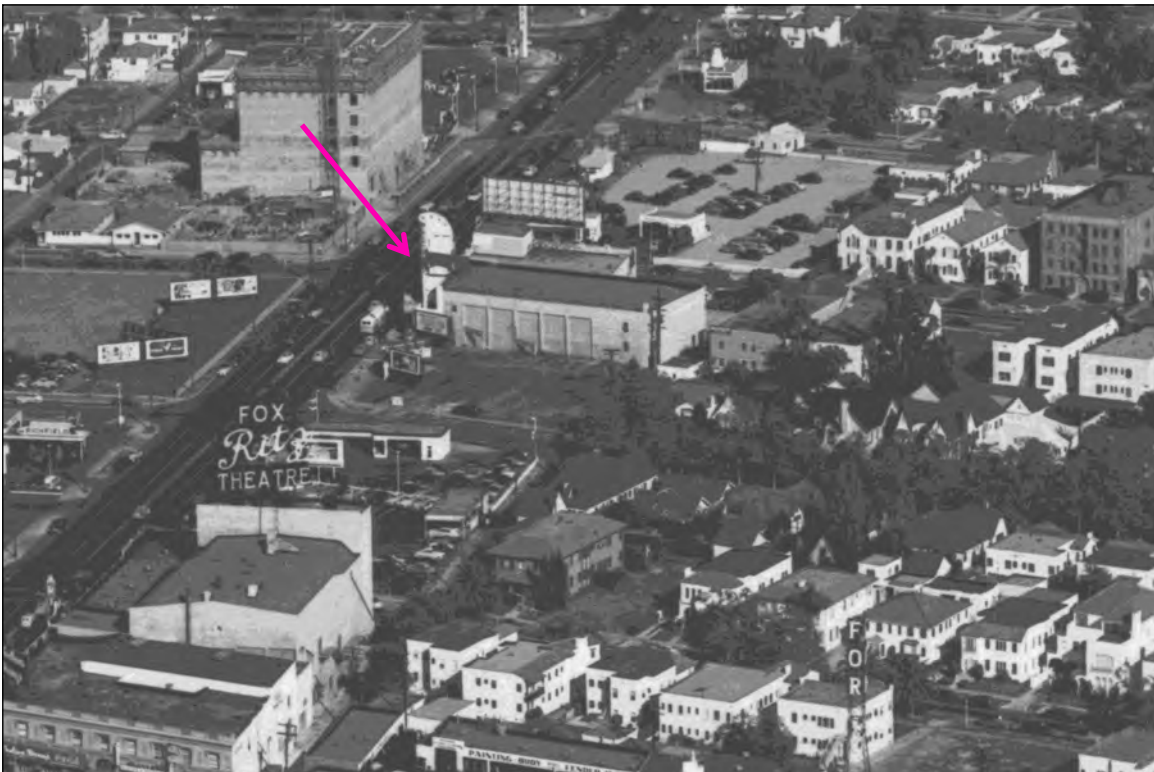
**Figure 22:** Historic aerial with subject property circled in pink (University California Los Angeles Air Photo Archives, Spence collection, 1935)



**Figure 23:** Detail of above historic aerial (University California Los Angeles Air Photo Archives, Spence collection, 1935)



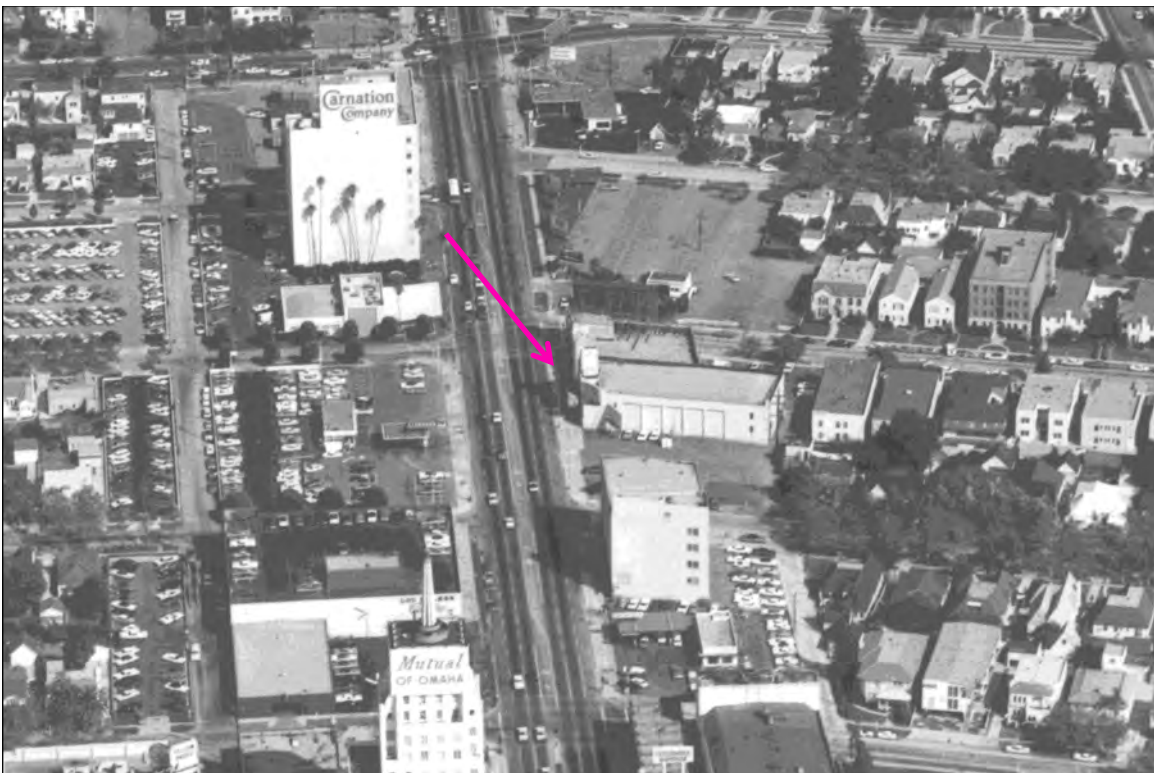
**Figure 24:** Historic aerial with subject property circled in pink (University California Los Angeles Air Photo Archives, Spence collection, 1948)



