

Hamilton Field, War Department Theater
(Facility No. 507)
Between Main Entrance Road (Palm Avenue)
and North Oakwood Drive
Novato
Marin County
California

HABS No. CA-2398-AC

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HAMILTON FIELD
War Department Theater
(Facility No. 507)

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HABS No. CA-2398-AC

Location: Hamilton Army Air Field
Novato, Marin County, California
War Department Theater
Facility No. 507 (between Main Entrance Road [Palm Drive] and North Oakwood Drive)

U.S.G.S.: Novato, CA. Quadrangle (7.5' series), 1954 (revised 1980)
Petaluma Point, CA. Quadrangle (7.5' series), 1959 (revised 1980)
UTM Coordinates: Zone 10; A: 542100/4213620; B: 544720/4212220;
C: 542760/4210650; D: 541040/4212600

Present Owner: U. S. Navy, Washington, D.C.

Present Occupant: U. S. Navy

Present Use: Theater

Statement of Significance:

The Base Theater was constructed in 1938, as funding gradually became available to complete the permanent post construction. It occupies a prominent position in the base plan and is an excellent example of Spanish Eclectic theater architecture.

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398) for a comprehensive Statement of Significance and individual report HABS No. CA-2398-F for a condensed general Statement of Significance.

PART I: HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: Construction on the Base Theater was completed on April 7, 193B (Hamilton Facility Cards 1933-1971).
2. Architect: Hamilton Field was designed under the guidance of Captain Howard B. Nurse, Construction Quartermaster. He was assisted by a corps of civilians headed by H. P. Spencer, Chief Architect, and F. W. Salfinger, Chief Engineer. Captain F. C. Petes and Lieutenant J. H. Veal of the Quartermaster's Corps were detailed to Marin County by the War Department to assist Nurse (*Novato Advance* May 2B, 1932). Landscaping efforts were directed by C. C. Stevens, a local landscape engineer, using plantings chosen by Nurse and donated by Marin County citizens.
3. Original Owner: Hamilton Field is on land originally owned by private individuals and companies. In 1930, the California Packing Company sold 630 acres of land to Marin County to use to entice the Army to build on the site. An additional 161 acres were purchased from Dr. T. Peter and Julia Bodkin. These parcels were combined with other County-owned land, and in 1932 Marin County sold a 927-acre parcel of land to the Department of the Army for \$1.00 for use by the Army Air Corps as an air field. In 1947 Hamilton Air Field was transferred to the newly-formed U. S. Air Force and renamed Hamilton Air Force Base. In 1974 the U. S. Congress declared the installation excess to military needs and closed the base (Maniery et al. 1993). The Base Theater area was transferred to the U. S. Navy in 1974 and remains in Navy ownership in 1995.
4. Builder, Contractor, Supplier: The War Department or Base Theater, when completed, cost \$54,3B7.24.
5. Original Plans and Construction: Original plans for the theater are filed at the National Archives, Pacific Division, San Bruno, California, and can be accessed through the U. S. Navy in San Bruno.
6. Alterations/Additions: Light fixtures were replaced with fluorescent tubes in the 1950s. The lobby and seating areas were reconfigured and rehabilitated in 1976.

B. Historical Context:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-239B) and Section B in report HABS No. CA-239B-F.

PART II: ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: Approximately 135 buildings on base were constructed during initial buildup at Hamilton. Designed and built under the direction of Captain Howard B. Nurse, an engineer with the Office of the Quartermaster General in Washington, D.C., these buildings are the most architecturally detailed on base, reflecting the personal inspiration and care of Nurse. Nurse was assisted in his endeavors by a group of local civilian architects and engineers led by H. P. Spencer, Chief Architect, and F. W. Salfinger, Chief Engineer (Spencer 1935).

In a departure from traditional base architecture, Nurse and his staff designed the buildings in a Spanish Eclectic style, popular in America between 1915 and 1940. Churrigueresque elements, as seen on the ornate facades, were used in some of the more important buildings: group headquarters, non-commissioned officers' (NCO) barracks, the Base Theater, and the base hospital.

The primary method of construction for the administrative and industrial buildings was reinforced concrete covered with stucco exteriors and Mission tile roofs. Foundations of all buildings were constructed of concrete reinforced with steel bars in consideration of the seismic activity of the region. Buildings in the administrative and industrial areas were built using concrete and wood piers for support in a response to their construction on reclaimed salt marsh. Although built following the initial construction phase, the theater was based on Nurse's design and is architecturally compatible.

