

WASHINGTON

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

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

1. Name

historic Will Rogers Theatre and Commercial Block

and/or common N/A

2. Location

street & number 705-715 Monroe Avenue

N/A not for publication

city, town Charleston

N/A vicinity of

state Illinois

code 012

county Coles

code 029

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 checked="" 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
	N/A	<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 Frisina Enterprises, Inc.

street & number 100 East Market Street P.O. Box 50

city, town Taylorville

N/A vicinity of

state Illinois

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Coles County Clerk and Recorder

street & number P.O. Box 207, Coles County Courthouse

city, town Charleston

state Illinois

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

see continuation sheet

title Historic Preservation Plan for Coles

County, IL (Preliminary Report)

has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date September 1981

federal state county local

depository for survey records Coles County Regional Planning Commission

city, town Charleston

state Illinois

7. Description

see continuation sheet

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 <u>N/A</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Will Rogers Theatre and Commercial Block is located in the Charleston central business district one-half block east of the Courthouse square. The one-story structure includes a theatre and six store buildings. The theatre has 10,857 square feet of floor space, while the shops cover 4,600 square feet. The structure most recently was occupied by the Will Rogers Theatre, a barbershop, a shoe repair shop, and a law office. Most of the building is vacant at this writing.

A distinctive Art Deco facade on Monroe Avenue unifies the different uses in the structure. The Will Rogers Commercial Block was the first and only structure to be built in Charleston in the Art Deco style. The Will Rogers is the only known Art Deco commercial block in Coles County and the six counties adjacent to it.

The Will Rogers Commercial Block was constructed in 1935 by the partnership of Dominic Frisina of Taylorville, Antonio Bianci of Charleston, and Ed Clark of Mattoon. The trio operated theatres in Charleston, Mattoon, and Taylorville. Individually, the three owned theatres throughout Illinois and neighboring states. The Will Rogers Theatre was officially opened in February, 1938, with a performance by Ina Ray Hutton.

The structure is fireproof throughout due to its steel reinforced masonry construction. Exterior walls are cinder block with glazed facing brick. The Monroe Avenue facade is faced with yellow, red, and black terra cotta. The theatre has an arched roof.

The terra cotta facade was designed to create a linear, streamlined effect. Geometric and floral low-relief ornamentation is executed in the terra cotta. The upper storefront facades have varying heights, thus creating a toothed effect. Windows and doors are straight-headed. The doors of the theatre are partially frosted. The structure was constructed by Roy M. Kennedy of Taylorville.

The theatre entrance is located at the west end of the structure nearest the downtown square. The theatre facade is taller than the rest of the structure and is decorated with an electric-neon marquee. The theatre entrance is symmetrically designed with two double-door entryways, one on either side of the ticket booth. Entrance doors are partially frosted with geometric and floral motifs and with the insignia "WR". The theatre goer first enters a small outer lobby. Three double doors, also with frosted glass, lead to a larger second lobby. On the east end of this space is the manager's private office; on the west end is the refreshment booth. This second lobby is decorated with a round, partially frosted mirror and with a portrait of Will Rogers. From the west end of the second lobby patrons enter a third waiting area. From this area patrons enter the theatre proper. Stairs rise from this third lobby to restrooms and to the projection booth.

The theatre originally had 1,043 seats. In the 1950s the theatre was remodeled to seat 783. Interior fixtures bear Art Deco motifs. In the ceiling is a large oval lighting recess. This area is decorated with hand-painted geometric and floral designs executed in aquas and pinks. Hand-painted rectangular panels adorn the side walls. Side light fixtures are also executed in the Art Deco style.

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<u>Representation in Existing Surveys</u>	6	1
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The Will Rogers Theatre and Commercial Block is listed on the Coles County Register of Significant Places, Maintained by the Coles County Regional Planning Commission, Charleston, IL

<u>Description</u>	7	2
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The collaboration of architects, designers, and painters in construction of the Will Rogers Theatre was characteristic of the Art Deco period. Local decorators and a Chicago painter were employed to assist the architect in finishing the structure.

The Will Rogers Theatre and Commercial Block has withstood the many changes in technology since its completion. The several alterations which have been made to the structure have largely been sympathetic to the Art Deco styling. The new seats and movie screen have detracted little from the theatre design. Some of the original artwork and light fixtures have been removed. The least sympathetic exterior alteration was the replacement of two lower storefronts on the east end of the structure in 1981.

