

COLORADO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

COLORADO STATE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES NOMINATION FORM

SECTION I

Name of Property

Historic Name Emerson Theatre

Other Names Sands Theatre

Address of Property

address not for publication

Street Address 211 Clayton Street

City Brush

County Morgan

Zip 80723-2103

Present Owner of Property

(for multiple ownership, list the names and addresses of each owner on one or more continuation sheets)

Name Joseph Machetta

Address PO Box 187

Phone 970-842-5744

City Brush

State CO

Zip 80723

Owner Consent for Nomination

(attach signed consent from each owner of property - see attached form)

Preparer of Nomination

Name Property owner (based partially on research by Carl McWilliams) Date May 24, 2005

Organization _____

Address _____

Phone _____

City _____

State _____

Zip _____

FOR OFFICIAL USE:

Site Number 5MR764

_____ Nomination Received

Senate # 1

House # 63

_____ Review Board Recommendation
 ____ Approval ____ Denial

_____ CHS Board State Register Listing
 ____ Approved ____ Denied

Certification of Listing: President, Colorado Historical Society

Date _____

COLORADO STATE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES

Property Name Emerson Theatre

SECTION II

Local Historic Designation

Has the property received local historic designation?

no

yes --- individually designated designated as part of a historic district

Date designated _____

Designated by _____ (Name of municipality or county)

Use of Property

Historic Theater

Current Theater

Original Owner Charles W. Emerson

Source of Information Carl McWilliams, Architectural Inventory Form 5MR764, February 20, 2003

Year of Construction 1916

Source of Information Carl McWilliams, Architectural Inventory Form 5MR764, February 20, 2003:

Brush Tribune, March 3, 1916, page 4

Architect, Builder, Engineer, Artist or Designer Unknown

Source of Information Carl McWilliams, Architectural Inventory Form 5MR764, February 20, 2003

Locational Status

Original location of structure(s)

Structure(s) moved to current location

Date of move _____

SECTION III

Description and Alterations

(describe the current and original appearance of the property and any alterations on one or more continuation sheets)

COLORADO STATE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES

Property Name Emerson Theatre

SECTION IV

Significance of Property

Nomination Criteria

- A** - property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to history
- B** - property is connected with persons significant in history
- C** - property has distinctive characteristics of a type, period, method of construction or artisan
- D** - property is of geographic importance
- E** - property contains the possibility of important discoveries related to prehistory or history

Areas of Significance

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Economics | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archaeology – prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Law |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archaeology – historic | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Entertainment/ Recreation | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Ethnic Heritage | <input type="checkbox"/> Military |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Exploration/ Settlement | <input type="checkbox"/> Performing Arts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Geography/ Community Identity | <input type="checkbox"/> Politics/ Government |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community Planning and Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Health/Medicine | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Science |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Social History |
| | | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation |

Significance Statement

(explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

Bibliography

(cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets)

SECTION V

Locational Information

Lot(s) 18-19 Block 11 Addition Original Town

USGS Topographic Quad Map Brush East

Verbal Boundary Description of Nominated Property

(describe the boundaries of the nominated property on a continuation sheet)

COLORADO STATE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES

Property Name Emerson Theatre

SECTION VI

Photograph Log for Black and White Photographs

(prepare a photograph log on one or more continuation sheets)

SECTION VII

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS TO ACCOMPANY NOMINATION

Owner Consent Form

Black and White Photographs

Color Prints or Digital Images

Sketch Map(s)

Photocopy of USGS Map Section

Optional Materials

Use of Nomination Materials

Upon submission to the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, all nomination forms and supporting materials become public records pursuant to CRS Title 24, and may be accessed, copied, and used for personal or commercial purposes in accordance with state law unless otherwise specifically exempted. The Colorado Historical Society may reproduce, publish, display, perform, prepare derivative works or otherwise use the nomination materials for Society and/or State Register purposes.