2. Condition of fabric: The theater is still in use and is in excellent condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The Base Theater is a two-story building with a rectilinear plan consisting of a main auditorium and front lobby. It is 48 feet wide by 80 feet long. The front elevation consists of a full-width balcony and arcade supported by four rectangular columns on the lower story, two eight light metal casement windows on the second, and a large louvered metal vent in the front gable with a Spanish Churrigueresque concrete cast-in-place surround. A small sound baffling room (3 feet, 11 inches by 12 feet) extends from the building on the first story rear wall.

2. Foundation: The building rests on concrete piers and has a six-inch layer of gravel topped by a six-inch layer of concrete.

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3. **Walls:** The exterior walls are 10-inch thick poured-in-place concrete framed with tile infill construction with a stucco finish. Exterior detailing consists of four recessed panels separated by concrete pilasters on both sides of the auditorium. Second story windows on the lobby portion of the theater are surrounded by a raised cast concrete band. Two sets of cast concrete ventilation grilles in a chevron pattern are located above each of the side windows in the lobby section. These grilles are reinforced with 3/8-inch steel bars. A drop panel of metal letters along the top of the arcade identifies the building as "Hamilton AFB Theater." Original letters were 12-inch high metal and said "Hamilton Field Theater."

4. **Structural systems, framing:** The building is supported by reinforced concrete columns. The roof system is riveted steel I-beam trusses.

5. **Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads:** The primary entrance is accessed via an arcaded one-story porch, with three front and two side arches supported by four rectangular concrete columns and two pilasters. The flooring is concrete. Side entrances are accessed by concrete steps. A wheel chair ramp is present on the west side. Rear entries also have concrete steps. The building is cut into a hill and the rear side entrance on either side is below grade, reached by downstairs.

6. **Chimneys:** A rectangular stucco-covered concrete elevated roof ventilator with three arches front and rear and two on each side is located towards the front of the building on the crest of the roof. It has a Mission tile gable roof and a band course below the arches.

7. **Openings:**

a. **Doorways/doors:** The primary entrance is through double glass doors in aluminum frames with wide oak pull bars and is centrally located beneath the second story balcony. Side entrances on each side of the lobby consist of single metal doors, with two sets of double metal fire doors on each side of the auditorium portion. The box office wicket is modern. Original front doors had metal thresholds and drip plates and had two rectangular panels under four-light rectangular glass with double metal pull bars. Side doors were of wood and had six or eight recessed panels.

b. **Windows/shutters:** There are two industrial metal casement windows with eight lights on the central second story front facade and two on each side of the second story lobby section of the theater. Each have concrete molding and projecting sills.

8. Roof:

a. Shape/covering: The main roof is end gabled and covered with terra cotta Mission tile. The shed roof on the rear sound baffling room is also covered with Mission tile. A built-up flat roof is over the first floor lobby entry.

b. Cornice/eaves: Copper gutters and drainspouts are located on each side of the building and along the rear of the sound baffling room. Cast concrete splash blocks are at the bottom of each drain spout.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans:

a. First Floor: The main entrance lobby is flanked by a coupon office and men's toilet on the east side and a store, women's toilet, and janitorial closet on the west. The auditorium has a sloped floor and is accessed via a foyer and curved passageways. It consists of three banks of theater seats separated by a central aisle, with aisles at each side. There is an elevated stage, 15 feet 10 inches by 46 feet four inches, at the south rear of the auditorium backed by a sound baffling room.

b. Second Floor: The second floor, which is located above the lobby section, consists of a central projection room and office, flanked by a rewind room, toilet, machine room, and two plenum chambers.

c. Third Floor: A large plenum chamber occupies the central portion of the partial third story and is flanked by a heater room on the west and an unoccupied space on the east. The third floor is accessed by an iron ladder.

2. Stairways: Exterior concrete stairways provide egress from the rear auditorium fire doors. They have two-inch metal pipe railings. Concrete stairs lead to the second story and are located in the northeast corner of the building. Short wood stairways lead from the auditorium floor to either side of the raised stage.

3. Flooring: The subflooring is concrete, covered with beige and brown confetti asphalt tile in the lobby and bathrooms and carpeting in the auditorium. The original brown linoleum is extant in the second floor projection booth, while the bath and hallway are covered with black and white asphalt tile. Flooring on the stage is Douglas fir tongue and groove.

