

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

CONNECTICUT HISTORICAL COMMISSION

59 South Prospect Street, Hartford, Connecticut 06106
(203) 566-3005

HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY FORM
For Buildings and Structures

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY			
TOWN NO.:	SITE NO.:		
UTM: 18/	/	/	/
QUAD:			
DISTRICT:	S	NR:	ACTUAL POTENTIAL

IDENTIFICATION

- 1. BUILDING NAME: Common: Old Middlesex Theater Historic: Middlesex Opera House
- 2. TOWN/CITY: Middletown VILLAGE: _____ COUNTY: Middlesex
- 3. STREET & NUMBER (and/or location): 109-111 College Street
- 4. OWNER(S): City of Middletown PUBLIC PRIVATE
- 5. USE: Present: Vacant Historic: Opera House; Movie Theater
- 6. ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC: Exterior visible from public road: yes no
Interior accessible: yes, explain with permission of Redevelopment Agency no

DESCRIPTION

7. STYLE OF BUILDING: Early Modern Commercial-Art Deco DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: 1892; College St. entrance 1927

- 8. MATERIAL(S) (indicate use or location when appropriate):
 clapboard asbestos siding brick
 wood shingle asphalt siding fieldstone
 board & batten stucco cobblestone
 aluminum siding concrete: type: _____ cut stone: type: _____
 other: _____

9. STRUCTURAL SYSTEM:

- wood frame: post and beam balloon
- load bearing masonry structural iron or steel interior framing
- other: _____

10. ROOF: type:

- gable flat mansard monitor sawtooth
- gambrel shed hip round other _____
- material:
 wood shingle roll asphalt tin slate
 asphalt shingle built up tile other: _____

11. NUMBER OF STORIES: 2 APPROXIMATE DIMENSIONS: entrance 30'x83'; Theater 86'x138

- 12. CONDITION: Structural: excellent good fair deteriorated
- Exterior: excellent good fair deteriorated

13. INTEGRITY: Location: on original site moved, when: _____
Alterations: no yes, explain: Interior of theater remodelled (See #18)

14. RELATED OUTBUILDINGS OR LANDSCAPE FEATURES:

- barn shed garage other landscape features or buildings: Passways
- carriage house shop garden either side of theater

15. SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT:

- open land woodland residential scattered buildings visible from site
- commercial industrial rural high building density

16. INTERRELATIONSHIP OF BUILDING AND SURROUNDINGS: The two story theater entrance facing north on College Street presents the largest facade in an area of small 19th century commercial buildings; it also contrasts stylistically. Together with the large theater behind it, it is included in a proposed historic district covering the west side of Main Street from College Street to Church Street.

17. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING OR SITE (interior and/or exterior):

- Domed vault in theater ceiling
- Art Deco chandeliers
- Ground level access to stage

SIGNIFICANCE

James D. Sibley superintendent of

Architect: Francis A. Kimball (Theater) Builder: construction (Theater)

18. HISTORICAL OR ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE: This elaborately decorated theater was constructed in 1892 by the Middlesex Mutual Assurance Co. "as a contribution to the artistic development of Middletown and Middlesex County." Francis H. Kimball of New York designed the theater which opened May 26, 1892. The entrance was through the Middlesex Mutual Building (1867) on Main Street, which contained lounges on the third floor for theater patrons. A few days after the theater's dedication a fire destroyed the interior. The theater reopened in October 1892. Providing a seating capacity of 1,100, it contained a balcony and gallery, two tiers of box seats, and was decorated with plaster relief work, mural paintings, and artistic design work on panels; the overall effect displayed the exuberant color and lavish detail typical of the late Victorian era. The Middlesex Theater was a regional entertainment center, and presented musicals, concerts, opera, drama and vaudeville to its patrons. First silent movies and then talkies supplanted live entertainment after World War I.

In 1926 the Grand Theater acquired the property, only to have the interior destroyed by fire in December. The Arrigoni interests bought the damaged theater and redecorated it, (see continuation sheet)

PHOTOGRAPH

photographer: Robert Svec
 date: 3/78 view: north
 negative on file: Roll 20, #35



COMPILED BY:

name: John E. Reynolds date: 6/78
 organization: Greater Middletown Preservation Trust
 address: 27 Washington St., Middletown, Ct. 06457

19. SOURCES: Middletown Land Records; Middletown City Directories; David R. Ransom, National Register Nomination "Metro South Register District"; J. Russell Ward, "The Best in Shows Came to the Middlesex Theater" Middletown Press, March 13, 1975; Centennial Middlesex Mutual Assurance Co. (Hartford: Case, Lockwood & Brainard Co., 1973); H.F. Donlan, Middletown Tribune: Souvenir Edition

20. SUBSEQUENT FIELD EVALUATIONS:

(see continuation sheet)

21. THREATS TO BUILDING OR SITE:

none known highways vandalism developers other: _____
 renewal private deterioration zoning explanation: Despite the

building's inclusion in a proposed restoration/reuse historic district, its large size, specialized nature, and deteriorated condition limit its possibility for reuse.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

Item number: 18&19 Date: 6/78

Middlesex Opera House
109-111 College Street, Middletown, Ct. 06457

#18

removing the gallery and boxes, and installing a single large balcony which increased the theater's capacity to 1,397 seats. In 1927 the present entrance on College Street was constructed to make the theater independent of the Middlesex Mutual Building on Main Street. It also contained commercial space on its two floors.

The interior of the theater now combines art deco and art nouveau motifs with vestiges of the Victorian interior which survived the 1926 fire. The domed vault in the ceiling is decorated with the signs of the zodiac and the art deco chandelier which hung from this vault is stored on the theater floor. Molded and stipled plasterwork panels along the walls are decorated with foliated patterns. The overall color scheme includes blue, pink, cream and imitation gilt.

The theater has been vacant since 1960, and its condition deteriorated rapidly since its mechanical support systems were turned off in 1974.

#19

(Middletown: E.F. Bigelow, 1896); See also Survey Form ,179-181 Main Street, Middlesex Mutual Building, GMPT, 1978



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CONTINUATION SHEET

Item number: _____ Date: 1/90

Middlesex Opera House
109-111 College Street, Middletown, CT 06457