<u>Major Bibliographical References</u>	9	4
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- 4) Tax Assessment Card, Coles County Supervisor of Assessments.
- 5) Interview with Gene Kennedy, Taylorville, on December 16, 1982.
- 6) Blumerson, John J-G, Identifying American Architecture, (American Association for State and Local History: Nashville, 1981).
- 7) Poppeliers, John, S. Allen Chambers, Nancy B. Schwartz. What Style is it? (Preservation Press of the National Trust for Historic Preservation: Washington, 1981).
- 8) Information compiled by LeLand Hall Realtors, Charleston, Dorothy Moore, agent.

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 type="checkbox"/> theater
<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 type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates built 1935 **Builder/Architect** ~~XXXXXXX~~ Roy Kennedy, Taylorville, IL

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Will Rogers Theatre and Commercial Block is significant for its Art Deco architecture. The structure is the only building in Charleston to be built in this style. The structure is the only known Art Deco commercial block in Coles County and the six surrounding counties.

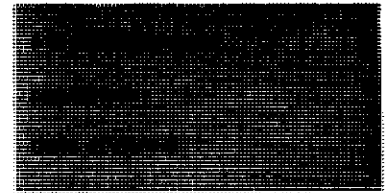
Whereas many theatres have been drastically altered to accommodate technological changes in the movie industry and changes in public taste, the Will Rogers has remained virtually unaltered. The interior, particularly, is nearly as it was in 1938 when the Art Deco theatre opened. The Time Theatre in Mattoon was also built in 1938 by the same owners and in the Art Deco style. Unlike the Will Rogers, the interior of the Time has been altered to the point that all Art Deco fixtures have been removed.

The Will Rogers Commercial Block is a landmark of Charleston's Depression years. It was one of the few commercial buildings constructed in the city during this period. Its vivid and colorful facade stands in irony to the difficult economic times of the Depression era during which it was built. The structure was quite a departure from the brick Italianate and Victorian structures which surrounded the square at the time. The Will Rogers indeed rejects its architectural precursors.

The Will Rogers Theatre and Commercial Block is listed on the Coles County Register of Significant Places and is the only Art Deco structure to be so recognized.

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Description

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It is fine ornamentation and the interplay of geometric designs that make the Will Rogers Theatre and Commercial Block an exceptional example of Art Deco architecture. The exterior is highly ornamented (characteristic of early Art Deco), while the interior has much less ornamentation and is more curvilinear (characteristic of later Art Deco or the Depression Modern style).

The four storefronts on the east end of the commercial block differ from one another in height and detail. Two of the storefronts are decorated with vertical crimson stripes on a yellow background and are topped with a band of yellow embossed with a floral motif and a band of black. These two storefronts are alternated with storefronts that are framed in a band of crimson and black and topped with a scroll ornament. The theatre entrance is assymmetrically located on the west end of the building. It is distinguished by its marquee and by terra cotta panels on either side of the marquee executed in yellow vertical stripes on a crimson background. Low relief ornamentation is machine produced in the form of parallel straight lines and florals. The commercial block is unified by color (crimson, yellow, black), texture (terra cotta), and by the use of a subtle rectangular grid system which underlays the ornamentation.

In contrast with the exterior, the interior design reflects a later Depression Modern style in that it is more curvilinear. The circle motif is repeated throughout the interior: in the circular wall mirrors, in circular bands in the lobby ceiling, in circular patterns in the terrazzo lobby floor, and in the iron railing on the stairs to the second floor lounges. Ornamentation is minimal in the theatre auditorium. Oval bands and an oval recessed light well in the ceiling give the interior a streamlined look. The ceiling bands are accentuated by subtle color changes. Light fixtures are limited to cast metal sidelights. The design of the light fixtures is repeated in stenciled panels between them. The repetition of circles, half circles, diamonds, and parallel lines unifies the interior visually.

The colors of the building were selected to reflect local tradition. The exterior crimson and yellow are the colors of Charleston High School, while the blue and gray on the recessed auditorium ceiling are the colors of Eastern Illinois University, located in Charleston.

Significance

8

3

Although the Will Rogers Theatre and Commercial Block is less than 50 years old (at this writing by just four years), it merits nomination to the National Register because the execution of the Art Deco style in the building is exceptional when compared to any other building of the period in East Central Illinois. The use of color, the attention to detail, the repetition and contrasting of patterns, and the high quality of craftsmanship (albeit machine crafting) throughout the building make the Will Rogers special. There are other structures in the region that utilize the patterns characteristic of the Art Deco style, but there is no other building in which the design is executed to this quality or degree. The Art Deco style is an integral part of this building rather than merely a style selected for the interior furnishings.