4. Wall/ceiling finish: The ceiling in the lobby is coated with plaster and modern acoustical tile. The side walls are of composition wood paneling, while the rear wall is covered with 12-inch mirrored tiles. Walls in the bathrooms are modern ceramic tile and

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plaster. The rear wall of the theater, behind the stage, is poured-in-place concrete. The auditorium has a suspended plaster ceiling and acoustical tile walls. Second and third floor walls are coated with plaster.

5. Openings:

a. **Doorways/doors:** Interior doors are metal, except for the wooden bathroom doors with two recessed panels.

b. **Windows:** Louvers provide light to the attic.

6. Decorative features/trim: Plaster trim is located around the stage.

7. Hardware: Door hardware on the aluminum and glass entry doors consists of a brass plate and handles with interior panic bars. Brass panic bars are located on the interior of the double doors in the auditorium, while the individual doors have standard circular knobs with half mortise door hinges.

8. Mechanical equipment:

a. **Heating, air conditioning, ventilation:** The theater has a central air and heat system with ducts that is controlled in a room off the projection room. The new heater system control is a Minneapolis - Honeywell Modutrol System, Automatic A.C. and Temp. Control, MH Regulator Company" (Type 5907-1 330186). A large electric blower with a drum exhaust is located on the third floor over the projection booth and is made by Clarage Fan Company, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

b. **Ventilation:** Ventilation consists of the roof ventilator, a central front vent surrounded by a Spanish baroque surround, terra cotta chevron panels on the second story lobby side walls, and three vertical rectangular metal louvers on the upper rear wall.

c. **Lighting:** Exterior lighting consists of four metal canopied pipe fixtures along the balcony railing. There are six, four-tube, recessed florescent lights in the porch ceiling. Lighting in the lobby are floodlights, the auditorium has recessed track lights. Lumiline lamp light strips illuminate the floor of the auditorium. The stage is lit by banks of overhead stage lighting, with multiple stage lights defining the front edge of the stage. A circuit breaker with a Cutter-Hammer Electric Switch is in the hall. Bathrooms have four-tube fluorescent lights covered with shallow diffused plastic paneled covers. The projection room has an original drop light with a half-cage on a cord. It is made by McGill Manufacturing Co. (Cat. #7000), Valparaiso, Indiana.

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d. **Plumbing:** The men's bathroom contains a new Crane wall-mounted urinal and an original Standard toilet, both operated by flush valves. Two new Standard sinks are mounted on the wall. The women's room has two original Standard flush valve toilets with Beneke black plastic seats and two new Standard sinks.

e. **Miscellaneous:** A "HAWS" drinking fountain is in the lobby.

9. **Original Furnishings:** The original auditorium had 20 rows of seats in four sections. This space was reconfigured in 1971 and now has three sections of 11 rows of metal seats with upholstered backs and seats and wooden arm rests. These chairs are new. The only original furnishing in the building is the elevated stage. An exterior safe, made by Newcomb & Sons of Vallejo, California, is accessed in the front facade exterior wall. The projection room on the second floor has some original equipment in place, although it is no longer in use. These include a "Reelite" Chord Retractor made by Appleton Manufacturing Company, a wall-mounted "Simplex" Amplifier Transistor and a "National Theater Supply Company" speaker.

D. **Site:**

1. **General site orientation:** The front facade of the Base Theater faces north towards the Main Entrance Road and a large asphalted parking lot. It is located in the original Spanish Colonial Revival district of Hamilton Army Air Field adjacent to the Non-Commissioned Officer's Club on the west and surrounded by rolling hills.

2. **Historic landscape design:** Captain Nurse's overall plan for base design included thoughtful use of rock walls, terracing, and plantings to create a visual effect that was continued, in a more limited fashion, during World War II. Rock terracing throughout the original base served to simultaneously separate individual residences while visually uniting various sections of the base into an overall city-like plan. They were built as part of the final phase of original post construction in 1935 (Hamilton Official Photographs 1934-1935). Foundation and accent plantings, tree-lined streets, and retention of natural oak groves and rolling hills complement the rock work.

