

**United States Department of the Interior**  
 National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Isis Theater **DRAFT**

Other names/site number: Ojai Theater; Glasgow Playhouse; Ojai Playhouse; Ojai Playhouse Theater

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

## 2. Location

Street & number: 145 E. Ojai Avenue

City or town: Ojai State: CA County: Ventura

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ **national**      \_\_\_ **statewide**      \_\_\_ **local**

Applicable National Register Criteria:

\_\_\_ **A**      \_\_\_ **B**      \_\_\_ **C**      \_\_\_ **D**

|  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
| <p>_____<br/> <b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b></p>                               | <p>_____<br/> <b>Date</b></p> |
| <p>_____<br/> <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b></p>                   |                               |
| <p>In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.</p> |                               |
| <p>_____<br/> <b>Signature of commenting official:</b></p>                                     | <p>_____<br/> <b>Date</b></p> |
| <p>_____<br/> <b>Title : State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b></p>           |                               |

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater

RECREATION AND CULTURE/auditorium

SOCIAL/meeting hall

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/theater

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS

OTHER: Mission Revival

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

walls: STUCCO

roof: TERRA COTTA

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

The Isis Theater, today named the Ojai Playhouse, is a single screen movie theater of the Mission Revival design system. Its north-facing front elevation features an espadaña parapet: a signature feature of the building and its E. Ojai Avenue setting for over 100 years. The façade not only fronts the theater, but fronts a once-separate building, now wholly integrated, that houses the theater's concession area and a restaurant. The property possesses one other building: a c.1947 dry cleaners that is a non-contributing resource.

The Isis Theater is located off the southwest corner of S. Signal Street and E. Ojai Avenue in Ojai, Ventura County, California. Ojai, on account of the beauty and the remove of its valley, is considered a resort town. The Isis Theater, with a 1917 façade renovation attributed to the master architectural firm of Mead and Requa, is part and parcel of a World War I-era Mission styled beautification project for which Ojai is historically identified. Other Mead and Requa Mission styled works, and additional diminutively scaled single-story buildings, surround the Isis Theater. Recently rehabilitated, the Isis Theater is in excellent condition. The property retains integrity of location, setting, design, workmanship, feeling and association.

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## Description

The Isis Theater is a single story, irregular plan commercial building. The building is clad in a slightly textured "Santa Barbara" styled stucco, with smooth stucco finish at the lower portion of the property's front elevation. The Isis Theater building is of two adjacent parts, plus rear additions, and is of variegated roof types. The roof types include: flat over the theater's auditorium and additions, then adjacent to the theater due west, a sizeable building with medium-pitch gabled roof. The theater's roof is clad in non-visible single ply roof membrane, and the adjacent gabled portion is clad in asphalt shingle. Both roofs are hidden behind a single façade running the building's length, unifying its parts. The lower portion of the building's front elevation has a multitude of bays, including recessed entry bays, in an irregular, asymmetrical arrangement. The eastern portion of the front elevation's lower portion features a row of three metal-frame poster display windows, each with a wide, inset wood surround of triple molding and double beadwork. Within it, large single-panel glazing is metal framed and hinged. The western end of the front elevation has two recessed entry bays: one for the theater, and the other for the adjacent restaurant space. Two square-form punched-out fixed picture windows flank the side-by-side entry bays. The entry to the east, for the theater, has recent entry doors of full-height glass with curved L-form pipe column handles. The doors flank a recent, full-height, clear-glazed single lite. The entry for the restaurant has a pair of recent, commercial-type wood-frame two-lite glass doors with recent aluminum hardware.

Just above the front elevation's ground level, a prominent astragal molding with cavetto underscore runs the length of the façade and wraps its outer corners. Above it, the façade's upper portion is a bank of flat stucco. Centered within it is sheet metal box-form lettering with inset white krypton lighting, done in a serified, old English-informed script that spells out "Ojai Playhouse," one word centered over the other. Both words are affixed onto a camouflaged, projecting metal box containing the sign's electrical equipment. The box runs lengthwise, and has convex outer ends. Centered beneath the Ojai Playhouse sign is a backlit recent metal marquee of three stacked rows. The marquee is recent but is of a Streamline Moderne style; its outer ends are rounded and stepped.

The façade's top portion is a full-length parapet running the building's length. The parapet has a pent roof clad in Spanish terra-cotta tile in overlapping pan-and-cover elements of a "Barrel Mission" arrangement, with block-molded underscore. At the parapet's center is a Mission-styled espadaña parapet. Its raised, central portion is arched, shouldered, and outlined in box molding. Centered within the espadaña parapet is a barbed quatrefoil containing rounded corners at cardinal points, then four right angled barbs at counterpoints forming the outline of a square within the quatrefoil. The barbed quatrefoil is fronted with astragal molding. As the quatrefoil recedes into its parapet, its breadth recedes to form a vanishing point. The optical play of this detail implies projection and enhances the quatrefoil's sense of depth and three-dimensionality. Centered within the back of the quatrefoil is a 16-part square-form grille, open to the sky beyond it. Each end of the parapet contains a square pier with block-molded capping.

Other than two faint vertical scores, the building's east-side elevation is blank, with just one recent, painted metal door toward its rear portion. The Theater's east-side elevation faces Signal

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Street, and the Mead and Requa designed post office and tower directly across Signal Street. The theater's east elevation cants inward as it runs south along Signal Street. Like that seen at the front elevation, the theater's east side has a pent roof parapet with pan-and-cover Barrel Mission tile and block molding underscore. Where the east elevation's upper portion meets the front façade, the corner pier is present and it is backed by a barbed, ogee-form curved bracket. The east elevation's parapet steps downward two-thirds of the way back along the elevation. At its rear- the building's southeast corner- is a pilaster that projects upward to become a raised square-form pier capped in block molding. Just off it, an archway projects in-plane off the east-side elevation. A pent roof of barrel Mission terra cotta tile tops an archway. At the pent roof's outer end is a pilaster and raised pier like that at the entryway's opposite side against the building, albeit shorter. Beneath the archway is a walkway leading to the property's rear portion.

### Rear Area

The rear portions of the Isis Theater property are largely out of view from the public right-of-way. Seeing the property's rear clarifies that the theater is a small complex versus one larger, rectangular-plan building, which it reads as from the public right-of-way. At the property's eastern end, the theater's box-form, stucco-clad flat-roofed rear portion projects southward. A recent galvanized steel, rectangular shaped rain gutter and spout runs along its south and west elevations. Groupings of metal pipes for conduit channels and recent utility boxes are present at its south elevation. West of the theater is a small, stucco-clad box-form projection, added in the 1980s with a paired fixed-over-hopper windows at its west elevation. It is affixed to the eastern half of the c.1920 gabled building immediately west of the theater itself. The rear elevation of this gable end was redone in the 1980s, with glass doors and stylized upper-portion transom, with cathedral lites and wood panels divided by painted wood plank. The western portion of this gable end is the restaurant space's rear elevation, and it opens onto the restaurant's patio. The gable's eastern portion is blank stucco.

Beyond the previously described arched entryway off Signal Street is a concrete walkway. It leads to the property's rear portions, including raised, recent L-plan patio servicing the restaurant in front of it. The patio's floor is concrete, with wood-plank cladding at the ell. The patio has inset benches of wood plank base and polished wood backing. Above the patio is a recent pleated nylon sunshade affixed to open metal framing. These patio spaces are accessed by a recent stair set of boxed wood treads open balustrades with metal pipe handrail. A wall to the north of this stairset backs the raised patio beyond it, while forming a corridor for the stair, and where it faces the stair, the wall is clad in recent wood plank board.

### Love's Cleaners

Behind the gabled building and its rear patio, at the parcel's southwest portion, is a standalone, small-scale single story rectangular building, originally built c. 1947 by later theater owners Hiram and Florence Flesher as "Love's Cleaners." Today, the restaurant at the property's west end uses this building as a storage space. The building, cabin-like in its proportions, is in the Spanish Revival style, is smooth stucco-clad, its gabled roof clad in Barrel Mission Spanish tile. Its roof has small eaves with open rafter tails and wood fasciae. The entry to this building is located at its south elevation. It presently has a metal door set in a glass block surround that is a recent alteration. The south elevation also contains two narrow vertical windows: both recent

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alterations, and a prominent galvanized steel rain gutter and spout. The building's north-rear elevation has an attached addition of rectangular plan and smooth stucco. The addition has a flat roof, and its north wall abuts the stairset leading to the elevated rear patio behind the restaurant at the property's far west end. Because of recent alterations to this building and its construction after the property's period of significance, the Love's Cleaners building is not a contributing resource.

## INTERIOR:

### Concession and Secondary Spaces

The main entrance of the Isis Theater opens into a concession room. The concession room is rectangular in plan with recent Marmoleum floors. Its west wall is covered with a full-height large bay of vertical boardworks, and has a narrow, Avonite bar running much of its length. Its east and south walls are Corian-clad. Concession counters are along the eastern portion of the room and made of European Beechwood. The concession room ceiling is open frame; the eastern half of a larger gabled building completed c.1920 as a major remodel of the former meat market and ice plant.<sup>1</sup> Above the trusswork, the ceiling's corrugated metal underside is readily visible. A four-panel drop ceiling of optical-grade resin containing large light panels partially obscures the truss work at the concession room's eastern portion. Exposed air conditioning ducts are tucked within the trusswork, and punchout, square-form skylights are present within the roof. At the concession lobby's upper portions, Maharam fabric clads walls off the trusswork.

South of the concession lobby is a small hallway with recessed ceiling lights, off which are men's and women's restrooms, both of which are recently redone in a stylized contemporary Minimalism, with canted concrete sink basins that are wedge-shaped and trough-like. The restrooms have subtly angled European beechwood walls with integrated doors and slit-like vertical strip lights integrated into walls at either side of mirrors. Between the concession lobby and the auditorium are a series of spaces, slightly labyrinthine, one leading into the other.

An entryway with a three-part, Deco-styled stepped surround opens from the concession lobby onto a ramp room due east of it. The ramp room, with a down-sloping floor for ADA access, has Marmoleum floors and cloth-covered acoustical ceiling planks of aluminum colored Maharam fabric. The ramp room includes a concrete bench recessed into its north wall, underscored with European beechwood. Above the bench is a recessed strip light. At the ramp room's east wall is a set of double metal doors that opens onto a foyer. The foyer has Marmoleum floors, Maharam covered acoustic plank ceilings, and a single wood beam, painted. The foyer's north wall has multiple, vertically acclimated cabinet doors of perforated metal fronting storage spaces, and its south wall is clad in Maharam cloth panels.

Off the foyer's northeast portion are set of double metal doors that open onto the projector room's stairwell. Off the foyer's southeast and west corners are single panel wood doors that open onto L-plan vestibule spaces, symmetrically located at either end, that lead into the auditorium itself. The vestibules have European beechwood wainscots acoustical and Maharam

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<sup>1</sup> "Local Capital Buys Houk Meat Market," *The Ojai*, August 8, 1919.

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paneling cladding their walls, Tidalstone resin floors, and dropped wood ceilings with recessed ceiling lights and bays of European Beechwood panels and slats that serve as quadratic diffusers.

### **Projection Room**

Off the vestibule, a three-quarter turn stair behind a recent and substantial single metal door leads to the projection room. Its stairwell has stainless steel pipe railing, and plastic grip safety flooring. The stairwell has a sharply angled and chamfered, boxed balustrade of gypsum wall board. The upper level projection room is a single story, rectangular plan space. Though its floorplan is original, its surfaces and technology are all recent additions. Its floor is cork tile and its ceiling includes the cloth-clad acoustical panels seen in the auditorium. The projection room's ceiling is edged with various cable trays. At its west side, the room includes a recessed bay accessed by sliding glass doors that houses various electrical equipment and soundboards, and hard drives, and any variety of recent computers multiple, monitors, and other recent technology. The two film projectors date to the late 1970s and are "Super Lume-X" projectors made by the Strong International of Omaha Nebraska. The property owner acquired both projectors from the Hollywood legacy business Raleigh Studios, where they serviced a viewing room.

### **Auditorium**

The auditorium is rectangular plan with a sloped floor clad in ground and sealed concrete. The present property owner, as part of substantial flood repair damage, recently rehabilitated the auditorium. The theater's auditorium space is slightly askew, with a box-like shotgun volume akin to other early-era store theaters. Circulation is provided by side aisles, lit by hidden lights recessed at the auditorium's Tidalstone wall bases. Each side aisle has a full-length stainless-steel handrail at its outer end. The auditorium's side walls are clad in large fabric acoustical panels with a staggered wood plank pattern that descends with the grade of the floor. Present within this pattern are multiple affixed speakers. The south end of the auditorium has a small and projecting beechwood-clad stage accessed by a small stairset off its east end.