**Figure 25:** Detail of above historic aerial (University California Los Angeles Air Photo Archives, Spence collection, 1948)



**Figure 26:** Historic aerial with subject property circled in pink (University California Los Angeles Air Photo Archives, 1967)



**Figure 27:** Detail of above historic aerial (University California Los Angeles Air Photo Archives, 1948)



**Figure 28:** North façade, view southwest (California State Library, Mott Studios, c.1932)





**Figure 29:** North façade, view southeast (Huntington Library, Whittington Studios, 1932)



**Figure 30:** North façade (left) and east elevation (right), view east (Bison Archives, 1936)



**Figure 31:** North façade (left) and east elevation (right), view east (Bison Archives, 1936)



**Figure 32:** North façade, view south (Los Angeles Public Library, 1937)



**Figure 33:** North façade, view west (Bison Archives, 1937)



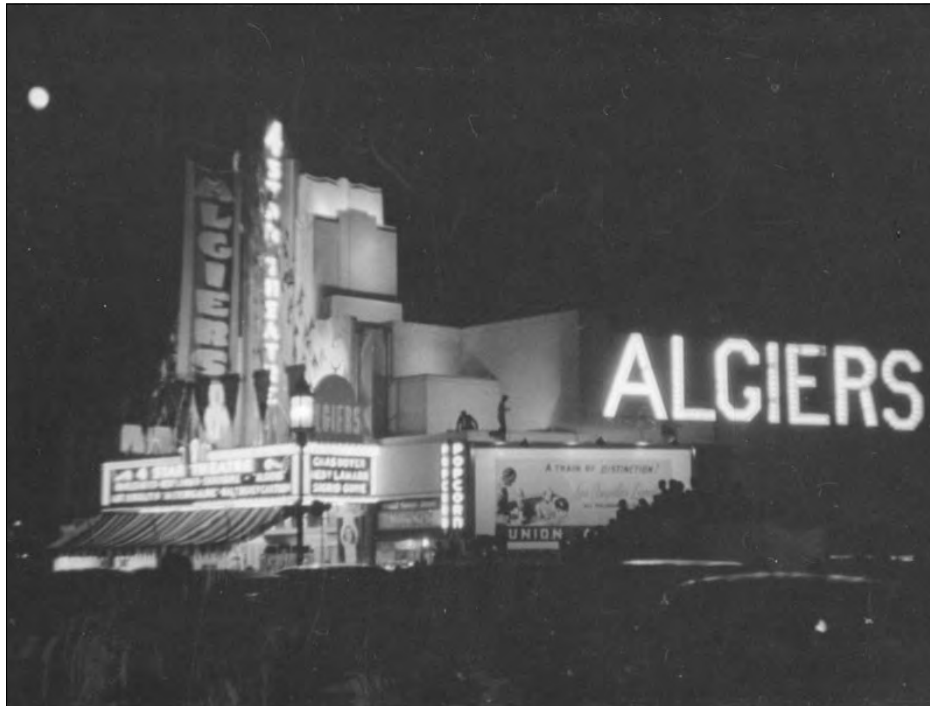
**Figure 34:** North façade, box office, note temporary wrapping on box office and entry for specific movie, view southeast (Bison Archives, 1937)



**Figure 35:** North façade, premier of “In Old Chicago,” view southeast (Los Angeles Public Library, 1938)



**Figure 36:** North façade, premier of “Algiers,” view southeast (Los Angeles Public Library, 1938)



**Figure 37:** North façade (left) and east elevation (right), premier of “Algiers,” view southeast (Los Angeles Public Library, 1938)



**Figure 38:** North façade, premier of “Algiers,” view southeast (Los Angeles Public Library, 1938)



**Figure 39:** West elevation (left) and north façade, view southwest, note blade sign with four stars (Bison Archives, 1946)



**Figure 40:** Detail of above photo (Bison Archives, 1946)



**Figure 41:** East elevation, view east, note blade sign with four stars (Bison Archives, c.1948)



**Figure 42:** North facade, view south (Bison Archives, 1952)



**Figure 43:** North façade, view southwest  
(Bison Archives, 1956)



**Figure 44:** North façade, view southeast  
(Bison Archives, 1956)





Figure 45: North façade, view southwest (Bison Archives, 1957)



Figure 46: North façade, view southeast (Bison Archives, 1957)



**Figure 47:** North façade, view southeast (Bison Archives, 1997)



**Figure 48:** North façade, view southeast (Bison Archives, 1997)

**EXHIBIT E: DPR SURVEY FORM**