For Office Use Only

Property Type: building(s) district site structure object area

Architectural Style/Engineering Type: Early Twentieth-Century Commercial

Period of Significance: 1916-1966

Level of Significance: Local State National

Acreage: Less than one

P.M. 6th Township 3N Range 56W Section 3 Quarter Sections NE SE SE NE

UTM Reference: Zone 13 Easting 617174 Northing 4456850 NAD27

Site Elevation: 4,230 feet

Property Name Emerson Theatre

DESCRIPTION and ALTERATIONS

The Emerson Theatre (now the Sands Theatre) is located on the east side of Clayton Street in the middle of the 200 block in downtown Brush. Other commercial buildings are located along Clayton Street in this block and in the next business block to the south. Additional commercial buildings are located nearby along Edison Street (U .S. Highway 34, Business Route).

Among Brush's most prominent downtown landmarks, the theatre has existed here at 211 Clayton Street since 1916. The building is two-stories high on a rectangular plan and is covered by a flat roof with a gable-roofed skylight. The theater's stuccoed symmetrical facade fronts directly onto the wide concrete sidewalk along Clayton Street, and is divided into three bays. The center bay is defined by two dark brown-painted pilasters and identical pilasters appear at either end of the facade. The center bay features a set of double, fully glazed, aluminum frame entry doors with flanking sidelights topped by a wide opaque white transom. An archetypal, V-shaped two-sided, theater marquee projects over the sidewalk above the entry in the center bay. The marquee advertises the name of the theatre, the "Sands", in neon-lit script, while featured movie information appears in moveable red block letters on the marquee. A spiral of chaser lights begins above the outer edge of the marquee and continues downward and across the lower edge on both sides of the marquee. Over the entry and behind the marquee is a semicircular panel which once was a glazed opening. The upper facade wall in the center bay is decorated with a faux oculus set between two applied panels which together create a rounded arch. The north and south bays on the facade are mirror images of each other. They both feature: a single, brown-painted solid wood door, with a transom light; a square single-light fixed-pane window; and three semicircular arch windows in the second story, with painted sand color wood frames, turquoise wood surrounds, and brown sills and arches. The facade wall itself features sand color stucco over brick construction. The facade wall is topped by a symmetrical stepped gable parapet, and below the parapet there is a projecting cornice with a turquoise-painted fretwork motif.