All wood accents in the auditorium are of European beechwood. This includes the backings of each of the individual fold down theater seats; along with side wall wainscots of a staggered course plank pattering, descending in grade with the floor; and as proscenium accents. The stage area has a wood, boxed tread stair off its east side. The auditorium seats 227 people; 22 rows with 11 connected seats per row, and an additional seven seats at the auditorium's rear. The auditorium's north wall is two levels, its upper portion the projection room. From the auditorium, the wall fronting the projection room contains six punchout openings- four of which are square-form and in a ribbon, then two others, one square and one rectangular, at each outer end. Each of the openings is framed in European Beechwood.

The auditorium's ceiling includes exposed Douglas fir planks original to the building's 1914 construction. The exposed plank ceiling has a slight pitch. Between its planks are Maharam-covered acoustical panels running the width of the auditorium, in addition to recent, programable LED lights of an eggcrate design. The LED lights are acrylic each consisting of 32 cube-like nodes, then recessed between the exposed planks in 12 groups of 8. Recent, black colored box speakers are suspended from various planks. In the ceiling area toward the stage, recessed wood



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bays run the width of the auditorium and contain additional black-colored speakers. All speakers in the auditorium are recent and positioned relative to acoustic geometry.

### Restaurant

At the property's far west end, fronted by the same Mission façade as the theater due east of it, is a rectangular plan restaurant. From the public right of way, the restaurant reads as one with the Isis Theater as both entities share the same Mission façade. However, the restaurant occupies the western portion of a large, gabled building; its gable hidden from the public right-of-way by the façade. The eastern half of the large gable tops the concession lobby for the theater, located at the middle of the complex. Inside, the restaurant possesses wide plank Douglas fir wood floor is reused from Ojai's Foothills Hotel, demolished in 1975. The restaurant space has an open frame wood truss ceiling, one-half of a gable, whose other half tops the concession lobby. Like the roof in the concession lobby, above the restaurant's ceiling trusswork its roof is also clad in corrugated metal.

### INTEGRITY

The Isis Theater retains integrity relative to Criterion A for its 1914 to 1945 period of significance. A historical contemporary would likely recognize the building as the former Isis Theater. The Isis Theater retains its integrity of **location**, unmoved since its 1914 completion. The Isis Theater retains its integrity of **setting**. In 1917 property owner J.J. Burke hired Mead and Requa's builder Robert Winfield to redo the building's façade to better complement and correspond to a notable beautification project occurring immediately east of the property. By the early 1920s, other Mead and Requa Spanish and Mission design would exist across the street from The Isis Theater (Ojai Tavern/ El Roblar Hotel, 1921) and west of it as well (Maravilla Realty Office, 1921; St. Thomas Catholic Church, 1919), and these buildings remain to this day. The Isis Theater retains integrity of **design**, attributed to the master architectural practice of Mead and Requa. Its barbed quatrefoil, block molding, barrel-vaulted terra cotta visor roofs and Santa Barbara styled stuccowork are present upon other Mead and Requa Ojai works, both built, and as research revealed, unbuilt designs. Other extant features include the slightly irregular shotgun volume of its auditorium, reiterated by the building's canted massing, in addition to the Mission-styled shoulders and single archway off its east-side elevation- added c. 1950, after the period of significance, but compatible to it. Especially by way of its long and narrow shotgun volume, the venue still reads as a "store theater" property type and is one of just three known to remain in Ventura County. The Isis Theater retains integrity of **workmanship**. The original Douglas fir truss topping the auditorium is now exposed, revealing original builder Arthur Pefley's construction workmanship. Aside from a consistent handling of exterior stuccowork to the 1917 façade redo, the Isis Theater appears to have lost its integrity of **materials**. No interior images of the Isis Theater/ Ojai Theater from its period of significance are known to exist, and present auditorium finishes exhibit no conjecture. Beginning in 1921, across its period of significance and beyond, the auditorium saw multiple renovations.<sup>2</sup> The Isis Theater retains integrity of **association** to J.J. Burke, the architectural practice of Mead and Requa, and the larger beautification project for which its façade was revised. Burke not only spearheaded the

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<sup>2</sup> Elise DePuydt, *The Ojai Playhouse: A Journey Through Time* (manuscript in preparation, n.d.), 18.

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construction of the Isis Theater but was still the property owner when builder Mead and Requa builder Robert Winfield completed its façade renovation just in time for the first Ojai Day celebration honoring Mead and Requa's Mission and Spanish-themed downtown beautification project and its primary benefactor, Edward Drummond Libbey. Presently the oldest operating movie theater in Ventura County, California, the Isis Theater retains integrity of **feeling**, as a small-town single screen movie theater venue. The theater's 1917 Mission styled façade renders its feeling as one distinctive to its immediate vicinity, and the larger, Ojai-specific beautification project in which, in intentional and picturesque composition, the Ojai Playhouse, as it is known today, still exists.

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### 8. Statement of Significance

#### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

#### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

#### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ENTERTAINMENT/ RECREATION

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

#### Period of Significance

1914-1945

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### Significant Dates

1914: Isis Theater built and opened

1917: Façade redone to match Mead and Requa Ojai beautification project

1935: Ojai Theosophists Fred and Lida Hart sell to owner intending to preserve venue as movie theater.

1942-1945: Owner Bill Swanson extends theater hours into the night for locally stationed World War II-era troops, revising the building to accommodate them.

### Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

### Architect/Builder

Builder: Arthur Pefley

Architect: Mead and Requa (attributed)

Builder: Robert Winfield

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Isis Theater is National Register of Historic Places eligible under Criterion A, at the local level of significance, as a historically significant recreation venue for the City of Ojai, California. Today named the Ojai Playhouse, the property is Ojai's first purpose-built movie theater. The Isis Theater is one of only three "store theater" property types known to remain in Ventura County. Store theaters, sometimes referred to as "nickelodeons," are the earliest purpose-built motion picture houses of any kind. Additionally, the Isis Theater possesses Criterion A eligibility for its associations to community planning and development. Civic booster J.J. Burke's purchase of the land on which three months later the Isis Theater opened, and industrialist Edward Drummond Libbey's first announcements of his intention to beautify what was then Nordhoff, both occurred on the same day: April 17, 1914. Both projects are intertwined, as Nordhoff transitioned into Ojai. The Isis Theater's Mission-styled façade is a distinctive, recognizable feature of downtown Ojai, and exists in purposeful, picturesque composition to the larger World War I-era beautification project Libbey funded, to which today Ojai is identified. The Isis Theater's period of significance is 1914 to 1945. 1914 is the year of the Isis Theater's construction. In 1935, Fred and Lida Hart, Theosophists who changed the name of the venue to "The Ojai Theater," sold the property to Bill Swanson that the property would continue to be used as a movie theater. After multiple improvements to the venue through the Great Depression and World War II, and after keeping the theater open into the night to make movies available to locally stationed troops, just after the War's end, in December 1945, Swanson sold the property, moved to Malibu, and began construction of Paradise Cove Resort.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

**Nordhoff to Ojai**

When the Isis Theater opened on August 15, 1914, though located in the Ojai Valley, the town of Ojai was then “Nordhoff.” Established beginning in the 1870s, Nordhoff owes a large part of its existence to westward health seekers. Lorenzo Dow Roberts, who arrived in the valley underweight and suffering from bronchitis, staked the original townsite at his fifty-acre farm on July 26, 1873, and gradually recovered his health.<sup>3</sup> Even then, Roberts at the time had intended to name the town “Ojai.”<sup>4</sup> Ventura County businessman and real estate agent Royce Gaylord Surdam purchased land west of Roberts, drawing up the town’s first large-scale subdivision in 1874. Surdam aggressively advertised his subdivision, locally and abroad, promising a 20-acre parcel of land for anyone willing to build a hotel upon it.<sup>5</sup> Among those from points east that became interested, and eventually took Surdam up on his offer, were Iowan lawyer Abram Wheeler Blumberg and his wife Catharine. Before their westward move, Catharine herself lay ill in bed, reading books to pass the time, including those written by the journalist Charles Nordhoff.<sup>6</sup> Nordhoff served as the editor of the *New York Post* from 1861 to 1871, and shortly thereafter became a primary travel writer regarding California and its health benefits. His works included *California for Health, Pleasure, and Residence: A Book for Travelers and Settlers* of 1873, possibly the book Ms. Blumberg read that drew her and husband out west. Within a year of her relocation, Catharine’s health recovered, and at that time, at her suggestion, the Blumbergs and Surdam decided to name the town “Nordhoff” in honor of Charles Nordhoff.<sup>7</sup> Charles Nordhoff, who was still living, appreciated the honor.<sup>8</sup>

Located in what is today Libbey Park, Abram Blumberg completed “Blumberg’s Nordhoff Hotel,” later known as the Ojai Inn, in 1874.<sup>9</sup> At the hotel’s opening, Surdam explained his plans for expanding the town, capturing the interest of others who soon came. Newcomers included John Montgomery, who with his wife Jacobita relocated in 1874 for the sake of curing her asthma.<sup>10</sup> Though surprised to find no town in the true sense, Montgomery stayed, stating, “grander than any map painting was stamped on nature’s great canvas, the dense oak forest; the perpetual play of sunshine through the foliage; the towering mountains, guardians of the rustic beauty below; and above all the balmy breath of life soothing the tender tissue of throat and

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<sup>3</sup> Patricia L. Fry, Elise DePuydt and Craig Walker, *The Ojai Valley: An Illustrated History* [Version 7] (Ojai, CA: Ojai Valley Museum, 2019), 25.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>7</sup> Ed Wenig, “Nordhoff vs Ojai,” *Ojai Valley News*, October 22, 1969, <https://ojaihistory.com/nordhoff-vs-ojai/>; Fry et al., *The Ojai Valley*, 27.

<sup>8</sup> Fry et al., *The Ojai Valley*, 31.

<sup>9</sup> Carole Denardo and Craig Walker, “Final Report: Historic Resource Inventory and Evaluation, Ojai Playhouse Theater, 145 East Ojai Avenue (APN 023-0-077-050), Ojai, Ventura County, California,” technical report (Santa Ynez, CA: Provenience Group, Inc., July 22, 2019), 10.

<sup>10</sup> Fry et al., *The Ojai Valley*, 29.

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lung.”<sup>11</sup> Once the Montgomerys arrived in Ojai Valley, according to John, Jacobita never had another asthma attack. Later in 1874, Montgomery purchased 1300 acres of the Surdam land. Colonel C.P. Wiggins purchased the Nordhoff townsite, including the hotel, in 1877, though passing away the following year.<sup>12</sup>

### **J.J. Burke**

The Isis theater was the brainchild of another Nordhoff settler who first arrived to heal. When he was 25 years old, doctors told John Joseph “J.J.” Burke that he would not live to age 30.<sup>13</sup> Upon telling the bad news to friend Edward Thacher, who already lived in the Ojai Valley, Thacher urged Burke to move west.<sup>14</sup> Burke arrived in Ojai in 1887 from Canada with next to nothing, clerking and managing various Ojai businesses, and farming a government claim of 160 acres.<sup>15</sup> Over the course of his first years in the Ojai Valley, Burke healed, and as he did, he not only vowed never to leave Nordhoff, but became the growing town’s primary booster. Burke’s multitude of civic efforts included, but were not limited to, installing the town first streetlamps (1892); coordinating Ojai’s first railroad line (1897), co-founding the Ojai Improvement Company (1900); establishing the Ojai Olive Company (1901); raising funds for building both the Foothills (1903) and Ojai Tavern hotels (“El Roblar,” 1920); co-founding the Ojai State Bank (1906), and helping start a local utility (Ojai Power Company, 1913).<sup>16</sup>

### **April 17, 1914**

Sponsored by the Ojai Civic League and overseen by S.D. Thacher- the half-brother of Edward Thacher, who first encouraged Burke to move to the Ojai Valley, all of Ojai’s male citizens- presumably property owners and American citizens only- were invited to a gathering to address Nordhoff’s growth and future. 87 men accepted the invite, which occurred the evening of April 17, 1914 at the former Blumberg Hotel, by then named the Ojai Inn and owned by Edward Drummond Libbey. Recognizing the need to continue his involvement in community affairs, Burke stated, “In this beautiful, quiet spot, we have a tendency to withdraw deeper into our human shells, and only gatherings of this kind can foster a spirit of public interest and good brotherly feeling that will rebound to the benefit of both community and individual. A good many years ago, I resolved to be a booster and an optimist. Today I am both, and I hope the future will see me in the same old bandwagon.”<sup>17</sup> Earlier that day, Burke had purchased the lot at the southwest corner of S. Signal Street and E. Ojai Avenue, where just three months and one week later, the Isis Theater opened.