The majority of buildings in the administration area have some landscaping, particularly around the NCO barracks. Street trees, such as Modesto ash, camphor, and various palms, are present throughout this area. Building corner and doorways are delimited by a number of conifers, the most prominent being sawara false cypress and Italian cypress. Accent trees include coast redwood and some red ironbark, which were incorporated into divider triangles and sometimes near entrances. California and Mexican fan palms and golden bamboo were prominent framers of entrances, as was the New Zealand draceeena. Foundation plantings are quite diverse and include mock orange, flowering quince, Portugal laurel, and Manukka tea tree. Japanese privet, Hollywood

juniper, and heavenly bamboo appear to have been added subsequent to the late 1930s and were not part of the original landscape design on base.

Building 507 is surrounded by concrete walkways on the front and sides, separated from the building by manicured lawns. Palm trees are located in front of the building, between the parking lot and the sidewalk.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398). Copies of the original plans for this building are filed at the National Archives, Pacific Division, San Bruno, CA. and the Hamilton Room, Novato History Museum, Novato.

B. Historic Maps and Views:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398).

C. Interviews:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398).

D. Bibliography:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398).

Sources cited in this individual report are listed below.

Fine, Jesse, and Lenore Remington

1972 *Army Corps of Engineers: Construction in the U.S.* U.S. Army and World War II,
Office of Military History.

Hamilton Facility Cards

1933-1971 Maintenance Cards for Base Facilities. On file, Hamilton Army Air Field
Installation Office, Novato, and Hamilton Room, Novato History Museum, Novato.

Maniery, Mary L., Leslie R. Fryman, and Fred Hrusa

1993 *National Register of Historic Places Evaluation, Hamilton Army Air Field Historic District, Marin County, California*. Submitted to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Sacramento District.

Thomason and Associates

1993 *Randolph Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas*. Cultural Resource Survey, Final Report. Nashville, Tennessee. On file, State Office of Historic Preservation, Austin, Texas.

E. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated:

See narrative for Hamilton Field (HABS No. CA-2398).

F. Supplemental Material:

Copies of representative floor plans of Facility No. 507, dated in the 1930s and prepared by the Quartermaster's General Office are attached to this form. The line drawn sketches were drafted on site in 1994 by Keith Syda, scanned into a computer and drawn by Christopher MacDonald in 1995, and corrected and finalized by Claire Warshaw in 1996 (all PAR Environmental Services, Inc. staff).

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Hamilton Army Air Field is owned by various federal entities including the Department of the Navy, Department of the Army, United States Coast Guard, and General Services Administration. The Army/GSA parcels are being excessed and sold to private developers. The Navy housing is included in Base Closure and Realignment actions.