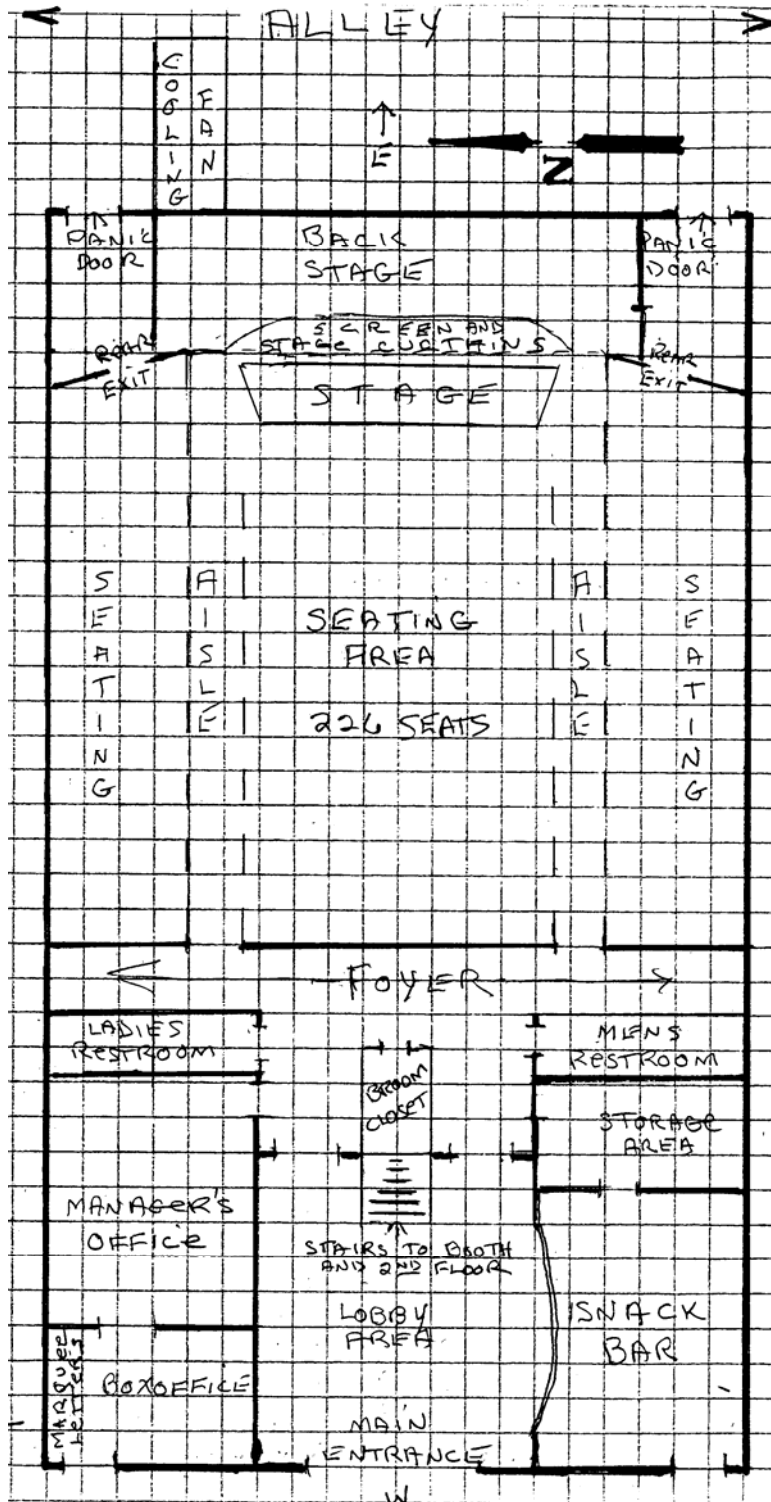
The theater's side elevation walls (north and south) are constructed of soft red brick laid in common bond, while the east (rear) elevation wall is stucco over red brick construction. A small square window, with a segmental brick arch and a rowlock brick sill, penetrates the building's first story on the south elevation. There is also a plywood-filled window located in the second story near the east end of the south elevation. The north wall one contained a triple sash which was bricked over at an unknown date.

A painted white metal rear service entry door is set within a recessed entryway at the south end of the east elevation; a plywood covered door, no longer in use, is located near the north end of the east elevation; a bulkhead cellar entrance is located on the east elevation as well. A red brick chimney stack, covered with concrete pargeting, is also located on the east elevation. Finally, there is a historic one-story gabled extension to the main building on the east elevation. This extension measures approximately 6' north to south and 21' east to west and is built of orange clay tile blocks.