This April 17, 1914 gathering is locally significant for other reasons as well, which would inform the Isis Theater’s future context. The group of 87 from this meeting would come to be known as the Ojai Valley Men’s League- a business focused entity named in response to the pre-extant

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>13</sup> Despite the presence of multiple Burke biographies, what his life-threatening ailment was, is unknown.

<sup>14</sup> Fry et al., *The Ojai Valley*, 160.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 96, 160.

<sup>16</sup> Solomon Neill Sheridan, *History of Ventura County Volume II* (Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1926), 393-394; Walter Bristol, *The Story of the Ojai Valley* (Ojai, CA: Ojai Publishing Company, [1947]), 92-93.

<sup>17</sup> Denardo and Walker, “Final Report,” 14.

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socially focused Ojai Valley Woman's Club. The Men's League is the precursor to the Ojai Chamber of Commerce.<sup>18</sup> It was also at this same event that the industrialist and winter-time resident Edward Drummond Libbey first indicated an intent to transform Nordhoff into something else. Libbey was originally from Toledo Ohio and oversaw the Libbey-Owens-Ford Glass Company (L-O-F). In the late 1800s, Libbey developed an efficient system of producing and cutting plate glass that became a new standard in glass manufacturing, cladding thousands of skyscrapers and other buildings worldwide, and making L-O-F one the largest 20<sup>th</sup> century glass manufacturers.

At the April 7, 1914 gathering, there seems to have been an understanding that the character of the town's building stock did not match that of its climate and scenery, which at that meeting J.J. Burke spoke of as Nordhoff's two primary assets.<sup>19</sup> According to *The Ojai* newspaper, Libbey, albeit vaguely, "...spoke of our great possibilities and of the future of the Valley if we organize ourselves into a body, for the advancement of the interests and enterprises of this community."<sup>20</sup> In time, Libbey committed to transforming downtown Nordhoff to the Ojai it is today. In 1916 Libbey hired the San Diego architectural practice of Mead and Requa to undertake the beautification work.<sup>21</sup> Before establishing their own practice, Frank Mead and Richard Requa both worked for Modern master Irving Gill: perhaps the first Southern Californian to practice any kind of abstracted, architectural Modernism, that he merged with the Mission style's arcades and smooth, stucco cladding. In the Ojai Valley, Mead and Requa had already designed a guest house for Libbey, in addition to a main house for his friend, fellow Toledoan Herry Sinclair, who first suggested that Libbey and his wife Florence visit the Ojai Valley, which they did in 1907.<sup>22</sup>

To great success, Libbey first exhibited his cut glass at the 1893 World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago. Architect Daniel Burnham designed the Exhibition campus and its buildings with *Beaux-Arts* inspired City Beautiful principals Libbey saw first-hand. Mead and Requa applied a similar City Beautiful total design and organizing approach to their Ojai project. In this instance, instead of the *Beaux-Arts* design-work Burnham applied, Mead and Requa incorporated a variety of Spanish and Mission design elements, borrowing from the Mission San Juan Capistrano arcade in designing the project's signature, 475-foot long storefront arcade, and referencing Havana's Columbus Cathedral for the design of Ojai's new post office.<sup>23</sup> Other aspects of the Ojai beautification project included new walkways, and a new park with tennis courts having Mead and Requa-designed bleachers, and the fronting of Civic Park, as it was originally named, by an elaborate pergola with a symmetrical dyad over oversized Mission-styled arches.

Mead and Requa were well-versed in Mediterranean vernaculars of different kinds, not only through working under Irving Gill. Both spent travel and research time across the Mediterranean, including North Africa, where Mead's photographs of Moroccan vernaculars are featured in the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid; Bristol, *The Story*, 82.

<sup>19</sup> "Men's Banquet Great Success," *The Ojai*, April 14, 1914.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>21</sup> "Requa's Plans Are Satisfactory," *The Ojai*, November 3, 1916.

<sup>22</sup> Bristol, *The Story*, 137.

<sup>23</sup> "Architectural Significance of Ojai Civic Improvements," *The Ojai*, May 11, 1917.

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1896 two volume set *Morocco: It's People and its Places*.<sup>24</sup> Richard Requa's 1926 book "*Architectural Details: Spain and the Mediterranean*," is considered a primary text for applying the design vernacular to US architecture of the pre-World War II era.<sup>25</sup> As Mead and Requa designed the Libbey beautification project, in their hometown of San Diego was occurring the Panama Pacific Exhibition, which presented a Churrigueresque-styled Spanish Revival designed by Bertram Goodhue and others. The exhibition, which ran from 1915 to 1917 was well attended, and is credited with popularizing Spanish Colonial Revival architecture in Southern California.<sup>26</sup>

One of the few pre-existing Nordhoff elements the beautification project spared was the 1903 memorial fountain dedicated to Charles Nordhoff's daughter Evelyn who died at age 33 of appendicitis shortly before her wedding.<sup>27</sup> Designed by S.M. Ilsey- architect of the Foothills Hotel, this fountain was not only preserved, but though it was dwarfed by the new work, it stars in Libbey's beautification project. The fountain is front and center within the pergola at the project's heart, fronting Civic Park (today named Libbey Park) and facing E. Ojai Avenue. With its espadaña parapet, block molding and smooth stucco, the commemorative fountain's design language is seen throughout the new scheme. Preserving the fountain made in honor of Charles Nordhoff's deceased daughter was a poetic continuance of Nordhoff's past, doubling as the new Ojai's germinating seed. Soon, the Nordhoff fountain's design language would also make its way into the Isis Theater's new façade.

### Isis Façade Redone

The Isis Theater is located at E. Ojai Avenue and S. Signal Street: the primary intersection of the Ojai beautification project. Though its Arthur Pefley-built façade was only three years old, and already in the Mission Revival style, it clashed with Mead and Requa's work. Perhaps asked by Libbey, or Mead and Requa themselves, J.J. Burke made a decision to redo the façade of his fairly new theater to better match the nearby scheme. Robert Winfield, then serving as Mead and Requa's builder for the Libbey beautification, undertook the façade renovation. Though no primary source documents or drawings are presently known, it is assumed Winfield did not go rogue from Mead and Requa in the middle of their larger project.<sup>28</sup> Just as he did throughout the

<sup>24</sup> John Crosse, "Frank Mead: 'A New Type of Architecture in the Southwest,' Part I, 1890-1906," *Southern California Architectural History*, May 13, 2016, <https://socalarchhistory.blogspot.com/2016/05/frank-mead-new-kind-of-architecture-in.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Los Angeles Conservancy, "Frank Mead & Richard Requa," Los Angeles Conservancy, 2025, <https://www.laconservancy.org/learn/architect-biographies/frank-mead-richard-requa/>.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Requa himself would revise the Panama California Exhibition Buildings for the 1935-1936 California Pacific International Exhibition. San Diego History Center, "California Pacific International Exposition, Chapter One: Planning and Preparation," *San Diego History Center*, accessed April 18, 2025, <https://sandiegohistory.org/archives/amer0/1935expo/ch1/>.

<sup>27</sup> Fry et al., *The Ojai Valley*, 234.

<sup>28</sup> A 1968 *Ojai Valley News* article interviews H.W. (Robert) Winfield and lists the massive body of Ojai works he built, including all aspects of the Mead and Requa beautification, and the Isis Theater's façade renovation. Both the article and Winfield delineate little between Mead and Requa designed works, those Winfield built under Mead and Requa, and those Winfield may have designed himself in later decades. His work on the Isis Theater is briefly mentioned as an effort to better correlate the façade to the [Mead and Requa designed] arcade. In US Census records, Winfield identifies himself a "contractor" and "carpenter." Fred Volz, "You name it; he built it," *Ojai Valley News*, January 21, 1968; U.S. Census Bureau, *1920 Federal Census, Nordhoff (sp), Ventura, California*,



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beautification, for the new façade Winfield likely built from a Mead and Requa design. Thusly, and lower-portion alterations aside, the Ojai Playhouse façade as it exists today is attributed to Mead and Requa, with Robert Winfield as builder.<sup>29</sup>

As Libbey, Mead, Requa, and Winfield finished the beautification project, on March 23, 1917, the State of California officially approved the renaming of Nordhoff to “Ojai.”<sup>30</sup> Local citizens celebrated the first “Ojai Day,” intended as “Libbey Day” before Libbey declined that honor, on April 7, 1917. Winfield finished the façade redo immediately before the first Ojai Day celebration.<sup>31</sup> A film in honor of Ojai Day event was shown at the Isis Theater on May 4 and May 5, 1917.<sup>32</sup> Ojai would be formally incorporated as a City on August 5, 1921. According to builder Robert Winfield in a 1960 interview, Libbey invested thousands in Ojai because, “he told me that he’d been all over the world and he’d only seen two places to compare with it- one in Syria and the other on the Bosphorus and Ojai beat them both.”<sup>33</sup>

### Store Theatres

The Isis Theater is a “store theatre” building type. According to author William Paul, store theaters were the first dedicated movie theatres and “were where movies came into their own as a new art form.”<sup>34</sup> Store theaters are closely related to the better-known “nickelodeon,” with differences among movie theater scholars regarding the application of one term versus the other, or the interchangeable use of both terms.<sup>35</sup> The advent of the term “nickelodeon” appears to have been tied to programming versus architecture, with the first usage of the term occurring in Pittsburgh in 1905 at a venue that was itself a converted storeroom. The parlance of “store show” was common industry nomenclature at the time of their construction.<sup>36</sup> Store theaters possessed common characteristics, including elaborated façades, and narrow, shotgun-like massings. Though not adorned, the Isis Theater’s original Mission-styled façade was Nordhoff’s (Ojai’s) first, predating the Mead and Requa Mission and Spanish themed beautification project by three years, and therefore would have been eye catching and distinctive for a rural town. Store theaters

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Enumeration District: 261, roll: T625\_154, 7B; U.S. Census Bureau, *Sixteenth Census of the United States [1940 US Federal Census]*, Ojai, Ventura, California, enumeration district: 56-23, roll: m-t0627-00363, 65A; U.S. Census Bureau, *Seventeenth Census of the United States [1950 US Federal Census]*, Ojai, Ventura, California, enumeration district: 56-34, roll: 3768,12.

<sup>29</sup> The Isis Theater’s espadaña parapet echoes those fronting Libbey Park, themselves based off the parapet of the Evelyn Nordhoff Commemorative fountain, which they frame. The Isis Theater’s barbed quatrefoil design is highly similar to a Mead and Requa design proposed for Clark’s Auto Livery at the west end of the arcade, kitty-corner from the theater itself. Though Clark’s garage was built in tandem with the Arcade, the quatrefoil is not known to have been included in its parapet and is not present within its today. Mead and Requa, “Clark, Tom, garage, (commercial) [AD 1002-25],” San Diego History Center, Architecture collection, [c.1916].

<sup>30</sup> Fry et al., *The Ojai Valley*, 232.

<sup>31</sup> “Nordhoff News and Notes of Interest,” *Daily Free Press*, March 24, 1917.

<sup>32</sup> Fry et al., *The Ojai Valley*, 225.

<sup>33</sup> Patricia Fry, *The Ojai Valley: An Illustrated History* (Ojai, CA: Matilija Press, 1999), 200.

<sup>34</sup> William Paul, *When Movies Were Theater: Architecture, Exhibition, and the Evolution of American Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 65–66.

<sup>35</sup> Paul, *When Movies*, 65; Maggie Valentine, *The Show Starts on the Sidewalk: An Architectural History of the Movie Theater, Starring S. Charles Lee* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 23–24.

<sup>36</sup> S.S. Hutchinson, “Kinematography in the United States,” *Moving Picture World*, July 11, 1914, 175–76, quoted in Paul, *When Movies*, 62.

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typically possessed 25-to-30-foot street-facing façades, with depths ranging anywhere from 50 to 100 feet. Especially as seen from within the present auditorium, though its finishes had been repeatedly redone over the years, and subject to one compatible 1950 expansion, this long, shotgun-like volume is retained.