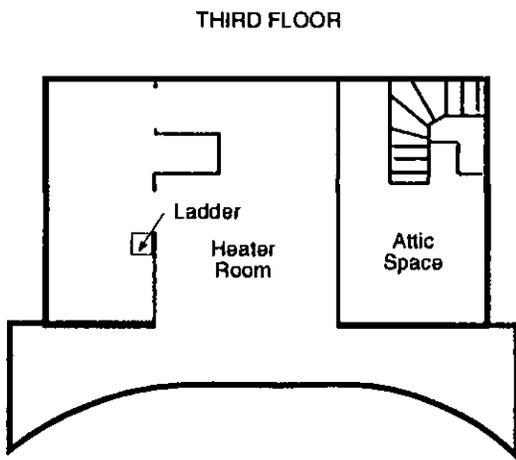
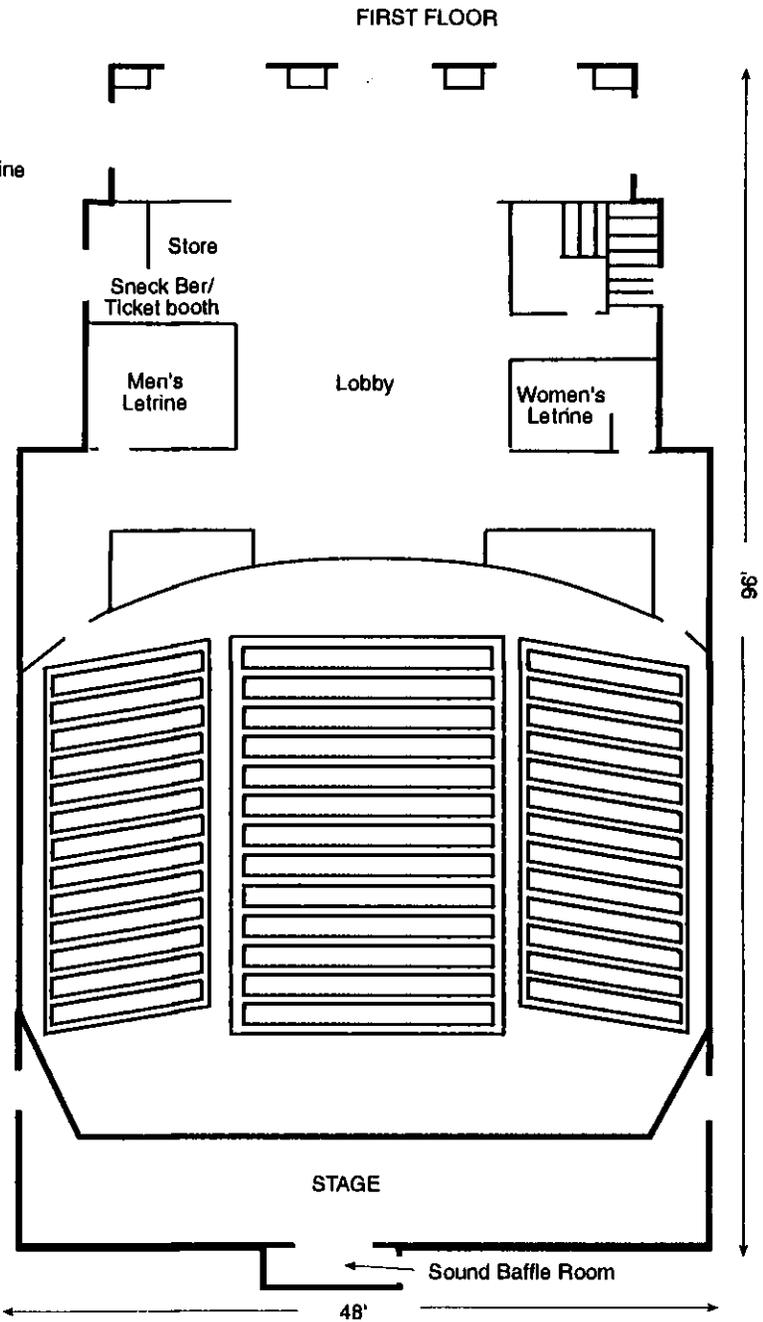
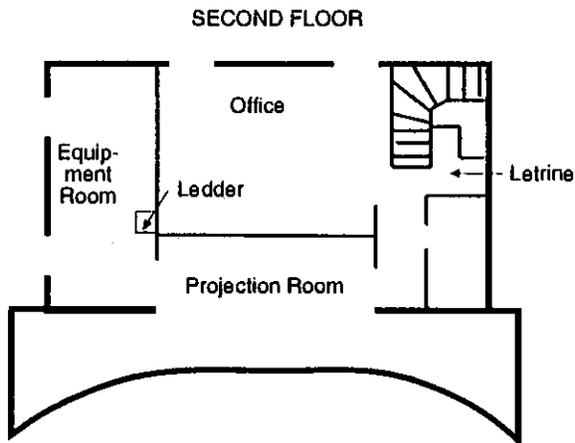
As part of the Army's undertaking, it has been determined in consultation with the California Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) that the excess sale will have an affect on properties at the air field, and that these properties are components of a district that is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. Based on consultation with the OHP and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, pursuant to 36 CFR part 800, regulations implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470f), a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was entered into by the interested parties in March 1994. The agreement stipulated that prior to excess sale the Army must contact the HABS/HAER division at the Western Regional Office of the National Park Service, San Francisco, California, to determine the appropriate level and kind of recordation for the subject properties. The MOA further stipulated that copies of the documentation be made available to the OHP and

