

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. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name Ontario Theatre
other names/site number Teatro Ontario Internacional

2. Location

street & number 1700 Columbia Road, N.W. not for publication
city or town Washington, D.C. vicinity
state District of Columbia code DC county N/A code 01 zip code 20009

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

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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:) _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box.)

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/Theater

VACANT/NOT IN USE

COMMERCE/TRADE/Specialty Store

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Moderne

foundation: _____

walls: _____

roof: _____

other: _____

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Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

The Ontario Theatre occupies the southwest corner of the intersection of Seventeenth Street and Columbia Road NW. The theatre building is divided into two volumes; a two-story lobby and a three-story auditorium. Two storefronts face Columbia Road. The theater, one of the last designed by the pre-eminent theater architect John J. Zink, is in a transitional style that embraces late art deco elements as well as mid-century modern motifs. Situated on an angular lot, the theater features a large triangular aluminum-clad marquee supported by a two story cylindrical aluminum pole. The entrance area is surmounted by aluminum-framed glass panels, and the Columbia Road and Seventeenth Street NW façades of the lobby section are clad in large orange rectangular ceramic tiles with framed displays for theater signage. Behind this section, the taller auditorium portion of the building is plain brick.

The Ontario Theatre is a uniquely-designed theater building from an era that saw little construction of such buildings. It includes elements, such as the streamlined aluminum-clad marquee, that are rarely seen in commercial Washington, D.C. buildings. The theater, although vacant, remains in good condition and retains its integrity.

Narrative Description

The Ontario Theatre's lobby section is flat-roofed and roughly triangularly-shaped, with the apex of the triangle facing the corner of Seventeenth Street and Columbia Road. The apex of the building itself is flattened to accommodate the main lobby entrance. The entrance originally consisted of three parallel rows of large glass panels above and doors with a box office window below, each set in an aluminum frame. Currently, the doors are covered by steel security grills and a section of the upper panels are obscured by a large advertising sign. Above the entrance is one of the building's most distinctive features; a triangular aluminum-clad marquee which points toward the intersection of Seventeenth Street and Columbia Road. The point of this marquee is supported by a two story cylindrical aluminum pole. This triangular marquee is likely unique among Washington movie theatres.

Above the marquee, a flat concrete pediment divided into three rows of 12 squares and topped by a plain rectangular cornice rises just above the roofline of the lobby section. This section of the façade originally provided a pedestal for the cutout letters O-N-T-A-R-I-O, which are no longer present.

The Columbia Road and Seventeenth Street NW façades of the lobby section are clad in large orange rectangular ceramic tiles, bounded at the corners of the main lobby entrance by vertical concrete bands which adjoin vertical strips of polished stone providing a frame for the aluminum and glass lobby entrance. The lobby façade extends perhaps fifty feet down Seventeenth Street before adjoining the taller red brick façade of the auditorium section. The rectangular frame for a display sign is inset in the second story and a square frame of a poster display case in the center of the façade's first story.

The lobby façade has much longer street frontage on the Columbia Road side of the building. The first segment of the façade proceeding west from the main lobby entrance is a virtual mirror image of the Seventeenth Street façade with its inset display cases. This section also includes a single steel door. Immediately west of the door is a tile-framed opening for a storefront, which appears in a pre-construction sketch of the building. The infill façade for the storefront is concrete patterned into squares like the pediment above the main lobby entrance, with a four-light window and protruding signage on the second floor. On the street level, the storefront inset includes a store entrance between two bays with display windows that protrude into the sidewalk. The orange ceramic tile continues across the top of the inset and as a border on the western side of the lobby section façade. It is penetrated by a small single window on the first story.

The Columbia Road façade of the redbrick auditorium section is separated from the tile lobby section by a vertical concrete band. Originally, it included a side exit from the auditorium and a second, smaller storefront at the extreme west corner of the façade. Today a coat of stucco has been applied to that area and the exit doors converted into the entrance to a store housed in the former auditorium. The poster case that was inset between the exit doors appears to have been converted to a display window.

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In contrast to the polychrome lobby section, the auditorium section is a relatively plain, polygonal –shaped structure with a hipped roof with some restrained simple corbelling under its eaves. Its Seventeenth Street façade has two four-paned windows on its second story, and a number of utilitarian exit doors at street level.