The first purpose-built movie theater of any kind is believed to be Tally's Electric Theatre, constructed in Los Angeles in 1902.<sup>37</sup> By 1908, just 12 years after moving picture and projection technologies were first developed and paired, there were 8,000 movie theaters across the U.S. By 1916, that number had grown to 18,000 theaters- converted, purpose-built, or otherwise- with a daily attendance of 16 million.<sup>38</sup> Unlike earlier live performance venues with their highly elevated box opera seats, such seating offered no practical advantage for viewing a motion picture. Due to their oblique angles, these seats were actually worse than those at ground level, which faced the screen head-on.<sup>39</sup> For its ability to provide entertainment to the multitudes and its lack of overt hierarchies within its auditoriums, the store theater typology was intrinsically democratic and quickly became an affordable entertainment medium for the masses, "a sort of people's forum," according to a 1914 article in the trade journal *Moving Picture World*.<sup>40</sup> Store theaters still presented any variety of live acts within their spaces, and many, including the Isis, originally possessed stages. But the design of store theaters was screen-focused, with all aspects of the space geared toward the screen, and the movie upon it.

Of an era predating the long-form feature length film as the movie-going norm, to generate income with small venues, store theaters changed movies frequently to keep audiences returning. From the start, original proprietor DeLacy Clarke variegated Isis programming; two different presentations per week, changing on Wednesdays and Saturdays.<sup>41</sup> Through its early years and beyond, as Ojai's only movie theater, the Isis would show first-run Hollywood movies with any variety of notable stars. But like many early-era store theaters, the Isis occasionally doubled as a community hall and hosted fundraisers, lectures, dances, vaudeville, locally shot movies featuring Ojai's citizens, and educational fare such short films on how automobiles or shoes were made.<sup>42</sup>

A small-town venue, the Isis Theater opened in 1914, just as in major cities, the first instances of more elaborate "movie palaces"- standalone venues coupled with longer-running feature films, ushered in a new, more elaborate, chapter of the movie-going experience.<sup>43</sup> Among the first of the new movie palaces was the 2,989-seat Mark Strand Theater in New York, overseen by innovative impresario Samuel "Roxy" Rothafel.<sup>44</sup> Befitting the movie palace's elaborate revivalist design, Rothafel transformed the experience into an occasion, with meticulously

<sup>37</sup> Valentine, *The Show Starts*, 22.

<sup>38</sup> Paul, *When Movies*, 63.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>40</sup> W. Stephen Bush, "The Triumph of the Gallery," *Moving Picture World*, December 13, 1913, 1256, cited in Paul, *When Movies*, 71.

<sup>41</sup> "Isis Theater, Nordhoff, Opens Saturday Evening," *The Ojai*, August 14, 1914.

<sup>42</sup> Isis Theatre (Theater), advertisement, *The Ojai*, August 22, 1919; Isis Theatre (Theater), advertisement, *The Ojai*, July 13, 1917.

<sup>43</sup> Paul, *When Movies*, 114-15.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 113-115.

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uniformed ushers, an orchestra, fresh flowers in the lobby, and, most notably, the rearranging of a given night's films and live acts into one dense arc over the course of the evening.<sup>45</sup> Built at a cost equivalent to nearly 32 million dollars in 2025 money, the Strand as movie palace would usher a new level of escapism that the movie palace's theming, scale, and design both encouraged and enabled. In the process, the store theater's chapter in movie-going history was closed.

### **The Isis Theater During its period of significance: 1914-1945**

By the time J.J. Burke proposed The Isis Theater, motion pictures were years into being a craze. Their earliest viewings occurred not in purpose-built buildings, store theater or otherwise, but as pop-up-like events in pre-existing spaces of different kinds. Sponsored by *The Ojai* editor F.W. Hawes, and a "Mr. Hayward," Nordhoff's first picture show of any kind occurred in 1911 at the Nordhoff High School auditorium.<sup>46</sup> There, 200 people paid 50 cents each- 10 cents for children- to view two showings of an unknown film, ran off a gas-powered generator.<sup>47</sup>

To clear the way for a theater on his newly purchased lot, Burke relocated a printer's building that doubled as the office for *The Ojai* newspaper. A pre-existing meat market (1903) and ice plant (1911), both owned by noted Nordhoff resident W.E. Houk remained, with Burke building the new theater east of and physically adjacent to the meat market itself. Burke hired builder Arthur Pefley, whom the County of Ventura identifies as a master builder, to undertake the building's construction.<sup>48</sup> The Isis Theater's original architect, if one was hired, is presently unknown.<sup>49</sup> Pefley not only built the Isis Theater, but in a manner unusual, if not distinctive, Pefley constructed a single, 70-foot long uniform and continuous Mission-styled façade fronting the new theater, the adjacent meat market, and an ice plant, unifying all three into what then read as a single building. Early press indicated a design intended to accept a possible second story at a future point.<sup>50</sup>

Upon the Isis Theater's completion, J.J. Burke hired DeLacy Clarke as the first theater operator. Clarke already operated a theater in Ventura named the Isis Theater, and thus Clarke presumably selected the "Isis" name for the new venue.<sup>51</sup> Nordhoff's Isis Theater opened on August 15, 1914, with showing "five full reels, two shows" of unknown, unnamed films. The first named

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>46</sup> Fry et al., *The Ojai Valley*, 241.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ventura County Cultural Heritage Board, "Ventura County Cultural Heritage Board Resolution No. 2017.3: A Resolution Establishing The List of Local Master Architects and Builders for the Unincorporated County Area, the Cultural Heritage Board Serves," November 13, 2017, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Ojai historian Craig Walker believes that the Isis Theater's original architect might have been Albert C. Martin; Pefley and Martin together completed a 75 x 100 store building in Ojai c. 1918. "Ojai," *Southwest Builder and Contractor*, April 12, 1918, 34; Craig Walker, "Original Design of Ojai Theater," email correspondence with author, July 13, 2024. Pefley worked with master architect Alfred Priest, serving as his builder upon the 1921 Ventura City Hall complex.

<sup>50</sup> "New Building for Nordhoff," *The Ojai*, May 29, 1914.

<sup>51</sup> DePuydt, *The Ojai Playhouse*, 3. In a manner somewhat inconsistent, in the coming years some early advertisements refer to the venue as "The Isis Theatre" or "Isis Theatre." On account of multiple advertisements and past scholarship referring to it as such, this application uses the "Isis Theater"; "Ventura's Live Wires," *Land of Sunshine*. May, 1912, 344.

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film advertised was Jack London's six-reel *Valley of the Moon*, to be shown on August 19, 1914.<sup>52</sup> The name "Ojai," is derived from the Chumash word for "moon" ('awha'y) and selecting this film as one of the theater's first may have been a themed tie-in to the new venue's Ojai Valley location.<sup>53</sup>

Initially, the Isis presented identical one and two-reel movies on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Early on, the venue had distribution with Lewis Selznick's "World Film Corporation" (1917) and also showed Heart-Selig movies.<sup>54</sup> After DeLacy Clarke's brief tenure, in August of 1915, Clarke sold the business to two young locals, Perry Johnson, and Harry Sharpe.<sup>55</sup> Johnson and Sharpe, aside from showing various one- and two-reel films, featured vaudeville acts, including African American jubilee singers and featured soloists.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, Johnson and Sharpe held Saturday jitney dances, whereby after the Saturday showing, all chairs were moved and music was provided by trap drum player Ed Runkle, and his "Isis Orchestra," aka "Runkle's Jazz Band." Ed's wife Ethel, the sister of Harry Sharpe, was the piano player for various films, at that time all still silent. The sister of projectionist Claude Munger would marry Sharpe. Johnson and Sharpe owned the business in 1917, at the time its façade was renovated to match the larger, Mead and Requa Mission styled beautification being constructed nearby. With the advent of World War I, Perry Johnson enlisted, and the Isis Theater sold to Charles Langley in January of 1918. Conglomerating local media, Langley had recently become editor of *The Ojai* newspaper, its office located off Signal Street immediately south of the theater itself, where Burke had relocated it to build the Isis.<sup>57</sup> Both *The Ojai* newspaper and The Isis Theater under Langley presented patriotic fare related to World War I. This included newsreel updates, and titles such as "A Daughter of Uncle Sam" and "Pershing's Crusaders."<sup>58</sup>

In December of 1918, one month after the theater closed due to the Spanish Flu pandemic, Langley sold the theater to newspaperman Bill Train, who in 1921 would also acquire *The Ojai* newspaper, which he oversaw until 1925.<sup>59</sup> Train himself only briefly owned the theater before selling the business to Ed and Ethel Runkle, who reopened the venue in April of 1919.<sup>60</sup> With World War I concluding, the Runkles, associated with the theater since 1915, reintroduced Saturday night jitney dances and presented "vaudeville acts, musical performances and lectures," in addition to Kinograms (Newsreels).<sup>61</sup> Under the Runkles, the Isis Theater occasionally functioned as a community venue, including as a space for benefits of local families in need.<sup>62</sup> The Runkles operated The Isis until leaving Ojai in 1923, selling the business to Otto Busch.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>52</sup> DePuydt, *The Ojai Playhouse*, 4.

<sup>53</sup> "Ojai History," *Ojai Valley Museum*, accessed May 22, 2024, <https://www.ojavalleymuseum.org/ojai-history>.

<sup>54</sup> DePuydt, *The Ojai Playhouse*, 6.

<sup>55</sup> Fry et al., *The Ojai Valley*, 241; DePuydt, *The Ojai Playhouse*, 7.

<sup>56</sup> DePuydt, *The Ojai Playhouse*, 7.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>58</sup> The Isis Theatre (Theater), advertisement, *The Ojai*, August 23, 1918; Isis Theater (Theater), advertisement, *The Ojai*, July 19, 1918.

<sup>59</sup> DePuydt, *The Ojai Playhouse*, 13.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>61</sup> Fry et al., *The Ojai Valley*, 242.

<sup>62</sup> *The Ojai*, August 22, 1919.

<sup>63</sup> DePuydt, *The Ojai Playhouse*, 22.

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By the early 1920s Busch's brother Edmond owned the former ice plant space, which by that time had been reconstructed into a grocery store. Busch continued presenting movies and vaudeville both, and added the theater's first permanent seats: 50 upholstered chairs to its rear portion, in 1924.<sup>64</sup> In April of 1926, Fred and Lida Hart bought not only the Isis Theater business from Otto Busch, but the property itself, purchased from an aged J.J. Burke, who had still owned it over the course of all these years. Having relocated from Massachusetts to Ojai, Fred and Lida Hart were Theosophists. By the time of the Harts' Ojai arrival, Theosophy had a recent, but already pervasive, presence through Ojai.

### Theosophy and Ojai

Established in New York in 1874 with a motto of "there is no religion higher than truth," Theosophy was an alternative teaching and spiritual discipline, combinative in its approach to world religions. Theosophy was among the very first Western-based practices wholeheartedly embracing Eastern spiritualist disciplines, including Buddhism. Converting in 1875, Theosophy co-founder Henry Olcott was one of Buddhism's first Westerners.<sup>65</sup> Theosophy has three separate branches which by the 1920s each had a Southern California headquarters. Of these three, the American Section of the Theosophical Society, Adyar [India] ("Theosophical Society") was centered at "Krotona"- a purpose-built commune in Hollywood's Beachwood Canyon. Mead and Requa themselves had designed Krotona's main building: the 1912 Krotona Inn, sometimes called "Krotona Court." Krotona Court, a multi-purpose building that is today a City of Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument, featured guest lodging, a library, a publishing office, a vegetarian cafeteria, Warrington's living quarters, and a quasi-sacred domed space for Theosophy's "Esoteric Section" practitioners.<sup>66</sup> Krotona Court was the centerpiece of what would become the 11-acre "Krotona Colony." Krotona's primary purpose was twofold: 1) a place where like-minded students could study Theosophy and live its teachings, and 2) as a place made in preparation for the coming world teacher.<sup>67</sup> Theosophical Society leaders had already identified this figure: a young Brahman boy discovered on an Adyar beach named Jiddu Krishnamurti, who would become a primary Ojai figure.

Having lost his mother at age 9, his father then surrendered Krishnamurti and his brother Nityananda to the Theosophists. Annie Besant, TS Adyar's spiritual leader, had adopted and raised both brothers. Although Krotona Hollywood was in-part built for him, and though Krishnamurti as a dashing young man had Hollywood friends- particularly the writers Christopher Isherwood and Aldous Huxley, Krishnamurti was raised in London, and when he arrived in Southern California, it was the clean air and open, natural space of Ojai he preferred. This was in large part for his brother Nitya, who by the early 1920s was suffering from tuberculosis, and in 1922 the brothers had stayed at an Ojai cottage of a Theosophy member. In

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Anu Kumar, "How an American helped revive Buddhism in Sri Lanka after moving to India," *Scroll.in*, April. 22, 2023, <https://scroll.in/magazine/1047687/how-an-american-helped-revive-buddhism-in-sri-lanka-after-moving-to-india>.