The building is also exceptional in the way that it contrasts the characteristics of early American interpretations of the Art Deco style (cubic, rectilinear, highly ornamented) with the Post -1929 interpretation of Art Deco, also referred to as

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<u>Significance</u>	8	3
Depression Modern (clean, uncluttered, curvilinear, minimal ornamentation). By listing the Will Rogers on the National Register of Historic Places, it is hoped that this exceptional design will be recognized and preserved.		

9. Major Bibliographical References see continuation sheet

- 1) Information from John Kruger, retired projectionist of the Will Rogers Theatre.
- 2) Charleston Times-Courier, February 8, 1938.
- 3) Will Rogers nomination to Coles County Register of Significant Places, prepared by Leyla Waddell, March, 1979.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 0.39 acre
Quadrangle name Toledo Quadrangle (1:62500 - scale available) Quadrangle scale 1:62500

UTM References

A	<u>16</u>	<u>39,30,20</u>	<u>437,20,05</u>	B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

Lots 21, 22, 23, **24**, and 45' off of the south end of lots 21 and 22 in Block 2 of the original town of Charleston

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

state	code	county	code
<u>N/A</u>			
state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Bruce R. Stoffel/Community Planner
organization Coles County Regional Planning Commission date 4/13/83
street & number P.O. Box 471, 701 Monroe Avenue telephone (217) 348-0521
city or town Charleston state Illinois

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 National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature *David K...*
title *Director* date 6/22/83

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

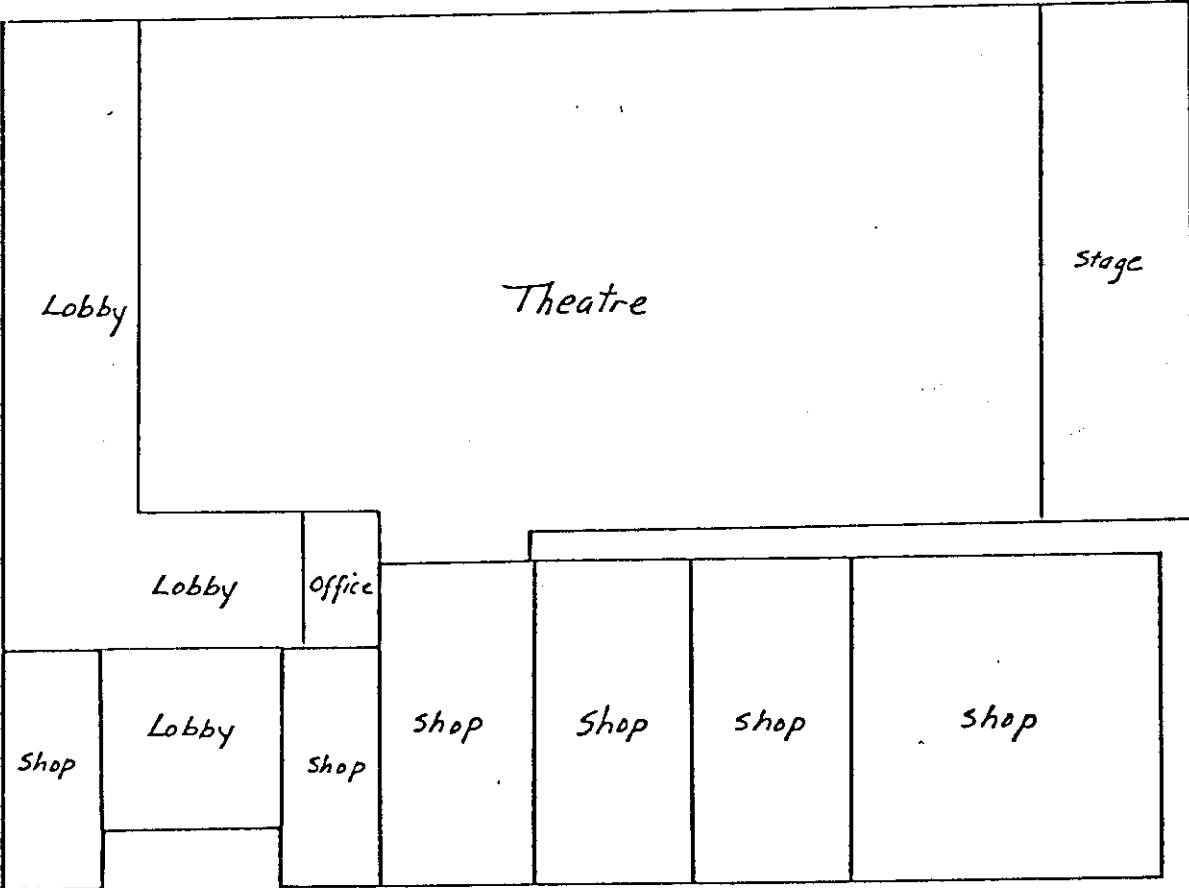
date

Keeper of the National Register

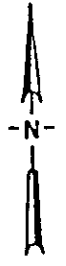
Attest:

date

Chief of Registration



*Will Rogers Theatre and
Commercial Block
705-715 Monroe Ave.
Charleston, Illinois*