Although somewhat weathered in appearance, the Ontario Theatre remains substantially intact and retains its character-defining features. The chief compromises are the loss of the original sign from the entrance pediment and the addition of stucco to a portion of the Columbia Road façade.

The architecture of the Ontario Theatre shows an important progression in the architecture of theatres and other places of entertainment in the District of Columbia. The Ontario shares some of the “late art deco” elements found in Zink’s and Moehle’s immediately-prior project, the Flower Theatre in Silver Spring, which was recently added to the Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties. These elements include “a strong directional emphasis that suggests movement,” especially with regard to the lobby’s diagonal relationship to the street and the thrust of the triangular marquee, and “rectangular volumes with planes of smooth brick or stone”, such as the building’s elongated façade on Columbia Road. The Ontario also utilizes materials associated with art moderne such as tile, aluminum, and glass. Yet, at the same time, the Ontario’s forms are more abstracted and stylized than the streamline motifs associated with art moderne. For example, the Flower Theatre has a massive blunted triangle marquee (at right angles to the street) which bears display signage. The Ontario marquee is a light, aluminum triangle that suggests the silhouette of a jet plane. Its lobby entrance is largely constructed of glass with very light aluminum framing. The bold orange square tiles of the façade suggest the forms of an abstract painting, and the pedestal for the theatre’s name was constructed as a rectangle rather than the more deco ziggurat form presented in the pre-construction rendering. In this sense, the Ontario recalls an almost exactly contemporary building, the Waffle Shop at Tenth and F Streets NW, which is listed on the DC Inventory of Historic Sites. Like the Waffle Shop, the architecture of the Ontario reflects the transition from pre-war art modern forms to postwar modernism. As one of just two theatres constructed from scratch in Washington during the 1950s, it represents a distinctive stage in the development of motion picture exhibition in Washington.

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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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

Period of Significance

1951-1987

Significant Dates

1951

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

John J. Zink and Frederick Moehle, architects

Roscoe Engineering Company, builder

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

- 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.

Period of Significance (justification)

The Period of Significance for the Ontario Theater extends from 1951 when the building was constructed and opened, to 1987 when it was closed after serving the community as a venue for a wide array of entertainment. In the 1990s, it was adapted for commercial retail use and now stands vacant.

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Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

N/A

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

The streamlined Ontario Theater at 17th Street and Columbia Road, NW is a large neighborhood theater that opened to the public on November 1, 1951 in the exceptionally diverse and cosmopolitan Washington, DC neighborhood now known as Adams Morgan. The theater was designed by prominent theater architect John Jacob Zink, and was erected by Roscoe Engineering Company for the Kogod-Burka (K-B) chain of motion picture theaters. The Ontario Theater meets National Register Criteria A and C with the Areas of Significance being Architecture and Entertainment/Recreation. The Ontario is an excellent and unique example of late Art Moderne/Art Deco design elements evolving into a Mid-Century Modern vocabulary, with distinctive decorative and architectural touches that remain largely intact. The Ontario Theater is a worthy work of a recognized and prolific master of theater design of the second quarter of the twentieth century. In addition, the Ontario is important to the history of Washington in that it is associated with and expresses the patterns of growth and change that contributed significantly to the heritage, culture or development of the District of Columbia, including the development of the motion picture screening industry—particularly the dispersion of first-run motion-picture entertainment from downtown to the city's residential areas—and the development of the city's vibrant Latino community.

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

The Ontario Theater is a unique example of one of the last large neighborhood theaters from the post-war era, retaining the size, stature, and sophistication of earlier downtown theaters but aiming to appeal to neighborhood residents. Its distinctive streamlined styling—accented by orange glazed exterior wall tiling and an energetic, prow-like, stainless-steel-trimmed entrance canopy—mark it as the work of a master architect as well as one of the last of the city's theaters that drew such a high level of design attention. Its history spans elegant premieres of acclaimed motion pictures, concerts by notable bands of the Rock 'n Roll era, as well as groundbreaking screenings of Spanish-language films for a community that previously had little access to such entertainment. While the theater often struggled to find its identity, in the process it served as a vital and exceptional community resource.