<sup>66</sup> Please see: Daniel Paul and Lindsay Mulcahy, "Krotona Court & Grand Temple of the Rosy Cross," City of Los Angeles Historic-Cultural Monument application, March 8, 2024.

<sup>67</sup> Joseph E. Ross, *Krotona of Old Hollywood, 1866-1913*, (Montecito, CA: El Montecito Oaks Press, 1989), 233; A.F. Knudsen, "Why a Krotona," *The Messenger*, January 1915, 416.

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1924, citing the increased congestion, pollution and corruption of Hollywood, the Theosophical Society vacated Krotona Hollywood and relocated the entire Krotona Colony to Ojai, perceiving Ojai's land as "impregnated with occult and psychic influences."<sup>68</sup> Architect Robert Stacy Judd constructed the new Krotona Colony west of the town center. Sadly, Jiddu Nityananda, Krishnamurti's brother, closest friend and confidant, would pass away in 1925. Jiddu Krishnamurti, for his part, at age 35 in 1929, dissolved "The Order of the Star of the East" (OSE) that the Theosophical Society had formed around him, declaring in a speech that "truth is a pathless land," and walking away from any messianic associations.<sup>69</sup> Nonetheless, until his passing at age 90 in 1986, Krishnamurti lived in Ojai, at least part time of a given year, and over the course of his life gave hundreds of lectures on philosophy, spirituality, the importance of finding out for oneself, of following neither religions, gurus, or the emotional predominance of one's own thoughts.

The Harts had relocated from Massachusetts to Ojai to take care of an older, ailing Albert Warrington. Additionally, Mr. Hart worked with the Theosophical Book Association for the Blind, which made various texts available in braille.<sup>70</sup> With their 1926 acquisition of the Isis Theater, the Harts made various improvements, and most notably, renamed the venue "The Ojai Theater," sometimes simply referred to as "The Ojai," a name it retained until the mid-1960s. For his part, Krishnamurti attended at the movies at The Ojai Theater often, especially if the feature was a musical, a Disney movie, or focused upon nature or animals.<sup>71</sup> Under the Hart's ownership, in 1930 the theater presented its first "talkie," titled "The Great Divide." By the late 1920s, Theosophists not only owned the theater, but Annie Besant herself owned *The Ojai* newspaper until her 1933 passing, and installed a Theosophist editor.<sup>72</sup> Besant spoke at the theater on April 14, 1927. Philosopher and spiritualist Manley P. Hall, who would go on to establish the Philosophical Research Society in 1934, hiring Robert Stacy Judd to design his small campus, spoke at the Ojai Theater on June 28, 1929. Both the Krotona Colony and a Theosophical presence still exist in Ojai to this day.

Though they continued to own the property, the Harts ceased running the theater in 1930. During the heart of the Great Depression the theater had various operators, and was also closed for five months. In 1933 the Harts turned the business over to Bill Swanson, who operated multiple Southern California movie theaters, and had just lost a prior venue in the March, 1933 6.4 magnitude Long Beach earthquake. Swanson reopened the Ojai Theater in October of that year after making cosmetic renovations and installing a new screen, commencing his tenure with a showing of a historical drama about Voltaire. When the Harts finally sold the property in 1935, despite receiving a variety of offers upon it, they decided to sell the property to Swanson. The

<sup>68</sup> Hadley Meares, "The Creation of Beachwood Canyon's Theosophist "Dreamland," *Curbed Los Angeles*, May 22, 2014, <https://la.curbed.com/2014/5/22/10099768/the-creation-of-beachwood-canyons-theosophist-dreamland-1>.

<sup>69</sup> Paul and Mulcahy, "Krotona Court," 19.

<sup>70</sup> Fry et al., *The Ojai Valley*, 324.

<sup>71</sup> Ellen Sklarz, "Krishnamurti and the Ojai Valley," *Ojai History*, May 27, 2011, <https://ojaihistory.com/krishnamurti-and-the-ojai-valley/>.

<sup>72</sup> Bristol, *The Story*, 91.

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Harts expressly did so because they wanted the venue to continue as a movie theater, a use that the “Ojai Playhouse,” as it is today known, continues to this day.<sup>73</sup>

### World War II and Thereafter

Bill Swanson not only committed to the Ojai Theater through the Great Depression, but made special accommodations for hundreds of troops stationed nearby during World War II. The Ojai Theater was their closest movie theater. From 1942-1946, two Infantry Regiments: the 134<sup>th</sup> 2nd Battalion, and the 174<sup>th</sup>, followed by the Navy’s Acorn Assembly and Training Detachment, were stationed at the Ojai Country Club at different, contiguous points over the war and shortly thereafter.<sup>74</sup> The Ojai Theater, which already had one of Ojai Valley’s first air conditioning units, became a welcome respite.<sup>75</sup> Swanson kept the Ojai Theater open after hours, deep into the night according to different accounts, to show movies to the hundreds of troops stationed nearby.<sup>76</sup> To accommodate his troop influx, Swanson added 165 new seats to the theater and converted a vacated doctor’s office just west of the theater- the present day concessions area- into an overflow area.<sup>77</sup> Shortly after the war’s end, in December of 1945, Swanson sold the property and moved with his family from Ojai to a Malibu beachfront property he had recently purchased. There, Swanson built a completed a pier began before the war, and transformed its shoreline into what became known as Paradise Cove, an iconic postwar Southern California locale.

Over the course of the postwar years and into the present day, the former Isis Theater would continue operation under various names and owners. The theater has had dark spells: in transition between owners, during the Spanish Flu pandemic and the Great Depression, briefly closed during the early 1980s due to safety concerns, more recently closed due to a public utility water line breaking in 2014 and flooding the theater. However, the property has continued its use as single-screen movie theater, and is today the oldest operating movie theater in Ventura County. With its distinctive Mission styled espadaña parapet, and its shotgun, box-form massing, slightly canted as it runs along S. Signal Street, the Isis Theater, today known as the Ojai Playhouse, remains a signature element of downtown Ojai. A rare, surviving instance of a Ventura County store theater, the genesis of the Isis Theater is part-and-parcel to that of Ojai itself, while preceding the city by some years.

<sup>73</sup> DePuydt, *The Ojai Playhouse*, 38.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 38

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 54;

<sup>77</sup> “Improvements Being Made In Ojai Theater,” *The Ojai*, December 1, 1944.

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### Timeline

1903: C.V. Miller constructs meat market upon the property

1911: W.E. Houk, who acquired meat market in 1904, constructs ice plant.

April 7, 1914: J.J. Burke purchases the lot upon which the meat market and ice plant exist, and on which The Isis Theater will be constructed. That same evening, 87 Nordhoff men hold a meeting to discuss the town's future, and industrialist Edward Libbey first indicates an interest to help. In the coming years, Libbey's financial commitments will lead to a revitalized, redesigned Nordhoff, renamed Ojai in 1917.

April-August 1914: After moving a printer's building that doubled as the headquarters for *The Ojai* newspaper, Burke hires builder Arthur Pefley to build the Isis Theater, with its Mission-styled façade fronting not just the theater itself, but the adjacent ice plant and meat market. If Pefley did so under an architect, that architect is presently unknown.

August 15, 1914: The Isis Theater opens to public, with DeLacy Clarke, who operated a Ventura venue also named the Isis Theater, as its proprietor.

August 1915: Clarke sells the business to young Nordhoff residents Perry Johnson and Harry Sharpe. Through World War I until 1926, the Isis Theater would have a variety of different business owners, including a some who also owned *The Ojai* newspaper, headquartered next to it. J.J. Burke continues to own the property itself.

c.1916-1917: The Isis Theater façade is redone to better match the larger Mead and Requa beautification project Libby is funding along Ojai Avenue nearby. Undertaken by their builder, Robert Winfield, the revised façade is attributed to Mead and Requa.

March 23, 1917: Nordhoff is officially renamed "Ojai."

April 7, 1917: Libbey's beautification project is completed, and the City celebrated its first "Ojai Day." The local newspaper reports that scaffolding was just being removed from the Isis Theater's façade redo in time for this celebration.

c.1920: Former ice plant and meat market, two standalone, side-by-side buildings adjacent the theater, are reconstructed into one gabled buildings that still exists, its spaces shared by the theater and the adjacent restaurant.

August 5, 1921: Ojai incorporated as a city.

1924: The Theosophist community known as Krotona Colony relocates from Hollywood to Ojai.



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April 1926: Theosophists Fred and Lida Hart purchase the Isis Theater and from J.J. Burke, its property. The Harts rename the venue "The Ojai Theater."

1927 Theosophical Society of America spiritual leader Annie Besant purchases *The Ojai* newspaper and installs a Theosophist editor.

1926-1935: Under the Hart's ownership, The Ojai Theater during this time features first run Hollywood movies, but also hosts various Theosophical and metaphysical lectures at the venue by the likes of Annie Besant and Manley P. Hall, who in 1934 would establish the Philosophical Research Society in Los Angeles.

February 1930: First "talkie," titles *The Great Divide*, is shown at venue, after Harts install sound equipment for accommodating them.

October 1930: The Harts cease to run the theater business, leasing is to Oliver Prickett and George Damon, the first of a variety of Hart lessees during the Depression's early years.

1932: The Harts' theater manager Louis DuMoulin adds a Streamline Moderne entry program to the ground level that remained until the mid-1960s. DuMoulin established robust children's programming. This included Saturday and Sunday matinees, and after meeting with Walt Disney in person in Los Angeles, basing a local Mickey Mouse Club at the theater.

September 1933: Annie Besant dies. Around that time the Harts lease the theater with Bill Swanson, a Southern California proprietor who had lost a theater in the March, 1933 Long Beach earthquake, operate the Isis Theater.

July 1935: Bill Swanson purchases of the Ojai Theater property from Fred and Lida Hart. Swanson adds the sloped floor still present today, in addition to a new box office. The Harts sell the theater to Swanson among other suitors, because of his desire to continue the property as a movie theater.

July 1937: Swanson installs air conditioning in the Ojai Theater and according to his daughter, it was the first such unit in the Ojai Valley. Swanson aggressively markets the theater as air conditioned in print ads.

c. 1932-1944: Ventura County Health Officer Doctor Jesse A. King is based in an office at the building's middle portion. Early years of this occupancy include a partnership with Dr. Suttan H. Groff, who shares the space with King.

1942-1946: Two Infantry Regiments: the 134<sup>th</sup> 2nd Battalion, and the 174<sup>th</sup>, followed by the Navy's Acorn Assembly and Training Detachment Friends are stationed at the Ojai Country Club at different points during World War II, and shortly thereafter. Bill Swanson keeps the Ojai Theater open "day and night," according to one author, to show movies to the hundreds of troops stationed nearby. Swanson adds 165 new seats to the theater, connects the vacated office of Dr.

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King west of the lobby into an overflow area, and adds restrooms behind it. This is the concessions area of the Ojai Playhouse today.

December 1945: Bill Swanson sells the Ojai Theater to focus upon improving his Malibu Paradise Cove property.

1946: Hiram H. (H.H.) and Florence Flesher, son Ted, daughter Katie, son-in-law Barney Lawrence acquire theater business in 1946, and purchase building in 1949.

c.1947: Building housing the former Love's Cleaners located at the parcel's southwest portion is built. The Theater building's western portion becomes an insurance and accounting office for Ted Flesher and Barney Lawrence, a use it retains until 1966.

1949: The Fleshers add 34 feet behind (south of) auditorium, to expand it and accommodate space for a 12-seat crying room. The Fleshers also constructed the compatibly designed archway and parapet off the theater's southeast corner, the walkway under it leading to a standalone former cleaners building.

1963: The Los Robles Theater, located on Maricopa Highway west of downtown Ojai, opens to the public, providing local residents a second movie venue option besides the Ojai Theater.