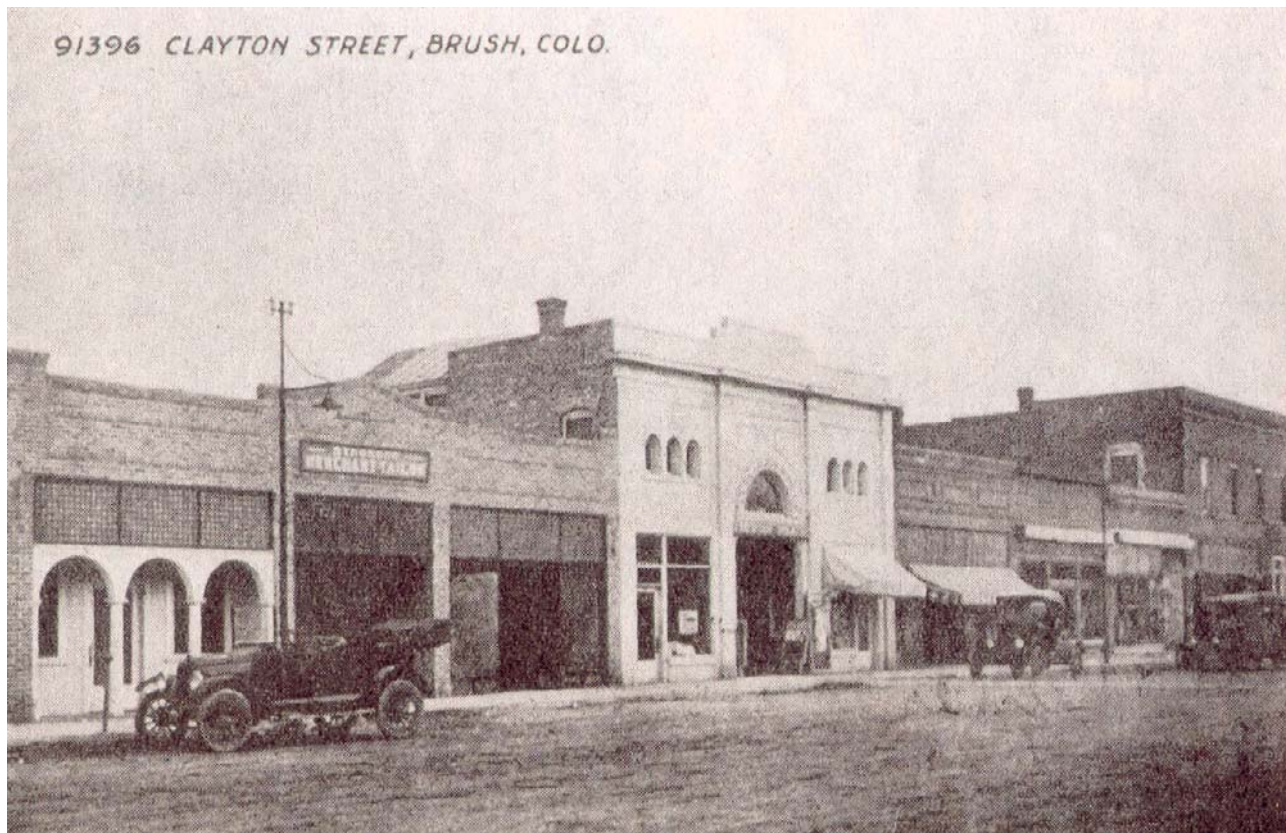
The theatre's box office and manager's office is to the left of the entry door in the lobby, with the snack bar to the right. A stairway leading to the projection booth and to the balcony rises from the center of the lobby. A men's and a ladies' restroom flank the foyer. The theater auditorium presently features seating for 226 patrons, although, historically there was seating

Property Name Emerson Theatre

Sketch Plan
(Not to Scale)



Property Name Emerson Theatre



The Emerson Theatre about 1916



The Emerson Theatre in the late 1950s

Property Name Emerson Theatre

for 360, including 60 balcony seats. The seating is divided into three sections by a pair of aisles. Most of the side walls are covered by acoustical curtains. A stepped rectangular panel occupies the upper wall above both exits flanking the stage. The dark brown ceiling is decorated with by a series of dark brown rectangular panels outlined in yellow, the whole forming a cross-shaped pattern.

In addition to the projection booth and the theater balcony, the western-most portion of the second-floor contains office space which runs the full width of the building. This space was once occupied by a photography studio. It is now used for storage.

The only addition to the original exterior is the rear projection for the cooling equipment. There have been modifications to the building facade and the interior.

The original theater entry was recessed. At an unknown date the lobby was enclosed by fully glazed doors and side lights. The flanking storefronts retain their general fenestration, though the doors and windows are replacements and the upper transoms are now covered by stucco. The semicircular arch above the entry is infilled. The former store spaces on each side of the lobby have been incorporated into the theater proper.

The marquee was modified in 1966 when the theater's name was changed from the "Emerson" to the "Sands". The two-sided V-shaped marquee originally featured the name "Emerson," but after renaming the theatre, owner Joe Machetta installed the name "Sands" at the top of the marquee in neon-lit script. The marquee was historically lit from behind by white neon lighting, however the neon faded in cold weather. Machetta replaced the background neon lighting on each side with sixteen 5'-tall, vertical, fluorescent lights. He also installed additional "chasing bulbs" outlining the marquee so that it is now lit by 196 bulbs.