The Ontario Theater, designed by the accomplished theater architect John J. Zink (1886-1952) and his associate, Frederick L.W. Moehle (1903-1959), was completed in 1951 for the K-B theater chain headed by Fred S. Kogod and Max Burka. The theater is unique form a design perspective, marking a striking transition point from the earlier art moderne Zink designs, such as the Uptown (1936), Newton (1937), and Apex (1940) theaters. Most distinctive is the prominent stainless steel canopy marquee that juts out towards the angled intersection of 17th Street and Columbia Road. Its clean, rounded lines reflect a distinctly mid-century aesthetic, as does the exposed support pole, the glazed orange terracotta tile work, and the gently-angled retail storefront on Columbia Road. Unlike the decorative extravagance of older downtown movie palaces or even the streamlined exuberance of the art deco neighborhood theaters, the Ontario's sleek, futuristic glamour is nearly unparalleled in other Washington, D.C. theaters.

At the time of the Ontario's construction, this dense residential section of the city was thought to be overdue for an additional movie theater, despite the proximity of the Ambassador Theater (now demolished), run by rival Warner Bros., at Columbia Road and 18th Street NW. As early as 1945, Roth's Theaters, another rival chain, had planned a theater a block away at Columbia Road and Mozart Place, NW, but it was never built.¹ According

¹ Robert K. Headley, *Motion Picture Exhibition in Washington, D.C.*, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1999), 169.

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to *Washington Post* theater critic Richard L. Coe, Kogod had been planning a theater at this location for 10 years but had to wait for a pre-existing lease to run out.ⁱⁱ Wartime restrictions also curtailed new theater construction for many years in the 1940s and 1950s.

To compete effectively with the much-older Ambassador Theater, Kogod and Burka built a stylish and up-to-date theater with the latest amenities, reflecting the emerging 1950s emphasis on the “comforts of home.” For example, the auditorium featured Bodyform Pushback seats built by the American Seating Company that allowed patrons to “simply slide back” to allow others to pass rather than having to get up from their seats. Generous spacing was provided between the rows, and the seating arrangement was staggered to ensure maximum visibility in all parts of the house. The auditorium also had two enclosed balcony rooms, one a nursery for children next to the projection room, again reflecting the domestic focus of the era. The other, called the Columbia Room, was a private party room seating 47 people. The lobby was designed by prominent Philadelphia theater decorator David E. Brodsky (1903-1995) in a stylish gold-gray scheme that was intended to convey a distinctly modernistic vision of luxury, in contrast to the overwrought decorations of the older downtown movie palaces. According to a letter sent by manager Edmund Linder to potential patrons before the theater’s opening, its picture screen was the largest in Washington.

With 1,400 seats, the Ontario was one of the largest theaters in the city and exceptional for its size as a neighborhood venue. It was said to have cost \$500,000 to build, an expensive amount at the time. Filling an angular lot at the southwest corner of 17th Street and Columbia Road, NW, the theater building included a single retail storefront facing Columbia Road that was initially occupied by a Robert Winston Candies store.

The theater’s first feature when it opened on November 1, 1951, was a comedy called *Rhubarb*, starring Ray Milland and Jan Sterling. According to Robert K. Headley, the Ontario Theater was the first neighborhood theater in Washington to break the monopoly of downtown theaters on showing first-run features.ⁱⁱⁱ Theater critic Richard L. Coe marveled in January 1952 that the Ontario was splurging on first-run films, effectively outbidding the “downtown palazzos.”^{iv} Several premieres at the Ontario were significant cultural events. More than 200 diplomats, congressmen, Supreme Court justices, and other high government officials were invited to the February 1963 premiere of *Lawrence of Arabia*, for example, and many prominent Washington hostesses hosted commemorative dinners before the gala showing. As the VIPs disembarked from their limousines in front of the streamlined arcade of the Ontario, commentator Hazel Markel announced each arrival to a wide radio audience.^v A number of benefit showings were also held at the Ontario, including a special showing of *Mary Poppins* in 1964 to support Project HOPE that was attended by actress Julie Andrews. A premiere of *The Bolshoi Ballet* in 1958 aided the Washington Ballet Guild. Other major showings included *The Longest Day* and *Tom Jones*.

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

ⁱⁱ Richard L. Coe, “Ontario Theater Opens About Nov. 1” in *The Washington Post*, Oct. 17, 1951, 18.

ⁱⁱⁱ Headley, 180.

^{iv} Richard L. Coe, “Ontario Splurging On Top First-Runs” in *The Washington Post*, Jan. 15, 1952, 12.