1966: Wayne Glasgow leases the theater from owner Sam Cornish; hires architect J. Arthur Drielsma to redo the venue in a Scottish theme and renames it the "Glasgow Playhouse." Drielsma redesigns the ground level of front elevation, adding slumpstone brick cladding. Drielsma converts offices at building's far west end into restaurant space. Glasgow and his wife remodel the lobby, and focus on arthouse and adult only programming. Wayne Glasgow had left San Francisco, where during the early 1960s he operated the Peerless Theater, a subject of constant police raids and one of the City's first adult theaters showing both gay and straight pornography and "same sex encounter" live acts.<sup>78</sup>

1972: Los Robles Theater closes, rendering the Isis Theater Ojai ("Glasgow Playhouse" at that time) as Ojai's only movie theater once more. Converted into a bank that same year, the Los Robles Theater is substantially altered, no longer reading as a theater from the public right of way.<sup>79</sup>

1975: Wayne Glasgow acquires property.

1983: The property had failed a building code inspection for a cracked roof beam, and was deemed closes by the City of Ojai. A controversial and financially troubled local figure, Glasgow sells the property to Khaled Al-Awar. Al-Awar renames the venue the "Ojai Playhouse." Al-Awar undertakes façade renovations at the lower level that inform the building's design today.

<sup>78</sup> Bill Counter, "The Peerless Theatre," *San Francisco Theaters*, September 27, 2017, <https://sanfranciscotheatres.blogspot.com/2017/09/peerless-theatre.html>.

<sup>79</sup> "Newly-chartered Ojai bank awards contract for home," *Ventura County Star*, September 30, 1972.

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1984: Al-Awar adds kitchen extension bump-out at middle portion, rear of building, away from public right-of-way.

July 20, 2014: A water main beneath E. Ojai Avenue bursts, flooding the theater in four feet of water, causing substantial damage, ruining fixtures and finishes Al-Awar installed.

July 12, 2018: SHPO concurs with findings of the GPA-authored Caltrans HRER titled “Maricopa Highway Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Improvements Project (EFIS 07 1700 0274/EA 07-34220).” Identifies the Downtown Ojai Historic District and ascribes a CA Historical Resource Status Code of 2D2 for the Isis Theater (NR District Contributor through Section 106 process [lead agency: FHWA]). Isis Theater is listed upon the California Register of Historical Resources.

2020: Concert promoter David Berger purchases the Ojai Playhouse.

July, 2020: The City of Ojai adopts the “Ojai Playhouse Theater” as City of Ojai Historic Landmark no. 26.

2024: After a multi-million dollar revitalization, including a focus on restoring the building’s signature, street-facing parapet, Berger reopens the Ojai Playhouse to the public.

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**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 # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency

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- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

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### 10. Geographical Data

**Acreeage of Property** 0.180

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

#### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_  
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 34.447517                      Longitude: -119.246131

**Or**

#### UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927    or     NAD 1983

- |          |           |           |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.) Property includes entirety of Ventura County, California, parcel number 023-0-077-050.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.) Documented resources are present upon, and historically associated with, County of Ventura, California, parcel 023-0-077-050.

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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Daniel D. Paul, Architectural Historian  
organization: on behalf of property owner David Berger  
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city or town: Glendale – La Crescenta state: CA zip code: 91214  
e-mail: daniel@culturalchapter.net  
telephone: (213) 215-4161  
date: May 22, 2025

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## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

## Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

## Photo Log

Name of Property: Isis Theater

City or Vicinity: Ojai

County: Ventura

State: California

Photographer: Daniel Paul



Isis Theater

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Date Photographed: March 27, 2024; January 24 and April 29, 2025

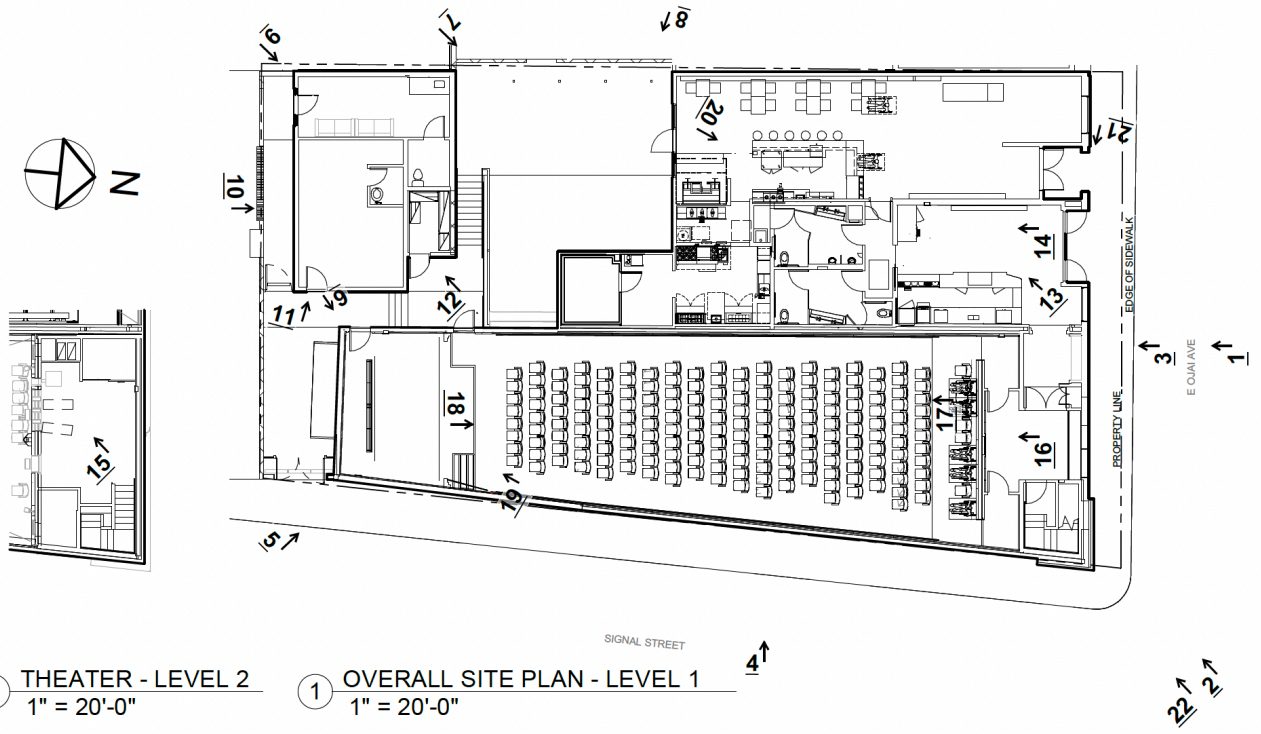
Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0001) Front elevation. View: S.
- 2 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0002) Front and side elevation. View: SW.
- 3 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0003) Espadaña parapet. View: S.
- 4 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0004) East-side elevation. View: W.
- 5 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0005) Compatible rear extension and archway, added 1950.
- 6 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0006) Rear elevation of theater. View: NE.
- 7 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0007) Back of property; restaurant at left; theater at right. View: NE.
- 8 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0008) West-side elevation and back of property. View: E, NE.
- 9 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0009) Former Love's Cleaners at SW portion of parcel. View: NE.
- 10 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0010) Former Love's Cleaner's, south elevation. View: N.
- 11 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0011) Former Love's Cleaners, front and side elevation. View: NW.
- 12 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0012) Former Love's Cleaners, recent addition. View: SW.
- 13 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0013) Concession lobby beneath gable. View: SW.
- 14 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0014) Exposed original trusswork at concession lobby roof.
- 15 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0015) Projection room. View: SW.
- 16 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0016) Foyer. View: S.
- 17 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0017) Auditorium. View: S.
- 18 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0018) Auditorium from stage. View: N.
- 19 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0019) Proscenium and stage. View: SW.
- 20 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0020) Restaurant interior. View: N, NE.
- 21 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0021) Theater in context to Ojai Post Office tower and arcade.
- 22 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0022) Front and side view, dusk. View: SW.

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1 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0001) Front elevation. View: S.

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2 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0002) Front and side elevation. View: SW.

Isis Theater  
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3 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0003) Espadaña parapet. View: S.

Isis Theater  
Name of Property

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4 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0004) East-side elevation. View: W.

Isis Theater  
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5 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0005) Compatible rear extension and archway, added 1950.

Isis Theater  
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Ventura, CA  
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6 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0006) Rear elevation of theater. View: NE.



Isis Theater  
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7 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0007) Back of property; restaurant at left; theater at right. View: NE.

Isis Theater  
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8 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0008) West-side elevation and back of property. View: E, NE.

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9 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0009) Former Love's Cleaners at SW portion of parcel. View: NE.

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Name of Property

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10 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0010) Former Love's Cleaner's, south elevation. View: N.

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Name of Property

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11 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0011) Former Love's Cleaners, front and side elevation. View: NW.

Isis Theater  
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12 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0012) Former Love's Cleaners, recent addition. View: SW.

Isis Theater  
Name of Property

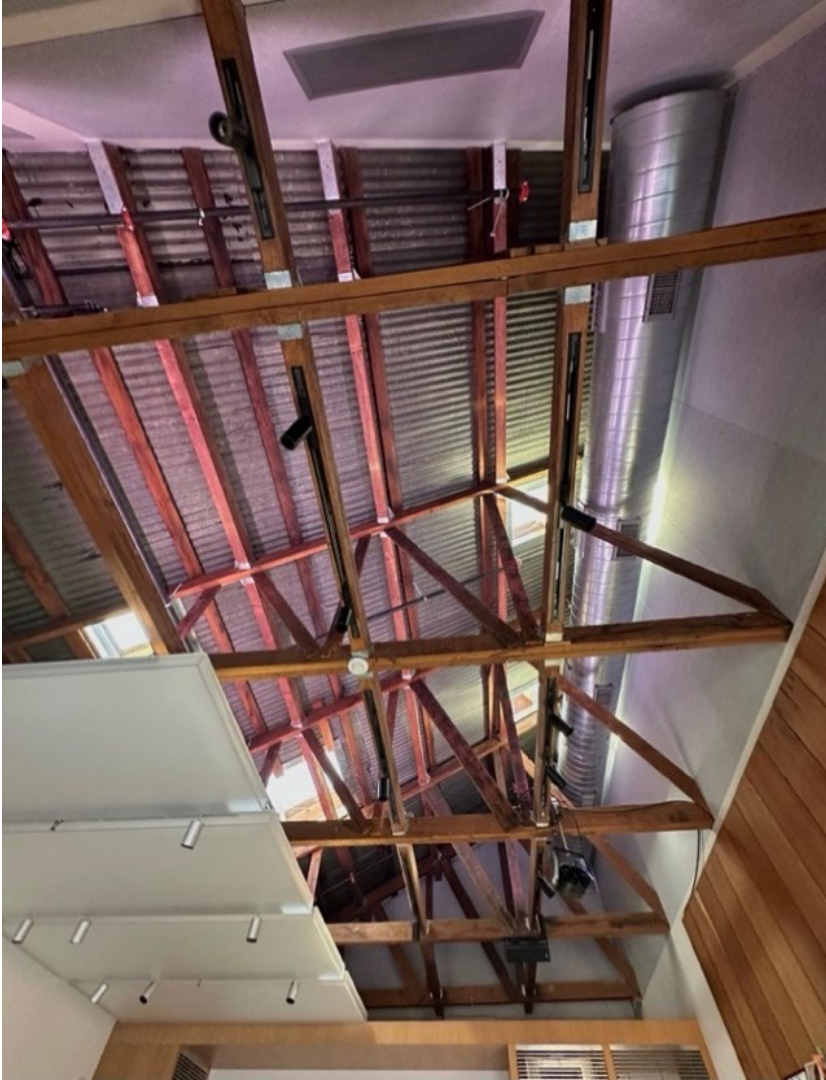
Ventura, CA  
County and State



13 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0013) Concession lobby beneath gable. View: SW.

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14 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0014) Exposed original trusswork at concession lobby roof.



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15 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0015) Projection room. View: SW.

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16 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0016) Foyer. View: S.

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17 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0017) Auditorium. View: S.

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18 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0018) Auditorium from stage. View: N.

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19 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0019) Proscenium and stage. View: SW.