In the early 1960s an auditorium stage was installed to permit the occasional booking of live entertainment. The theater was originally built with 300 seats on the main level, with an additional sixty seats in the balcony. Seventy-four main level seats were removed in the early 1990s, to provide for wider aisles and for roomier, more comfortable seating. The balcony seating was also closed at that time because it was not really needed, and because occasionally poorly-behaved theatre goers would cause disruptions from the balcony. As a result, the former balcony seating area now serves as storage.

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SIGNIFICANCE STATEMENT

The 1916 Emerson Theatre building (now the Sands Theatre) is eligible for the State Register under Criterion A in the area of *entertainment/recreation* during the period of 1916 to 1966. During this period the theater served as Brush's primary public entertainment venue.

The Emerson Theatre, later the Sands, has been a prominent landmark in downtown Brush for nearly nine decades. The building was initially owned by banker Charles W. Emerson who was one of Brush's most influential citizens through the first half of the twentieth century. Born in Van Wert, Ohio, in 1874, Emerson moved to Greeley with his family in 1876. In 1886, the family moved to Denver where he completed his public education. Emerson moved to Portland, Oregon, in 1897 where he obtained a law degree. He then practiced law in San Francisco for a short time before moving to Brush where he formed a partnership with W.S. Stratton of Hillrose. In 1904, he became president of the First National Bank. He also served the community as a police magistrate, a public trustee, and as the mayor of Brush from 1914 to 1917. Emerson was also involved in numerous business ventures, including the Emerson Theatre which bore his name until 1966. He passed away in July 1967, at the age of 93, survived by his wife, Lois, and a daughter.

The Emerson staged its grand opening on Saturday, March 4, 1916. Theater manager Harold N. Desky offered his opening night patrons the Famous Saxophone Orchestra. Demonstrating its commitment to the community, on August 17th the theater featured the movie *Polly of the Circus* in a one-night benefit for Brush Base Ball. A special invitation was extended to all churches, perhaps reflecting the uneasiness some clergy expressed nationwide about the new entertainment diversion of the motion pictures, particularly when they perceived theaters as competitors to evening religious services and other functions.

THE BRUSH TRIBUNE

Grand Opening
The Emerson Theatre
Saturday, March 4th

The Famous Saxophone Orchestra
PARAMOUNT PICTURES
The Worlds Best

Do not fail to see Eastern Colorado's Finest up-to-date Theatre Tonight

HAROLD N. DESKY, Manager

Polly of the Circus
Emerson Theatre
August 17, 1916
Brush Base Ball Benefit
One Night Only

**The Biggest Thing Ever Attempted
in Brush.**

A Four Act Pastorial Comedy
A Special Invitation Extended to All Churches

PRICES:

| | |
|--------------------------|------------|
| Children | 25c |
| General Admission | 50c |
| Reserved Seats | 75c |

Property Name Emerson Theatre

One month later the management featured the 10-reel *Civilization*. This allegorical film about peace came with endorsements not only from the clergy and the press, but President Wilson himself. Madame Pearson sang and played during the pictures.

In the era of silent movies, music accompaniment was generally part of each showing. The Emerson sometimes featured live entertainment in addition to its movie offerings. On March 3, 1922, then theater manager M. Sahlin advertised in the *Brush Tribune* the one night appearance of the famous Georgia Minstrels. The forty-person band and orchestra, whose ad suggests that at least part of the troop appeared in the stereotypical and racially degrading black-face makeup used by some white performers of the period, promised to stage a street parade.

The August 11 *Tribune* ad promised a beautiful concert by the Adelphian Male Quartette, in addition to Helene Chadwick in *The Angel Factory* and Harold Lloyd in *Somewhere in Turkey*. Also advertised was dancing in the Pavilion at 9 p.m.