^v “‘Lawrence’ Premiere Draws Capital VIPs” in *The Washington Post*, Feb. 27, 1963, D1.

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One of just two theaters constructed in the District of Columbia during the 1950s, the Ontario reflected the social tensions of its times as well as the cosmopolitan tastes of upper Northwest Washington, D.C. residents. The theater hosted the Washington premiere of *Death of a Salesman* in March 1952, and members of the local American Legion, reflecting the Cold War hysteria of the day, picketed outside the theater, calling the film “un-American” because of Arthur Miller’s left-leaning sympathies.^{vi} Surprisingly, only eight years later, the theater showed a Soviet production of *Eugene Onegin*, based on the Tchaikovsky opera and Pushkin novel, which seemed to cause no stir at all and was praised by the *Post*’s theater critic, Paul Hume.

The theater’s most successful and longest-running production was *The Sound of Music*, which opened at the Ontario in 1965 and ran for two years. In March 1966, a lavish celebration was held at the Ontario to mark the first year of the film’s run, with cast members and Swiss folk music groups in attendance.^{vii} However, the success of *The Sound of Music* was soon followed by major cultural shifts in the Washington landscape. The riots following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in April 1968, included looting and burning just a few blocks east of the Ontario, and the theater’s traditional patrons grew uneasy about the neighborhood. The hit movie *Funny Girl* did poorly when it opened at the Ontario in late 1968 but brought in many more customers when the K-B chain moved it west to its Wisconsin Avenue theater in early 1969.

In August 1969, responding to the significant demographic changes affecting the Adams-Morgan neighborhood, the theater converted to showing Spanish-language films, beginning with a double bill of *El Yaqui* and *Así Es Mi México*, all without English subtitles. Marvin Goldman, co-owner of the K-B chain at the time, commented on the formatting change to *The Evening Star*:

“In general, in the past and still today...pictures in the Spanish language have been shown, in this country, in inferior theaters—what we call junk houses—in New York City, Los Angeles, and especially in the border states—Arizona, New Mexico, Texas. We decided on a new wrinkle—to invite Washington’s Spanish-speaking community to see pictures in their language in the setting of a beautiful house with one of the most luxurious decors in the nation. The response has been gratifying. Latin audiences flock to the Ontario...”^{viii} According to the *Star*, many of the theater’s new patrons were Cuban exiles. Films starring the Mexican comedian Cantinflas were the biggest draw, and crowds were always largest on Sunday afternoons, unlike theaters showing “traditional” fare, which did their most business on Friday and Saturday evenings.

In January 1977, the K-B chain sold the theater to Paul S. Tauber and Herbert White for \$400,000, slightly less than it had cost to build 26 years earlier. Tauber and White decided they would discontinue the Spanish-language format and instead offer a mix of repertory and first-run features to cater to the affluent whites who were returning in significant numbers to the culturally-diverse Adams-Morgan neighborhood. However, Tauber and White misread the extent to which the Adams-Morgan community had changed. Tauber was quoted in the *Post* as saying that “There is no Spanish Community here anymore,” which angered the Latino community and led initially to a boycott of the theater. Carlos Rosario, a leader in the community who was instrumental in the formation of the D.C. Office of Latino Affairs, stepped in and arranged to rent out the Ontario on Sundays so it could continue to show Spanish language films once a week.

From 1977 until 1983, the Ontario Theater hosted a wide variety of shows aimed at the neighborhood’s widely varying clientele. Among the shows that appeared were a number of live rock concerts, including nationally-recognized artists, such as U2, the Police, R.E.M., and the Clash.^{ix} At least one live theater performance, done

^{vi} Eve Edstrom, “Legion Pickets District Theater Showing ‘Death of a Salesman’” in *The Washington Post*, Mar. 6, 1952, 10.

^{vii} Harry MacArthur, “‘Sound of Music’ Marks a Year,” in *The Evening Star*, Mar. 15, 1966.

^{viii} Charles Cooke, “Ontario Theater Goes Spanish” in *The Evening Star*, Oct. 19, 1969.

^{ix}, Celestino Zapata and Josh Gibson, *Then & Now: Adams Morgan*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2006), 87.

