

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Propertyhistoric name Robey Theatre

other names/site number _____

2. Locationstreet & number 318 Main Street☒ not for publicationcity, town Spencer☒ vicinitystate West Virginiacode WVcounty Roanecode 087zip code 25276**3. Classification**

Ownership of Property

- ☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property

- ☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<u> </u> buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Number of related multiple property listing:

N/ANumber of contributing resources previously
listed in the National Register 0**4. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this
☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the
National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.
In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official

Date 2/6/89

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

☐ entered in the National Register.☐ See continuation sheet.☐ determined eligible for the NationalRegister. ☐ See continuation sheet.☐ determined not eligible for the

National Register.

☐ removed from the National Register.☐ other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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☐ other, (explain:) _____

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Date of Action _____

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture/Theatre

Social/meeting hall

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Recreation and Culture/Theatre

Commerce/Trade/Specialty Store

Commerce/Trade/professional

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and 20th Century Revival/

Italian Renaissance/

Classical Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Brick

roof Asphalt shingle

other Rubber

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Robey Theatre is located at 318 Main Street (U.S. Route 33) in Spencer, the county seat of Roane County. The Theatre occupies a prominent location in the business section of downtown Spencer.

The Robey Theatre remains basically the same building that was extensively remodeled in 1926, with a few minor later changes. The building is three stories tall and five bays wide across the front elevation. Stylistically the building is a blend of Italian Renaissance and Neo-Classical Revival. These styles can be clearly seen in the architectural details of the second story in its semicircular arches. The outer two arches are over double doors with two small metal balconies. Each door has ten panes of glass. All the arches have light colored stone imposts and key stones. The three central arches have recessed brick panels. All of the arches are framed by pilasters with double pilasters on the east and west ends. The stone sill course and entablature serve to visually separate the second story from the rest of the structure.

The third story features five 1/1 double hung windows with stone sills and lintels. Above each window is a recessed brick panel; at the top of these panels is a cornice of corbelled brick work. Between these is painted "K of P" with a panel between each letter and one panel on each end. The facade terminates in a cornice on a high parapet.

The first floor facade of the theatre consists of a large central entrance bay. Within this bay is the ticket booth which is flanked on both sides by two sets of double doors. These doors are identical to exterior balcony doors. Above this bay is the marquee which is anchored to the second floor by chains. To the right or the east of the center bay is the concession window with its aluminum awning. The extreme eastern bay has a large billboard. The bay on the far left or west contains the entrance to the third floor and shares a wall with the Odd Fellow Building. To the right of this bay is a bay with a large billboard.

This floor's facade has had several minor post-1926 changes. These changes include moving the ticket booth and entrance doors forward several feet. The creation of the concession window and the billboard to its right which covers a window. The closing off of the bay to the left of the entrance behind the billboard to create a supply closet.

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National Park Service**

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One of the more distinctive features of this elevation is the neon sign which is supported by a metal rod from the third story and is anchored to the second story by two metal rods.

The east elevation consists of eight windows, infilled with brick and having stone sills and lintels. These openings were bricked up during the 1926 remodeling with the same types of brick that was used in the addition. In the addition, there is a wooden side door.

The plan of the first floor consists of the lobby, ticket booth, and concession stand. The rest rooms are located on the west side of the lobby. There are two single doors opening into the auditorium. Within the auditorium to the stage and orchestra pit which was used to house the music machine (which was sold in the sixties). The seating is divided by two aisles. On the east side of the lobby is the balcony entrance. The balcony contains some of the original seats, the projection booth and the manager's office.

The third floor, the former meeting hall for the Knights of Pythias, is accessed by a street level entrance and the emergency exit from the balcony. The front portion of the lodge hall still exists and is used as a storage area. The rear of this floor as two apartments that are being used as a photographer's studio and dark room.