The pavilion was part of the outdoor summer theater which the Emerson management initiated in 1922. Attendance generally declined during the summer as patrons found theater buildings too hot for enjoyment in the days before air conditioning. Some innovative theater owners and managers established outdoor theaters to retain their trade. These open air settings not only included screens for projecting movies but often included facilities for dancing and refreshments.

The *Tribune* of June 16, 1922, informed its readers that the management of the Emerson Theatre was soon to open an outdoor amusement pavilion to take

Civilization!

10 Reels One Show Only Beginning 8 P. M.

Friday, Oct. 5

EMERSON THEATRE

THE GREATEST PHOTO PLAY OF MODERN TIMES

Publicly endorsed by President Wilson, Press and Clergy the World over

Added Attraction to this Great Spectacle will be
MADAME PEARSON
who will sing and play during the pictures

Admission Prices: - Children 25c Adults 50c

EMERSON : THEATRE

M. SAHLIN, Manager. ALWAYS WORTH WHILE

THIRTY THIRD SEASON

The Famous
GEORGIA MINSTRELS

40-PEOPLE-40
Band and Orchestra

ONLY SHOW OF ITS KIND IN THE WORLD

WATCH FOR THE STREET PARADE

ONE NIGHT!
Tues., Mar. 7

Property Name Emerson Theatre

advantage of the cool summer evenings. To be located a few doors north of the theater building, the summer theater would be "arranged for moving pictures, radio concerts, vaudeville and dancing, also a summer garden for serving refreshments." The structure was to have a dance floor, substantial roof and open sides, protected by adjustable curtains, all at a cost of \$3,000. Mr. and Mrs. Sahlin would provide personal attention to the facility to insure absolute respectability. As if this was not enough, the newspaper reported that dances "will be chaperoned by two estimable women marshals, assisted by a special police officer."

True to their word, the Emerson Summer Theatre and Garden opened on Saturday, June 24, 1922, with the showing of Charles Ray in *Peaceful Valley*, along with some good comedies and added attractions, followed by dancing and refreshments. These outdoor summer theaters helped theater owners retain their clientele during hot weather. In a decade, that marketing philosophy would see the proliferation of drive-in movie theaters, often under the same ownership as the downtown theater. The indoor facilities frequently closed seasonally so as to staff the automobile-oriented venue at the edge of town.

At some point in its history, the theater projection equipment and overall operation of the Emerson was acquired by a man named John Roberts, although Charles Emerson retained ownership of the building and the theater continued to bear his name. In the 1950s, Roberts also operated a drive-in theater in Fort Morgan and another drive-in theater in Brush, which was located at the east end of town. With the increased popularity of the automobile and drive-in movies, the Emerson Theatre began to lose customers in the 1950s and it eventually closed.

In addition to the theater itself, the Emerson building traditionally also housed other small businesses which complemented its main use as a theater. For example, in the early 1940s, the "Sweet Shoppe" a small cafe which offered "light lunches.. ice cream.. soft drinks.. cigarettes.. pop corn.. [and] tobaccos" was located in the "Theatre Building."

In 1958, the theater gained a new lease on life when it was reopened by its current owner, Joe Machetta. A native of Aguilar, Colorado, Machetta grew up in southern Colorado where his grandfather operated a theater, and where his family gained experience in the theater business. After arriving in Brush, Machetta purchased the Emerson's projection equipment from John Roberts and acquired a lease for the property from Charles Emerson. He then spent some weeks cleaning and refurbishing the building before reopening the theater on the night of April 18, 1958.

Soon after re-opening, Machetta installed a stage, and then occasionally booked live performances. The "American Beatles," a band from Pueblo which emulated the better known Beatles of Liverpool and played Beatles songs, was among the more popular live acts, playing before sell-out crowds at the Emerson Theatre in the mid-1960s.

Machetta purchased the building in 1966 and renamed the theater the "Sands." He chose the name because it seemed reflective of the sandy, often dusty, topography of northeastern Colorado, and also because he was an admirer of the Sands Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas.