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Name of Property

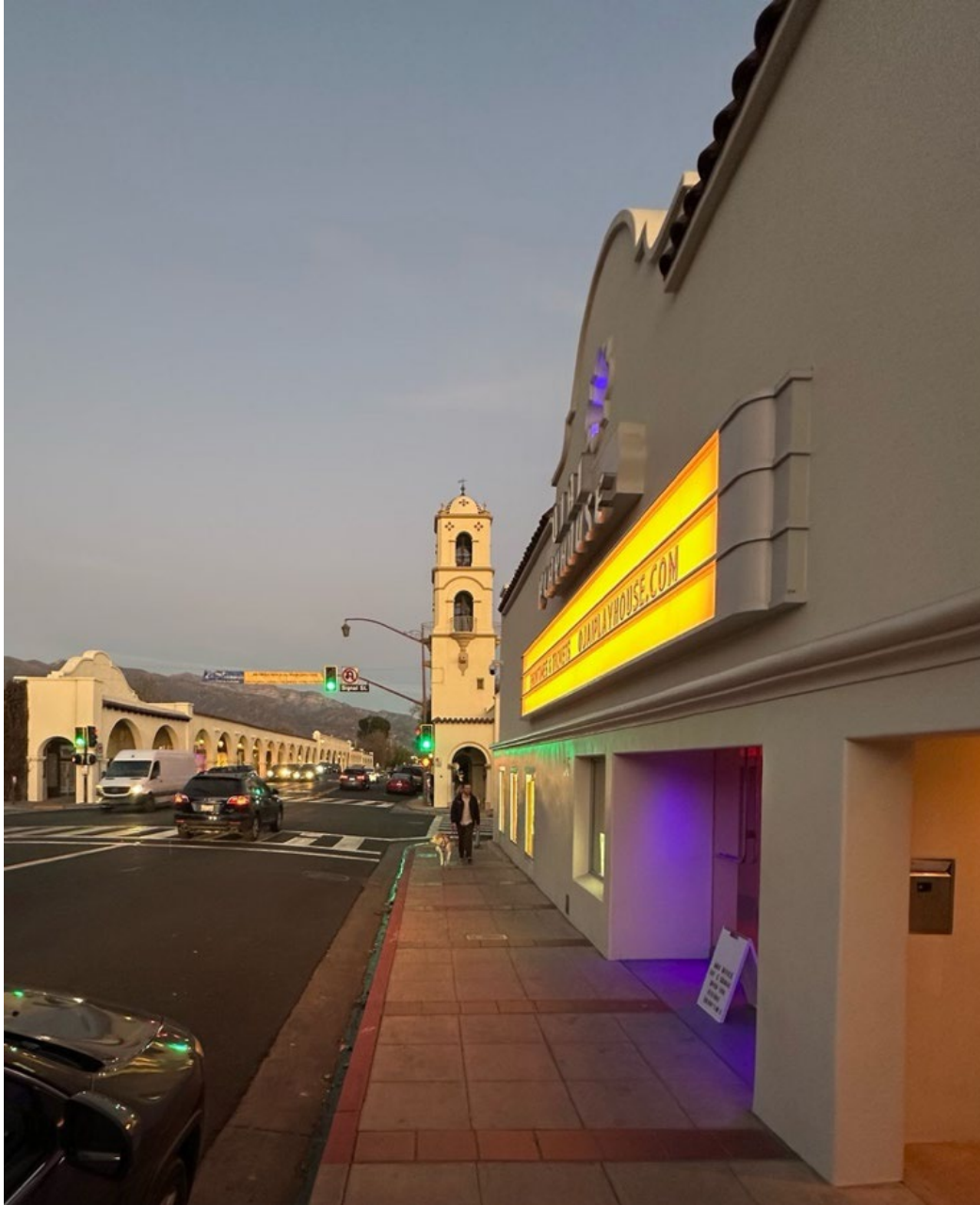
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20 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0020) Restaurant interior. View: N, NE.

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21 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0021) Theater in context to Ojai Post Office tower and arcade.

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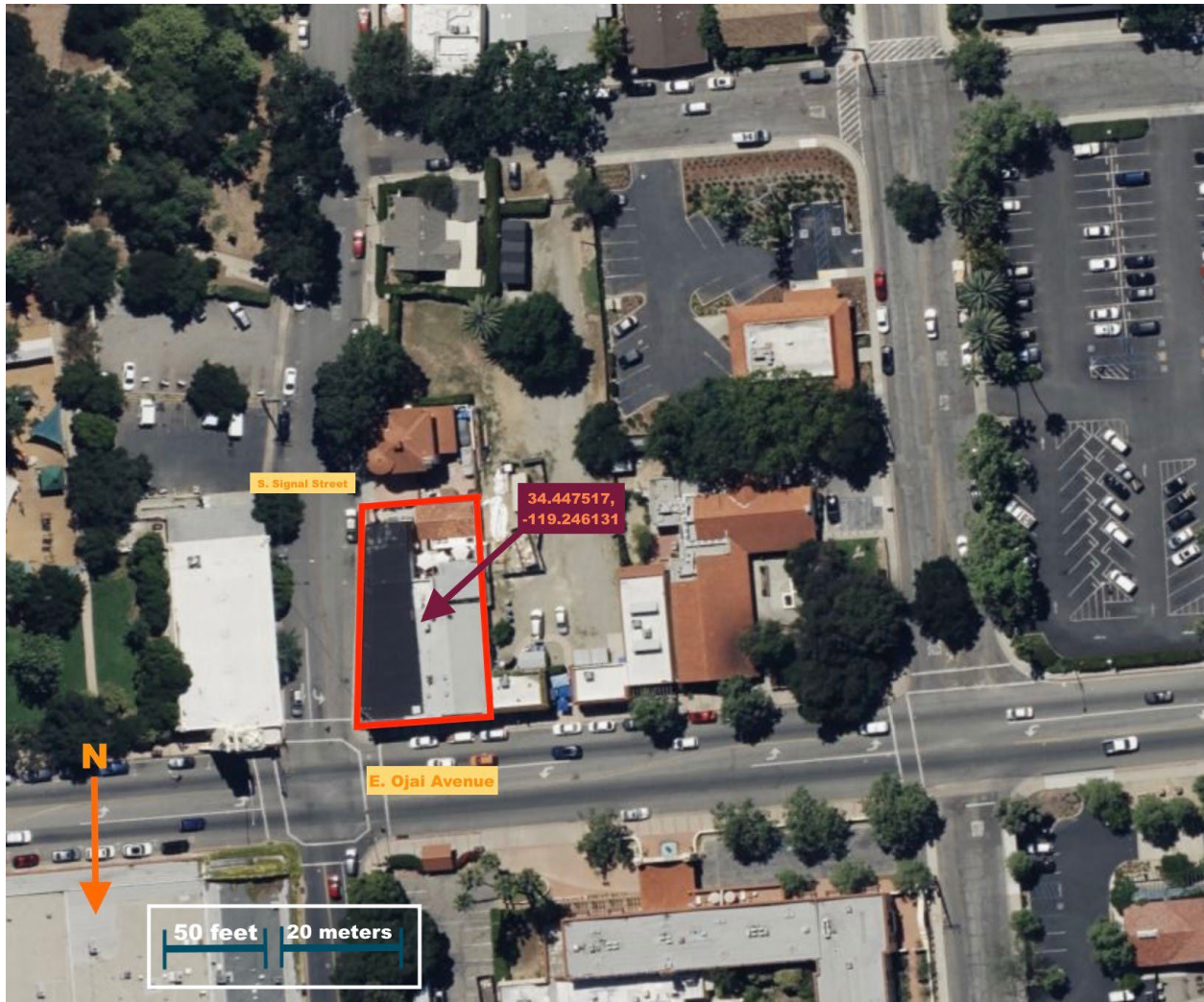
22 of 22 (CA\_Ventura\_IsisTheater\_0022) Front and side view, dusk. View: SW.



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**LOCATION MAP**  
**Google Earth map, location 34.447517, -119.246131**



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### TOPOGRAPHIC MAP

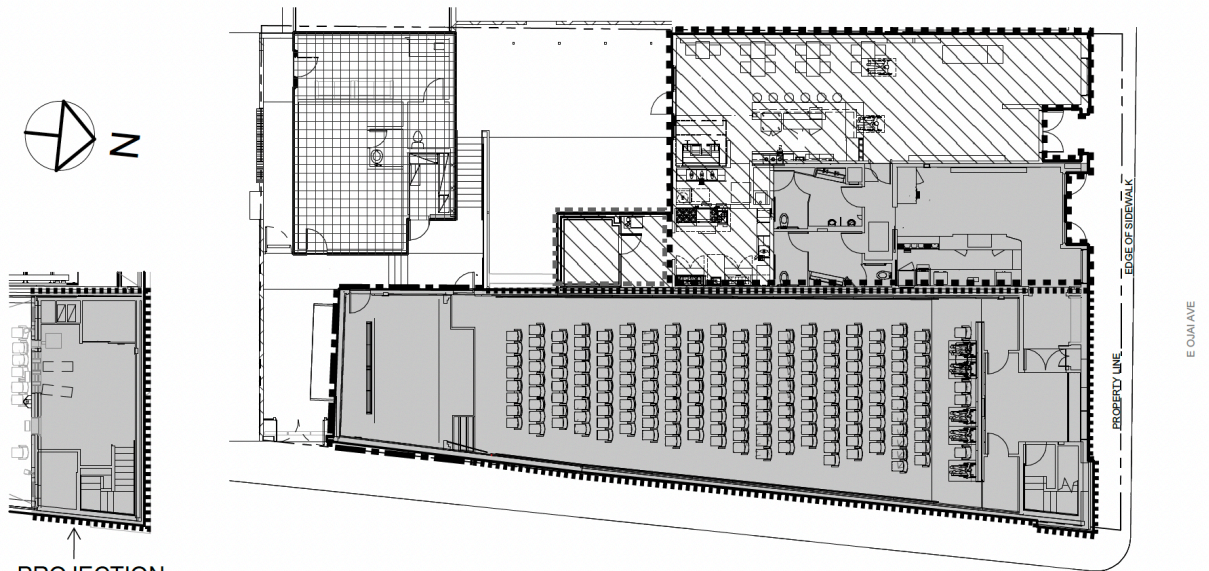


Ojai CA, 2022 1:24 000  
T5N R23W San Bernardino Principal Meridian

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### SITE PLAN



② THEATER - LEVEL 2  
 1" = 20'-0"

① OVERALL SITE PLAN - LEVEL 1  
 1" = 20'-0"

- ..... ISIS THEATER 1914
- - - - - GABLED BUILDING 1920
- THEATER USE (EXPANDED INTO GABLED BUILDING 1944)
- LOVE'S CLEANERS C. 1947 (NON-CONTRIBUTING)
- - - - - 1949 ADDITION
- RESTAURANT USE
- - - - - 1984 ADDITION (PARTIALLY REBUILT IN 2024 FROM FIRE)

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### FIGURES



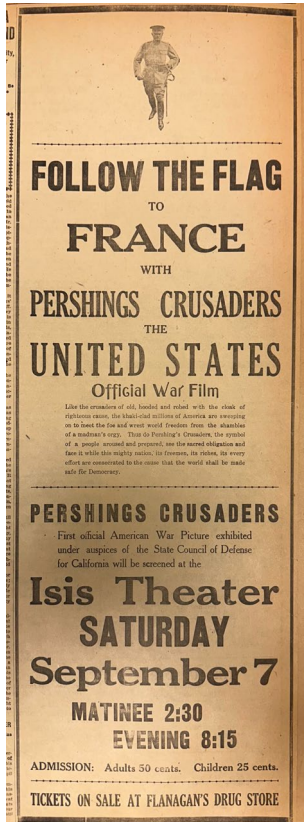
Figure 1. Isis Theater front elevation of 1914-1916. Carole Denardo and Craig Walker. "Final Report: Historic Resource Inventory and Evaluation, Ojai Playhouse Theater, 145 East Ojai Avenue (APN 023-0-077-050), Ojai, Ventura County, California." technical report (Santa Ynez, CA: Provenience Group, Inc., July 22, 2019), cover.

ION  
**ISIS THEATER, NORDHOFF,  
OPENS SATURDAY EVENING**  
The Isis picture show opens in Nordhoff Saturday evening. Manager Clark is busy fitting up the pretty little show room just completed by J. J. Burke and will give the residents of Nordhoff the first performance tomorrow evening. The program has not been announced, as yet, but the patrons may rest assured that it will be first-class in every particular. There will be two show weekly, on Wednesday and Saturday. On next Wednesday evening a great treat is in store for the people of the valley, being the great six-reel production by Jack London, "The Valley of the Moon." This will be the first showing of this photoplay in any small town in California, and being one of the most expensive productions, our people should congratulate themselves upon being able to see it. All the scenes in this picture are taken in California, around San Francisco bay, and beautiful Carmel by the Sea. Owing to the length of this program there will be but one performance, beginning at 7:45. If you desire to see a first-class entertainment make no other engagement for Wednesday evening, August 19.