The basement under the stage and dressing rooms is an area that has been converted to a video rental store.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

☐ nationally ☒ statewide ☐ locally

Applicable National Register Criteria ☒ A ☒ B ☐ C ☐ D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Entertainment/Recreation

Period of Significance

1911-1938

Significant Dates

1911

1926

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

Hamond H. Robey

Architect/Builder

Carmichael and Millspaugh

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Robey Theatre qualifies for inclusion on the National Register under Criterion "A" at the state and local level since it is the oldest movie theatre in continuous operation in West Virginia. The theatre was built in 1911 specifically for the exhibition of films, but Hamond Robey, who began exhibiting movies in 1907 and moved the operations several times before erecting the 1911 building. The Robey has received some national recognition as one of the oldest continuously operating movie theatre in the United States. According to David Naylor's book, The Great American Movie Theatres, "The theater remains in the hands of the family of the original owners, giving it the right to claim itself as the oldest American movie theater in continuous operation." While it is no longer owned by the Robey family it continues to operate as a movie theatre. According to a letter from Andrew Corsini, the editor of Marquee, the journal for the Theatre Historical Society, mentions two other theatres as possibly being of equal or longer continuous operation. He wrote, "There is a theatre in New York City supposedly still running from 1910 - and there was an earlier one in Detroit - but I think it has closed." Both of these sources are now dated. The theatre's age is not the sole reason for its significance since it is an example of the growth and influence of a new entertainment medium. This qualifies it under criterion "A", as well, and fits it into the broader patterns of early Twentieth Century American History. During the period of significance, 1911-1938, movies became an influential medium for entertainment and news linking this rural West Virginia to the outside world. This period includes the transition from silent era to the sound age. Also during this period, the Robey acted as a community center where local live productions were held.

The significant individual associated with the theatre was its founder, Hamond H. Robey. Robey, was born in 1881, on the Left Fork of Upper Reedy, in Roane County. In 1903, he moved to Spencer. His first business venture was a furniture store and funeral parlor with Elijah J. Harris. Four years later, Hamond began his lucrative side line of exhibiting movies. This led to the construction of the Robey and eventually, to the opening of theatres in

☒ See continuation sheet

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St. Marys, Ripley, and Sutton. A year after he started the Dream and Theatre, he introduced bowling alleys to Roane County. His first alley was in the Parson Building, the second was in Walton and his third was in Spencer. He also introduced roller skating to Spencer when he opened his rink. His most unusual business venture was, his attempt in 1914-1915, to build a commercial power plant. He sold his plant in 1915. During the period of significance his businesses made him a prominent local businessman and the one business that is still strongly associated with him is the theatre that still bears his name.

The theatre (theatre operation) was established by Hamond H. Robey, a local businessman, as a side line in 1907, to his furniture store and funeral parlor. This coincided with a boom in the local gas and oil industry which caused a population increase. His first theatre was named Dreamland and was an instant success. The theatre was renamed and moved several times prior to 1911. In 1911, Robey and his partner, Joseph Schwender, in conjunction with Knights of Pythias, built a three-story building. The Knights held the deed to the upper floor until February 23, 1950, when it was deeded to Robey. This theatre was opened at its present location in 1911 and was named the Auditorium.

The Auditorium's last competitor, the Wells Opera House, closed its doors in 1923. The Robey Theatre to this day has maintained a largely unchallenged monopoly as Spencer's only movie theatre. The availability of automobiles and paved roads increases the accessibility to the town and its businesses. It was due to this increase in business that Mr. Robey decided to expand and remodel his theatre in the summer of 1926. The result of this \$100,000 remodeling is, with the exception of a few later minor changes, Robey Theatre of today. Hamond Robey hired the architectural firm of Carmichael and Millspaugh, of Columbus, Ohio. The concrete work was done by the firm Henry Minns and Chester Dodd, Sr., and the Boggs and Rhodes Construction Company, handled the steel and brick work. Charley Glover fashioned all the woodwork throughout the theatre. The remodelling changed the facade and expanded the theatre in the rear (the additional land had been purchased in 1925) with an enlarged stage. During the summer Robey continued to exhibit films in a "Tentatorium." On September 6, 1926, the Auditorium was reopened as the Robey Theatre with much pomp and ceremony. Congressman Harry C. Woodyard gave the opening address, followed by Albert Heck's talk on the "Relation of the Theater to the City." R.W. "Worthy" Schumaker, the Superintendent of Schools, then addressed the 700 member