Property Name Emerson Theatre

The Sands Theatre continues to serve the community of Brush from the same location established in 1916. Nearly 90 years of continuous operation signifies the importance of the theater to the town and its citizens. It also speaks to the skill of the theater's owners and managers in meeting the entertainment preferences of its customers in an increasingly competitive entertainment market. In 1959, the editorial board of the *Motion Picture Exhibitor Magazine* selected Joe Machetta to be on the world-wide ballot for the election of the five leading "Showmen of the Year." In making its selection, the magazine cited Machetta's originality and ticket-selling skills. The theater has also been featured in articles in the *Fort Morgan Times Weekly* and *Westword*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Brush Tribune

- "Grand Opening Emerson Theatre," advertisement, March 4, 1916.
- "Polly of the Circus," advertisement, August 17, 1916.
- "Civilization!" advertisement, September 28, 1917.
- "The Jungle Princess," advertisement, Jan 12, 1922.
- "The Famous Georgia Minstrels," advertisement, March 3, 1922.
- "Brush to Have Summer Theatre," June 16, 1922.
- "Grand Opening New Summer Theatre and Garden," June 16, 1922.
- "The Famous Adelphian Male Quartette," advertisement, August 11, 1922.

Brush News Tribune

- "Theatre Manager Given Honor," may 21, 1959.
- "Machetta Buys Theater, Remodeling is Planned," March 23, 1967.

Fuller, Kathryn H. *At the Picture Show: Small-Town Audiences and the Creation of Movie Fan Culture*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996.

McWilliams, Carl. Architectural Inventory Form 5MR764, February 20, 2003. In the files of the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society.

"Picture Places," *Fort Morgan Times Weekly*, September 17, 1987, pgs. 10-11.

Van De Voorde, Andy, "Hollywood R.F.D.," *Westword*, Vol. 16, No. 37, May 12-18, 1993, pgs. 23-31.

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nomination consists of Lots 18-19, Block 11, Original Town of Brush, Morgan County, Colorado.

Property Name Emerson Theatre

PHOTOGRAPH LOG

The following information pertains to photograph numbers 1- 24:

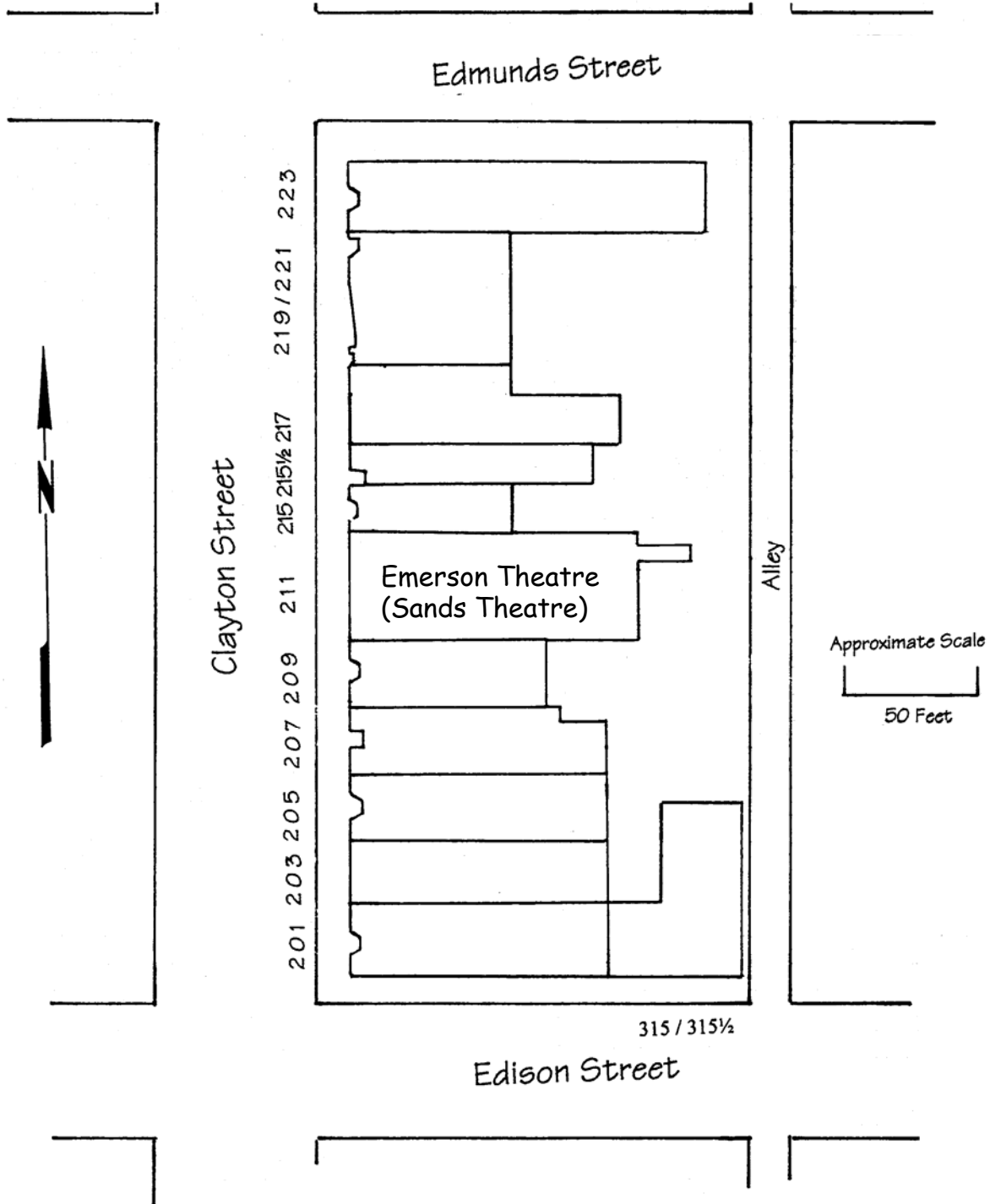
Photographer: Elaine Prascher
Date of Photographs: March 2005
Location of Negatives: Joe Machetta, Sands Theatre

| <u>Photo No.</u> | <u>Photographic Information</u> |
|------------------|---|
| 1 | Facade; view to the east |
| 2 | Facade at night; view to the east |
| 3 | Marquee - Joe Machetta, owner and manager; view to the northeast |
| 4 | Upper facade, south side; view to the east |
| 5 | Upper facade window detail; view to the east |
| 6 | Arch over entry behind marquee; view to the east. |
| 7 | Interior view of entry arch; view to the west |
| 8 | East (rear) and north walls; view to the southwest |
| 9 | South wall; view to the north |
| 10 | Lobby with stairs to second floor and balcony; view to the east |
| 11 | Box office interior; view to the west |
| 12 | Snack bar; view to the south |
| 13 | Manager's office; view to the northwest |
| 14 | Close-up of stair balustrade; view to the northwest |
| 15 | Foyer, south side; view to the south |
| 16 | Theater auditorium; view to the northeast |
| 17 | Original wall covering back stage |
| 18 | Close-up view of auditorium ceiling |
| 19 | Exit south of stage; view to the southeast |
| 20 | Projection booth southwest corner - second floor |
| 21 | Entrance to second-floor office (originally photographer's studio); view to the southwest |
| 22 | Inside studio entrance to photography room |
| 23 | Inside photography studio; view to the east |
| 24 | Skylight in photography studio with infilled triple window. |

Property Name Emerson Theatre

SITE MAP

(Source: McWilliams, Architectural Inventory Form 5MR764, February 20, 2003)



Property Name Emerson Theatre

USGS TOPOGRAPHIC MAP
Brush East Quadrangle, Colorado
7.5 Minute Series

UTM: Zone 13 / 617174E / 4456850N (NAD27)
PLSS: 6th PM, T3N, R56W, Sec. 3 NE¼ SE¼ SE ¼ NE¼
Elevation: 4,230 feet