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**Figure 2.** Isis Theater opening article in *The Ojai* newspaper. "Isis Theater, Nordhoff, Opens Saturday Evening," *The Ojai*, August 14, 1914, 1.



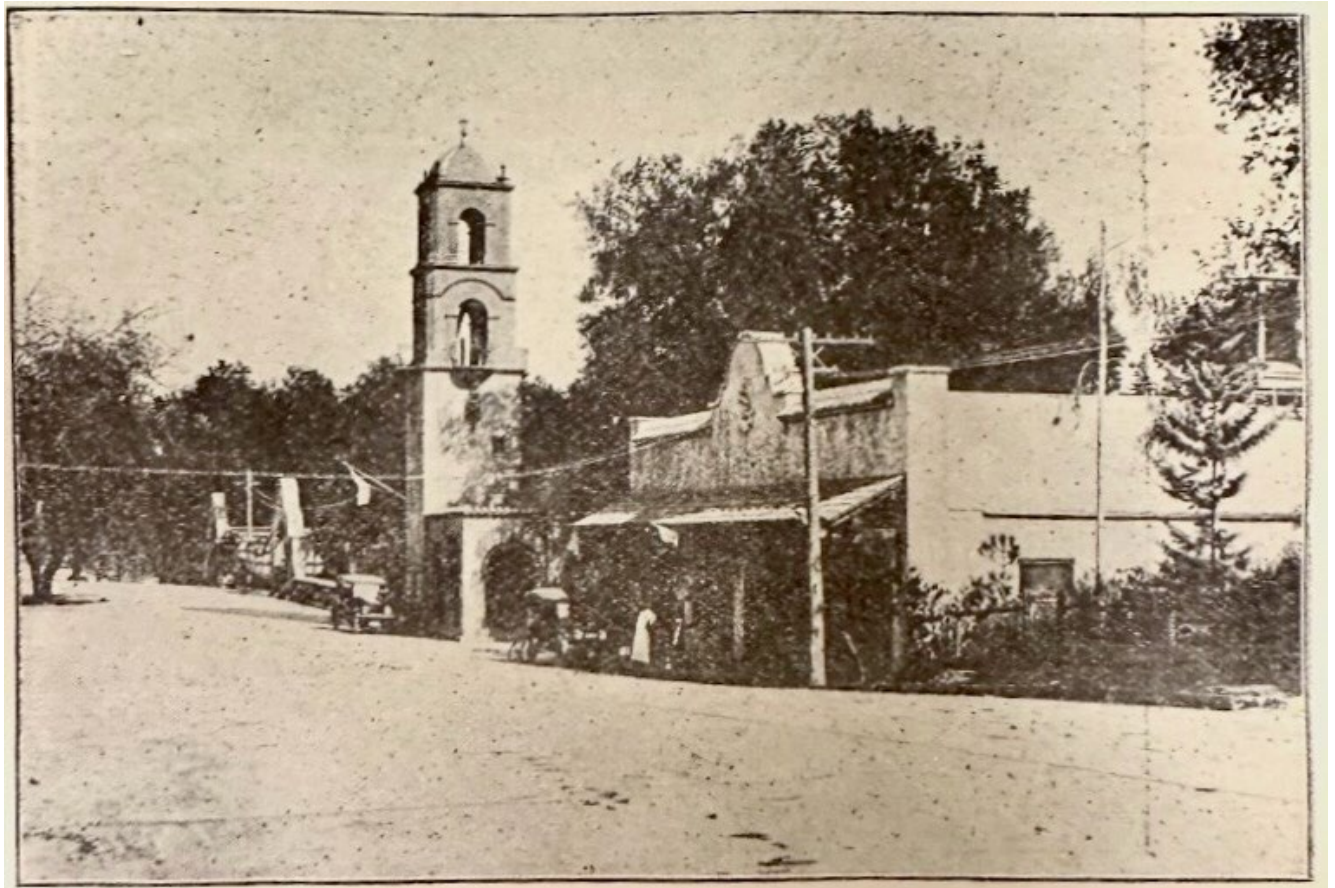
**Figure 3.** Isis Theater advertisement for *Pershing[']s Crusaders*. Isis Theater, advertisement, *The Ojai*, September 13, 1918.

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**SPECIAL ATTRACTION**  
ISIS THEATRE  
Monday, July 14  
MAURICE TOURNEUR PRESENTS  
**"SPORTING LIFE"**  
A STUPENDOUS PARAMOUNT-ARTORAF  
SPECIAL FEATURE  
THE WORLD'S MOST FAMOUS RACE  
A THRILLING PRIZE FIGHT AT AN EXCLUSIVE LONDON CLUB  
EXCITEMENT, INTRIGUE—EVERYTHING IN A YOUNG ENGLISH EARL'S "SPORTING LIFE."  
BIG PLOTS! BIG SCENES! BIG THRILLS!  
Don't Miss This TREMENDOUS PICTURE!  
\*\*\*\*\* 2 FULL SHOWS 2 \*\*\*\*\*  
FIRST SHOW STARTS PROMPTLY AT 8:00. SECOND SHOW AT 10:00  
ADMISSION Adults, - 35c. War Tax 4c  
Children, - 20c. War Tax 2c  
COME EARLY

Figure 4. Isis Theater advertisement for *Sporting Life*. Isis Theatre [Theater], advertisement, *The Ojai*, July 11, 1919.



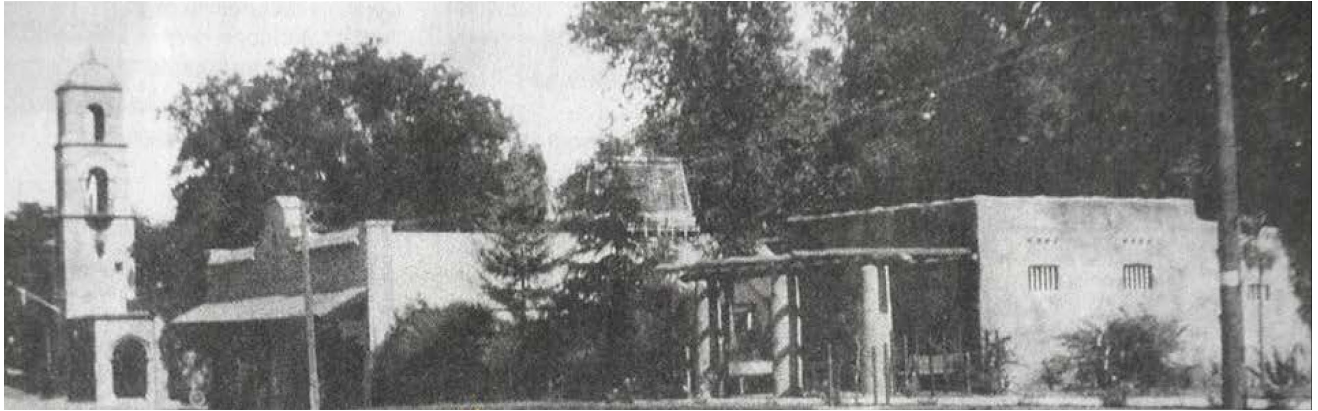
Isis Theater

Name of Property

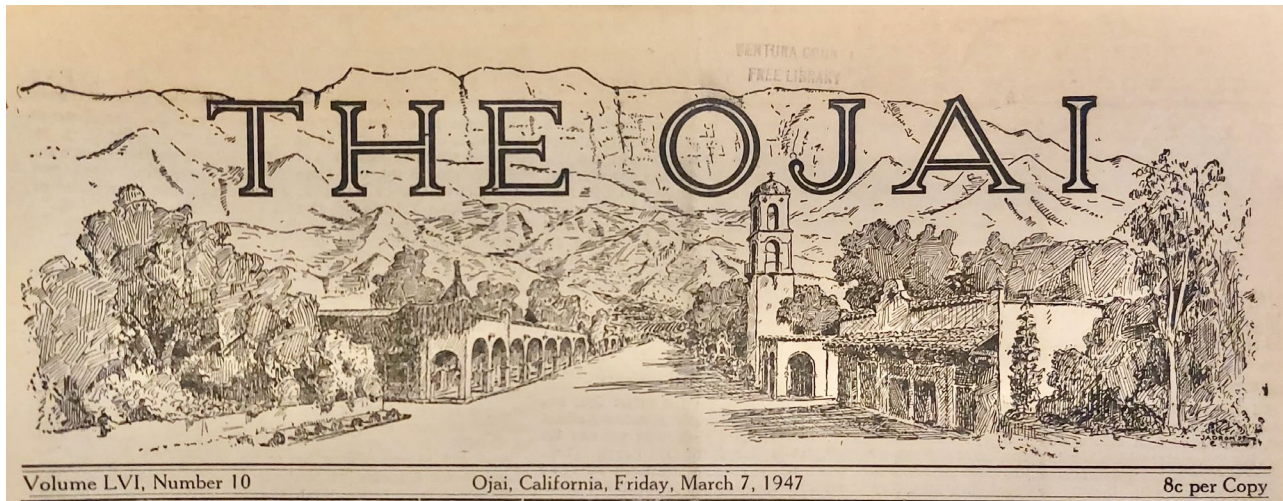
Ventura, CA

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**Figure 5.** Isis Theater in foreground, with post office tower and Civic Park archways in background, 1919. Theater façade redo attributed to Mead and Requa, who concurrently undertook the rest of the adjacent Ojai beautification project. "Our Civic Center --- Ojai," *Pictorial Edition of The Ojai XXIX*, No 29 (August, 1919), 4.



**Figure 6.** Isis Theater, situated between post office and Marvilla Real Estate Company, c. 1922. Denardo and Walker, "Final Report," 17.



**Figure 7.** 1940s-era header of *The Ojai* newspaper, with Isis Theater rendered at right. Courtesy Ojai Valley Museum.

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Figure 8 Ojai Theater (Isis Theater), 1954. Postcard. Courtesy Elise DePuydt.



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Figure 9. Ojai Playhouse (Isis Theater), 1984. Courtesy Elise DePuydt.

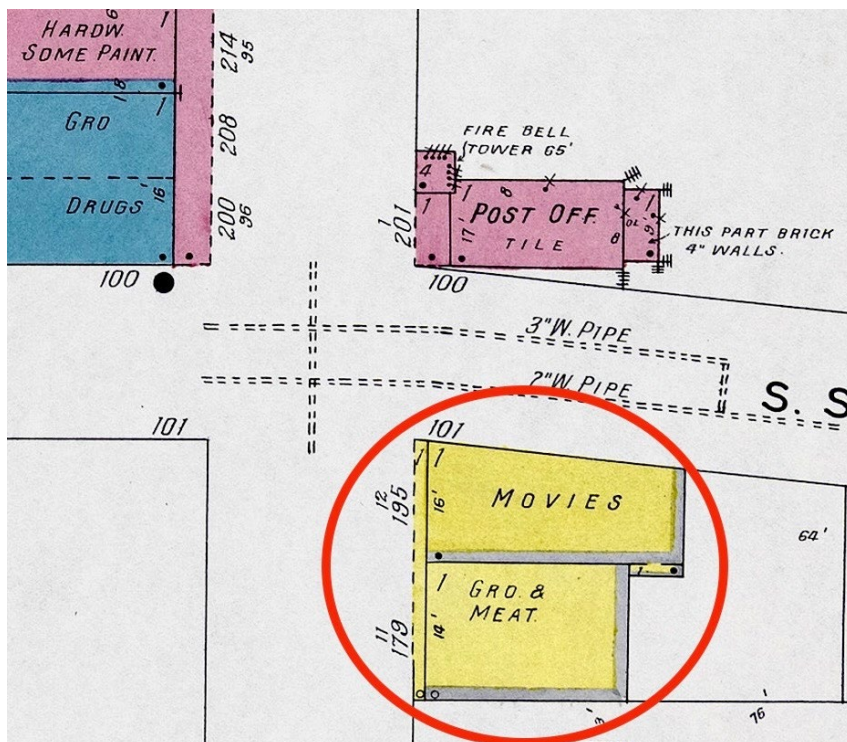


Figure 10. 1929 Sanborn map detail. The Mission styled façade fronts both the theater and the former grocer and meat market: the 1920 gable roofed portion extant today. Sanborn Map & Publishing Company, "Ojai, Ventura County, California" (New York: Sanborn Map & Publishing Company, November 1929), 6.

Isis Theater

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**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

Tier 1 – 60-100 hours

Tier 2 – 120 hours

Tier 3 – 230 hours

Tier 4 – 280 hours

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