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by the San Francisco Mime Troupe also played at the Ontario. The theater also continued to show a wide mix of films, from repertory art films to martial arts and horror fare. Spanish language films continued to draw many local residents, making the theater an important Latino community meeting place. Many Latino community members would attend the Ontario every Sunday regardless of what film was showing, because it was such an important community social event.^x

In 1983, the Circle Theaters chain purchased the Ontario. Despite the proven popularity of the Spanish-language fare, the new owners opted to once again try “art films and movies for a sophisticated market.” In 1985, extensive interior renovations were undertaken to allow the theater to once again show first-run features, which hadn’t been shown there since *Funny Girl* in 1969. While the renovations and new programming had some initial success, the theater was permanently closed just two years later, in May 1987. The owners claimed that the large, single-screen theater was not economically feasible as a neighborhood venue.

Subsequently, the building was used for a variety of retail purposes. A permit to convert the auditorium space to use as a retail pharmacy was filed in 1987,^{xi} as was a permit to remodel space on 17th Street as a Domino’s Pizza store.^{xii} More recently, the theater’s former lobby space has been used as a discount store. The building is now vacant.

Architects John J. Zink and Frederick L.W. Moehle

John Jacob Zink (1886-1952) was a native of Baltimore who first studied architecture at the Maryland Institute and practiced as an architect with the firm of Wyatt and Nolting in Baltimore before establishing his own office around 1910. He subsequently moved to New York to attend Columbia University’s Graduate School of Architecture, where he studied with Thomas W. Lamb (1871–1942), one of the foremost theater and cinema architects of the 20th century. He returned to Baltimore in 1916 to work in the office of Ewald G. Blanke, where he soon focused his attention on motion picture theaters, both new projects and renovations. In 1917-18, he collaborated with Blanke on his first Washington, D.C., project, Tom Moore’s Rialto Theater (demolished in 1940), one of the largest and most ornate ever built in the city. By the 1920s, Zink was working on his own, eventually heading the architectural firm of Zink, Adkins & Craycroft, which specialized in movie theater design.

Zink’s firm designed over 200 theaters in the mid-Atlantic region from the 1920s until the 1950s. Many were in the greater Washington, D.C., and Baltimore metropolitan areas. Zink designed at least 14 theaters that were built within the District of Columbia.^{xiii} Zink worked in a wide range of styles, and his projects spanned several generations of movie theater construction, beginning with the ornate Rialto Theater of 1917. His Takoma Theatre (1923), in contrast, is in a neoclassical style that appears to reflect the influence of Thomas Lamb. However, many of Zink’s later works embody art deco and streamlined styling, as embodied in his Uptown (1936), Newton (1937), and Apex (1940) theaters—among the finest art deco theaters in the city—as well as the mid-century modern Ontario.

Zink was considered one of the best architects in the *moderne* style, competing chiefly with John Ebersson (1875-1964) for the design of most of the significant theaters in Baltimore and Washington of that era.

^x Luis Aguilar, “Spanish Films Flavor Ontario” in *The Washington Post*, Dec. 1, 1983.

^{xi} D.C. Building Permit #B319994, Feb. 26, 1987.

^{xii} D.C. Building Permit #B325479, Oct. 30, 1987.

^{xiii} <http://www.takomatheatreconservancy.org/theatre-history/john-j-zink-architect> Accessed Jun. 22, 2011.

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Comfortable working with limited budgets, Zink's theaters nevertheless had a distinctive flair. Zink had a reputation for focusing on the technical aspects of theater architecture, such as clear views for all movie-goers, ideal lighting and acoustics.^{xiv} He typically incorporated such amenities as nurseries, lounges and smoking rooms in his movie house plans, as he did with the Ontario. A theater critic for *The Washington Post*, commenting in 1936 on plans for the Newton Theatre, noted that "Mr. Zink is known to the trade as the man who can contrive more unusual features for the motion picture theaters he designs than any other architect, not excepting Tom Lamb..."^{xv}

Frederick L.W. Moehle (1903-1959) was another Baltimore native who worked with Zink from 1948 to 1950, according to the *American Architects Directory*. Educated at Johns Hopkins University, Moehle first served as a draftsman for the Mexican Petroleum Corporation from 1925 to 1927. He established an independent practice as an architect in 1931. In addition to the Ontario, Moehle also collaborated with Zink on the Flower Theater and Shopping Center in Takoma Park, Maryland, completed in 1951. Other major projects of Moehle's included the Homeland Shopping Center in Baltimore as well as work at the U.S. Army's Edgewood Arsenal.^{xvi}