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audience on "The Theatre as a Civic Institution." The Pathe Newsreel followed along with a comedy short and then the evening's main feature, "KIKI", starring Norma Talmadge. The size of the crowd, the dignitaries and their speeches tell something of both the acceptance and importance of the movie theatre to the community.

In the late twenty's the Robey was one of the first theatres in the area to install sound equipment. The first talkie to play in Spencer was "Alias Jimmy Valentine," with William Harris and Joan Crawford.

The Robey throughout its period of significance, has been used for live local productions, such as the 1931 production of the "Womenless Wedding" by the Lions Club. It also functioned as a kind of community center where fiddle contests and high school graduations were, among the types of activities, often held.

The Robey Theatre remained within the Robey family until 1979 when T. Michael Burch became the current owner and operator. The theatre remains in operation and also houses a video rental shop.

The Robey during the period of significance (1911-1938) provided Spencer with an important link to the popular culture of the period which would help influence the changing values and fashions within the community. It is also significant for its association with Hamond Robey, a prominent local entrepreneur.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bishop, William Henry. History of Roane County: from the Time of Its Exploration to A.D. 1927. Spencer, WV: W.H. Bishop, 1927.

"The First Time Ever the Robey Theatre Changes Hands," Times Record, 14 December 1978, West Virginia Historic Preservation Office, Robey Theatre File.

Fox, Edward. "Old Theater Just Reeling Along," Charleston Gazette, 22 December 1982, West Virginia State Archives, Newspaper Clipping files.

Interview with T. Michael Burch on November 18, 1988.

Letter from B. Andrew Corsini, Editor of Marquee, 8 November, Photo Copy, West Virginia Historic Preservation Office, Robey Theatre file.

Mylott, James P. A Measure of Prosperity: A History of Roane County, West Virginia. Charleston, WV: Mountain State Press, 1984.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67)
has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings
Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering
Record # _____

☒ See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State historic preservation office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☒ Other

Specify repository:

The Owner, T. Michael Burch

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property .08

JTM References

A

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4	2	8	6	6	9	0
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Zone Easting Northing

C

B Zone Easting Northing

D

☐ See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Roane County Tax Assessor's map, Spencer Corporation, Map No. #4: plot 71.
The dimensions of the plot are 42' x 92'.

☐ See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundaries described above have historically been those of the theatre since 1926, when the building was expanded.

☐ See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Thomas Swift Landon, Research Assistant

Organization WV Historic Preservation Office

date November 1988

street & number Capitol Complex

telephone (304) 348-0240

city or town Charleston

state WV zip code 25305

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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Section number 9 Page 2 Robey Theatre, Spencer, West Virginia

#9. Major Bibliographical References

- _____. "The Robey Theatre of Spencer: A Roane County Tradition."
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- Naylor, David. Great American Movie Theaters. Washington, D.C.: Preservation Press, 1987.
- Paxton, Mark. "The Last Picture Show: Spencer Projectionist Retiring at 72."
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- Roane County Deed Book, 162: 335.
- West Virginia Department of Culture and History, Historic Preservation Office,
Historic Properties Inventory form, prepared by T. Michael Burch, 13 November
1978.
- Williams, Chambers. "Spencer Theater Continues a Tradition Dating Back to
1907," Charleston Daily Mail, West Virginia State Archives, Newspaper
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Lobey Theatre
318 Main Street
Spencer, WV
Roane County

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