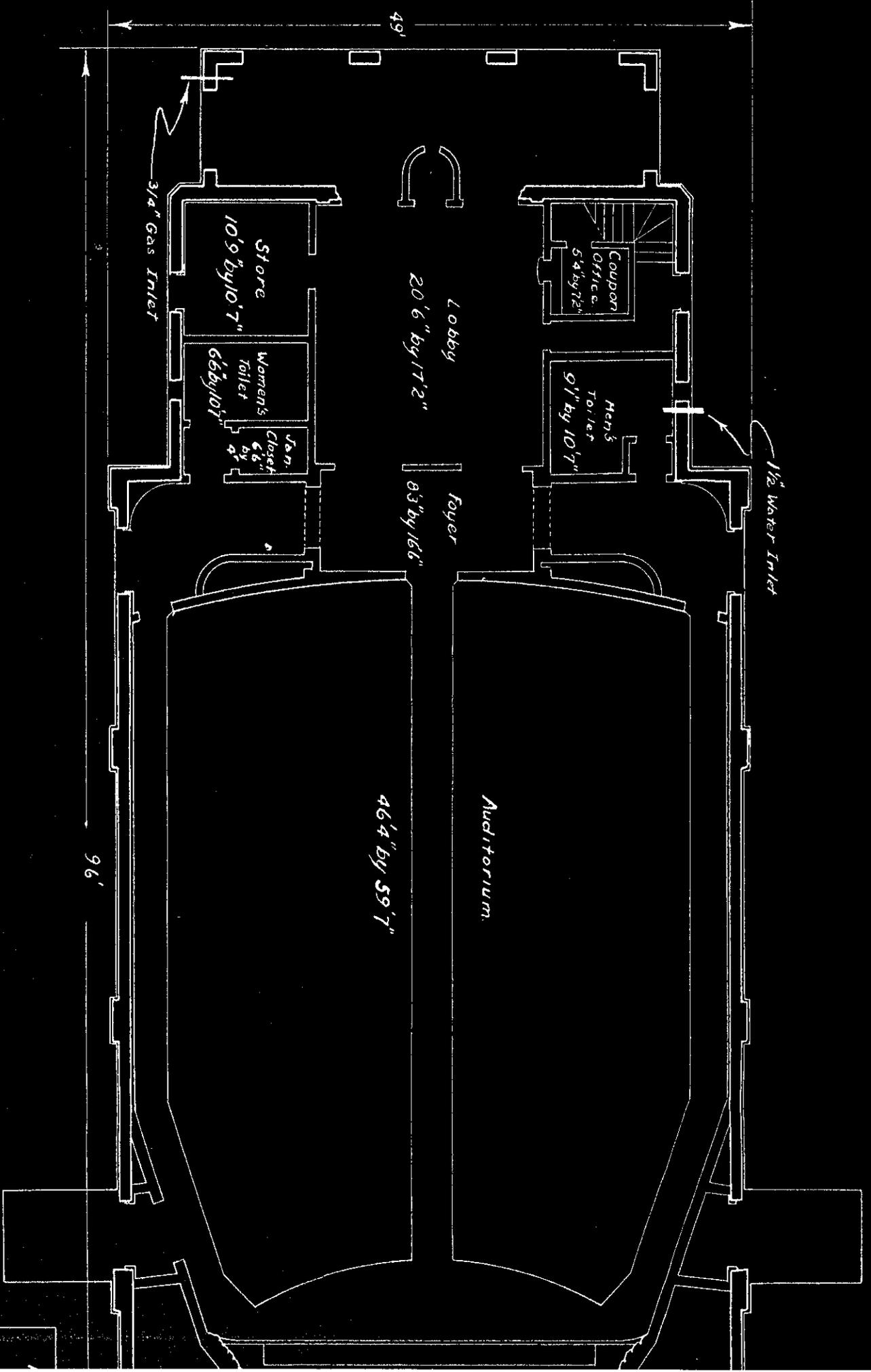
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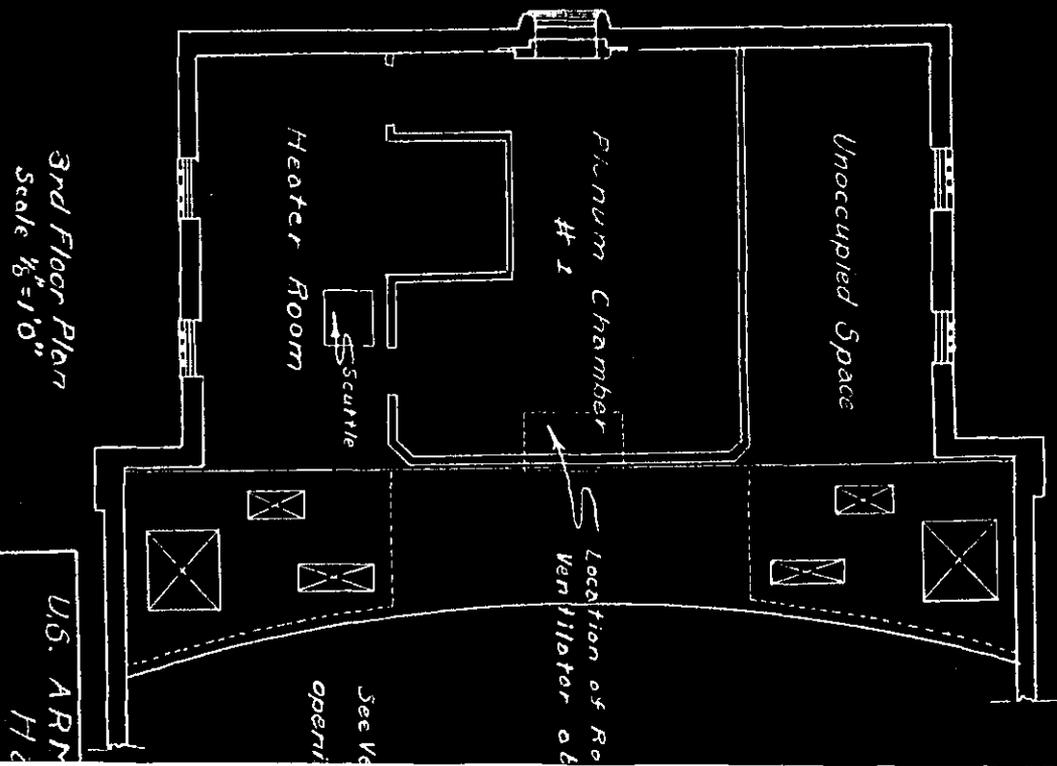