The K-B Theater Chain

Originally called the Kogod-Burka Amusement Company, K-B was founded in 1926 by Fred Saul Kogod (1900-1956) and his brother-in-law, Max Burka (1891-1966). Kogod and Burka had both emigrated from Eastern Europe (Kogod from Poland, Burka from the Ukraine) at a young age and had settled with their families in Washington. Both also initially entered the grocery business, Kogod becoming treasurer of the District Grocery Stores chain. Branching out into real estate, they purchased a building on H Street, NE, in 1926 that contained the Princess Theatre on the first floor. Their entry into the movie business came when the theater's proprietor quit, leaving the facility in their hands. They operated the Princess alone for more than ten years before adding the Atlas Theater, a few blocks east, in 1938. After that they began expanding throughout the District and neighboring suburbs, adding the Apex, in Spring Valley, in 1940. Both of these were exceptional art deco structures designed by John J. Zink, the architect of the Ontario. Zink also designed for them the Senator Theater, completed in 1942 on Minnesota Avenue, SE. World War II delayed further theater construction until later in the decade, when the chain added the Macarthur in the Palisades neighborhood, the Naylor in Anacostia, the Flower in Silver Spring, Maryland, and the Ontario. All of these theaters were designed in whole or in part by Zink and were among his last works before his death in 1952.

The K-B chain became one of the most prominent in the city. As an independent, local theater chain, it played a crucial role in bringing motion pictures to residential neighborhoods and breaking the domination of downtown theaters over first-run screenings. Marvin J. Goldman, Kogod's son-in-law, took over the chain with Fred Burka in 1952 and brought new ideas and vitality to the company. In the mid-1950s, he responded to the growing interest in foreign films by bringing in European and, especially, British movies, which did well with contemporary audiences. By the early 1970s, the K-B chain was reported to be the largest in the metropolitan area. By 1976, when the company acquired the last of the RKO-Stanley chain's theaters (the Uptown and the Avalon), K-B controlled almost all the first-run theaters in the upper northwest section of the city.^{xvii} Beginning in the 1980s, however, other companies surpassed K-B, which in 1992 was sold to new owners. The company

^{xiv} Alexandria Board of Architectural Review, case #2006-0165.

^{xv} Nelson B. Bell, "Another New Picture House Planned for Northeast," in *The Washington Post*, Dec. 16, 1936.

^{xvi} *American Architects Directory*. (R.R. Bowker, 1956), 385.

^{xvii} Gary Arnold, "RKO-Stanley Warner Sale" in *The Washington Post*, Dec. 11, 1976, E4.

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declared bankruptcy and closed its remaining theaters in 1994. *The Washington Post* noted at the time that it was the area's last locally-owned first-run movie chain.^{xviii}

9. Major Bibliographical References

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Horwitz, Sari, and Weil, Martin, "Ontario's Final Fade" in *The Washington Post*, May 11, 1987.

Singeltary, Michelle and Swisher, Kara, "K-B Closes Theaters, Looks to Sell Chain," in *The Washington Post*, Jan. 22, 1994, B1

^{xviii} Michelle Singeltary and Kara Swisher, "K-B Closes Theaters, Looks to Sell Chain," Jan. 22, 1994, B1.

Ontario Theater
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

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
 Federal agency
 Local government
 University
 Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property _____

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 _____
Zone Easting Northing

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing

2 _____
Zone Easting Northing

4 _____
Zone Easting Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Lot 2565 and Square 0052

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title John DeFerrari and Peter Sefton

organization Historic Washington Architecture, Inc.

date August 29, 2011

street & number 3706 Morrison Street, NW

telephone 202-362-9279

city or town Washington

state DC

zip code 20015

e-mail MERowse@aol.com

Additional Documentation

Ontario Theater
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

Submit the following items with the completed form:

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

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Ontario Theatre

City or Vicinity: Washington, D.C.

County: State:

Photographer: John DeFerrari

Date Photographed: 2011

Description of Photograph(s) and number: East elevation on 17th Street, view looking southwest
1 of 3.

Description of Photograph(s) and number: Corner marquee and entrance at 17th Street and Columbia Road NW
2 of 3.

Description of Photograph(s) and number: North elevation on Columbia Road, view looking southwest
3 of 3.

Property Owner:

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name _____
street & number _____ telephone _____
city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Ontario Theater

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.