United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

JAN 17 1984

IN REPLY REFER TO:

The Director of the National Park Service is pleased to inform you that the following properties have been entered in the National Register of Historic Places beginning January 8, 1984 and ending January 14, 1984. For further information call (202) 343-9552.

STATE, County, Vicinity, Property, Address, (Date Listed)

ALABAMA, Mobile County, Mobile, Church Street East Historic District, Roughly bounded by Broad, Conti, Water, Claiborne, and Canal Sts. (01/13/84)

FLORIDA, Duval County, Jacksonville, Florida Baptist Building, 218 W. Church St. (01/12/84)

FLORIDA, Marion County, Ocala, Ocala Historic District, Roughly bounded by Broadway, SE 8th St., Silver Springs Pl., SE 3rd, 13th, and Watula Aves. (01/12/84)

FLORIDA, Pinellas County, Tarpon Springs, Arcade Hotel, 210 Pinellas Ave. (01/12/84)

GEORGIA, Cherokee County, Canton, Canton Commercial Historic District, Roughly bounded by Main, Church, Archer, and Marietta Sts. (01/12/84)

GEORGIA, Gwinnett County, Buford, Allen, John Quincy, House, 345 E. Main St. (01/12/84)

GEORGIA, Lowndes County, Valdosta, Carnegie Library of Valdosta, 305 W. Central Avenue (01/12/84)

GEORGIA, Lowndes County, Valdosta, Crestwood, 502 Eager Rd. (01/12/84)

GEORGIA, Pickens County, Jasper, Pickens County Jail, N. Main St. (01/12/84)

GEORGIA, Troup County, LaGrange, Broad Street Historic District, Roughly bounded by McLendon Circle, Gordon St., Vernon Rd., and Wavelly Way (01/12/84)

GEORGIA, Troup County, LaGrange, Vernon Road Historic District, Vernon Rd. from Jenkins St. to Forrest Ave. incl. Ferrell Dr., Broad and Carter Sts. (01/12/84)

ILLINOIS, Coles County, Charleston, Will Rogers Theatre and Commercial Block, 705—715 Monroe Ave. (01/12/84)

INDIANA, Floyd County, New Albany, New Albany and Salem Railroad Station, Pearl and Oak Sts. (01/12/84)

IOWA, Appanoose County, Centerville, Sturdivant-Sawyer House, 707 Drake Ave. (01/12/84)

IOWA, Cass County, Atlantic, Martin, S. F., House, 419 Poplar St. (01/12/84)

IOWA, Grundy County, Wellsburg, Neessen, Chris, House, 601 E. 4th (01/12/84)

IOWA, Johnson County, North Liberty, White, H. A., General Store and House, 10 W. Cherry St. (01/12/84)

IOWA, Lee County, Keokuk, Harrison, E. H., House, 220 N. 4th St. (01/12/84)

IOWA, Marshall County, Marshalltown, Binford, Thaddeus, House, 110 N. 2nd Ave. (01/12/84)

IOWA, Polk County, Des Moines, Northwestern Hotel, 321 E. Walnut (01/12/84)

IOWA, Winneshiek County, Decorah, Koren Library, Luther College Campus (01/12/84)

KENTUCKY, Madison County, Richmond, West Richmond Historic District (Richmond MRA), Roughly W. Main St. between Church and Norwood Sts. (01/12/84)

KENTUCKY, Scott County, Georgetown vicinity, Lane's Run Historic District, Old Oxford Rd., US 62 and US 460 (01/12/84)

Will Rogers Theatre and Commercial Block
705-715 Monroe Avenue, Charleston

STATE OF ILLINOIS
DEPARTMENT OF REGISTRATION AND EDUCATION
GEOLOGICAL SURVEY DIVISION

50 MI. TO U.S. 51
MATTOON (JUNC. U.S. 45) 11 MI.
R. 9 E.

PARIS 26 MI.
ASHMORE 7 M (Oakland)

R. 10 E.