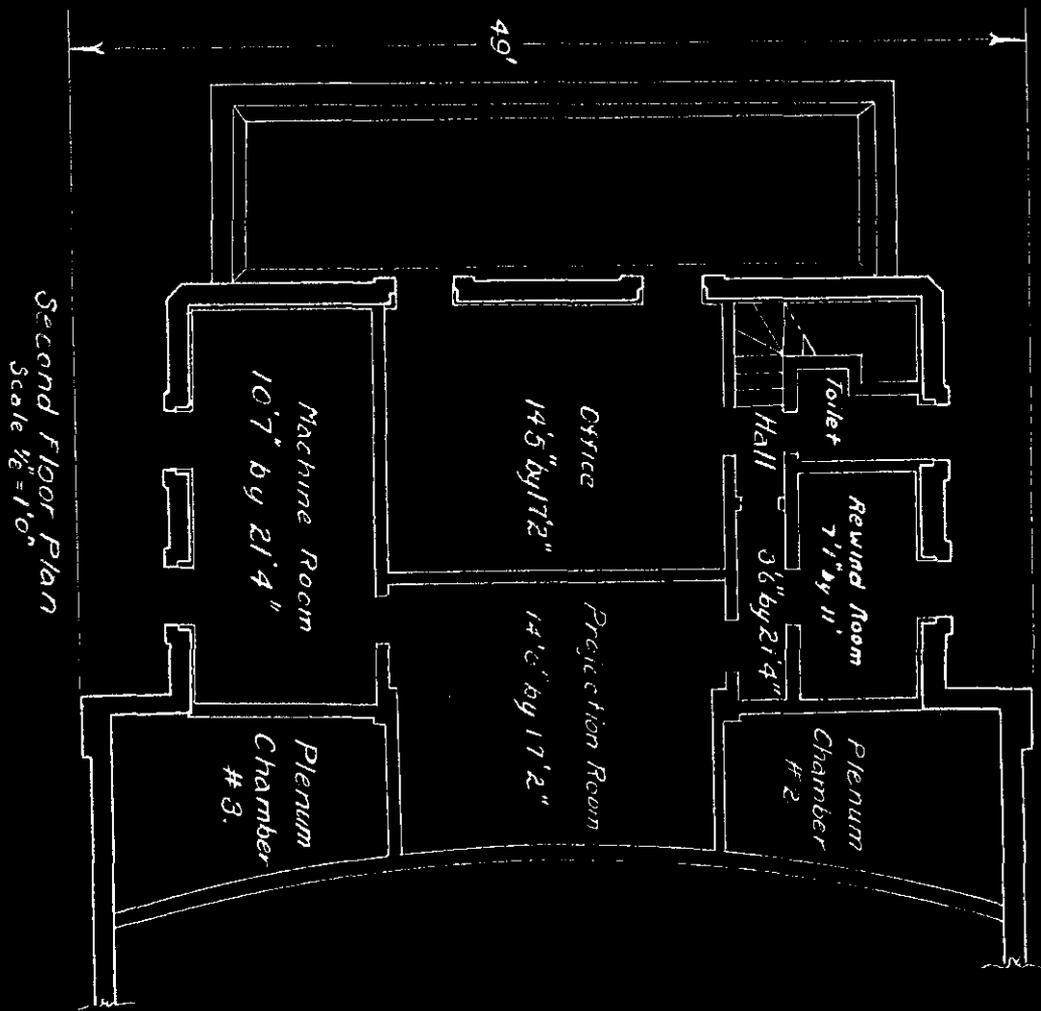
appropriate local archives designated by the OHP. This recordation has been prepared in order to meet those stipulations.

The title page, Part I, and Part III were prepared by Mary L. Maniery, Historian, PAR Environmental Services, Sacramento. Architectural descriptions in Part II were compiled by Judith Marvin, Historian/Architectural Historian, Foothill Resources, Murphys, California. Descriptions were checked against photographs and plans by Mary L. Maniery and were embellished and corrected, as necessary. Information on historic landscape design was extracted by Mary L. Maniery from a report prepared by Dr. Fred Hrusa, Botanist, PAR Environmental Services. Photography was prepared by David DeVries, Mesa Technical, Berkeley, California.

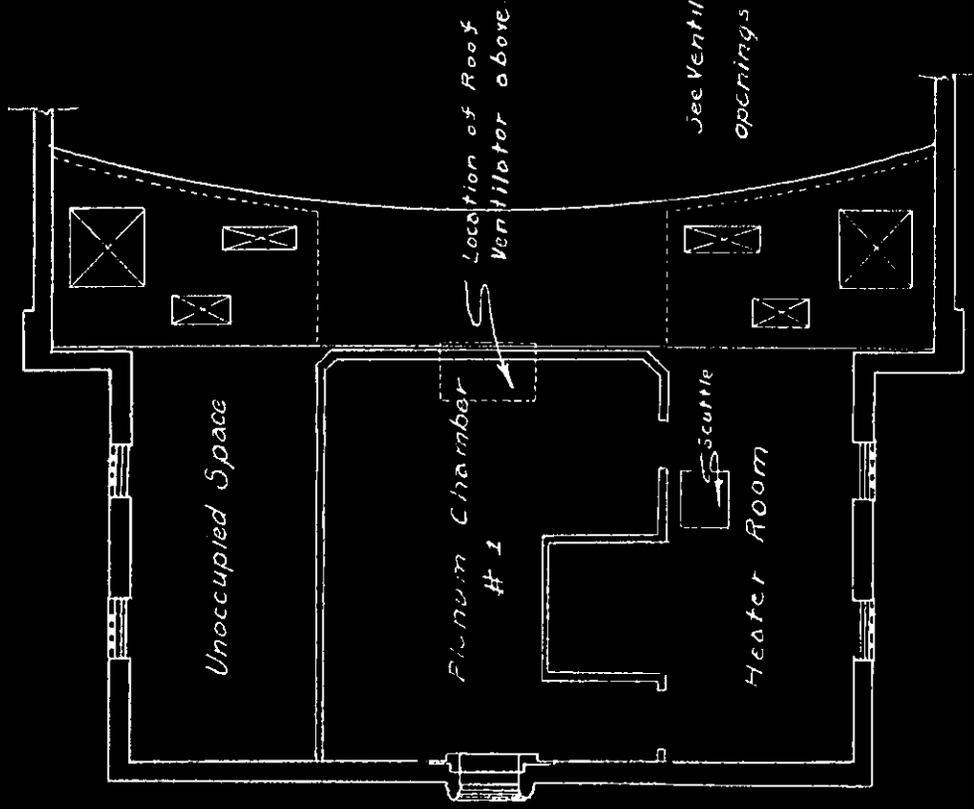




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 Drawn by
 Redrawn by



See Ventilation Drawings for openings in Plenum Ceiling.

3rd Floor Plan
Scale 1/8" = 1'0"

U.S. ARMY MOTION PICTURE SERVICE
Hamilton Field, Calif.
War Dept. Theater
2nd & 3rd Floor Plans (Details Omitted)
Scale: As noted
Drawn by Welpley Gould Feb 12, 1937
Redrawn by Donald G. Bigham May 18, 1938

