PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY
HISTORIC SITE SUMMARY SHEET

Building Name: Publick Playhouse
Location: 5445 Landover Road, Bladensburg, Maryland

Public/Theater/Occupied/Excellent/Accessible

Description:

The Publick Playhouse is a large brick theater building of Art Deco design. The main block of the theater is built of red-painted brick, two stories high; the attached large rear addition is built of light-colored brick. Entrance is in the center of the north facade, through two sets of double doors, inset beneath a prominent projecting marquee. The walls flanking the entrance curve in toward the doors. Originally the curved box office window opened on the left (east) side of the curving wall; this opening has been bricked in, but its lines can be clearly seen in the brickwork of the curved easterly flanking wall. The walls of the main block are surmounted by a brick cornice, corbelled in three courses, topped by a narrow concrete upper band. Above the marquee, the higher central part of the wall is decorated with three wide vertical panels, each composed of nine vertical courses of sawtooth brick corbelling. Originally the front curved walls of the theater were painted in a scalloped rainbow design of several colors. The long walls of the rear addition are unfenestrated, and are punctuated by buttresses on east and west.

Significance:

The Publick Playhouse is a brick theater building of Art Deco design. It is the only surviving theater of this type and period in Prince George's County, and although altered from its original appearance, is a visible landmark at the intersection of two important roads into Bladensburg. This building was constructed and opened in 1947 as the Cheverly Movie Theater. For many years, the old "Cheverly" was a neighborhood institution, one of the finest of the Sidney Lust chain of movie houses, with ornate sky scenes in the ceiling, plush seating for more than 900, and even air conditioning. The theater was acquired by M-NCPPC in 1975, and renovations were undertaken to convert the building into a place for live theater performances. The rear space was constructed, and the theater opened as the Prince George's Publick Playhouse in 1977. Further renovations were undertaken in 1984, and the theater now operates a full schedule of many types of performances. Although considerably altered from its original appearance, the theater is the only surviving Art Deco theater in Prince George's County, and is still a noticeable landmark in its neighborhood.

Acreage: 16,669 square feet
HISTORIC CONTEXT:

MARYLAND COMPREHENSIVE HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN DATA

Geographic Organization: Western Shore

Chronological/Development Periods:
  Modern Period - AD 1930 to present

Historic Period Themes:
  Social/Education/Cultural

Resource Type:
  Category: Building
  Historic Environment: Suburban
  Historic Functions and Uses: Theater
  Design Source: unknown
**1. Name**  
(indicate preferred name)

- historic: Cheverly Movie Theater
- and/or common: Publick Playhouse

**2. Location**

- street & number: 5445 Landover Road (Maryland Route 202)  
- city, town: Bladensburg  
- state: Maryland  
- county: Prince George's County  
- congressional district: 4

**3. Classification**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Ownership</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Present Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>district</td>
<td>public X</td>
<td>occupied X</td>
<td>agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>building(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>structure</td>
<td>private</td>
<td>unoccupied</td>
<td>educational</td>
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<tr>
<td>site</td>
<td>both</td>
<td>work in progress</td>
<td>scientific</td>
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<tr>
<td>object</td>
<td>Public Acquisition</td>
<td>entertainment</td>
<td>religious</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in process</td>
<td>X yes: restricted</td>
<td>government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>being considered</td>
<td>yes: unrestricted</td>
<td>industrial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>not applicable</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>military</td>
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**4. Owner of Property**  
give names and mailing addresses of all owners

- name: M-NCPIC
- street & number: 6600 Kenilworth Ave  
- city, town: Riverdale  
- state and zip code: MD 20737

**5. Location of Legal Description**

- courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.: Prince George's County Court House  
- liber: 456
- folio: 3  
- state: MD

**6. Representation in Existing**  
Historical Surveys

- title: None
- date
- repository for survey records

- city, town
- state
The Publick Playhouse is a large brick theater building of Art Deco design. It is distinguished by its curved and corbelled entrance facade, and period marquee. It stands at the intersection of two roads just east of the Town of Bladensburg.

The main block of the theater is built of red-painted brick, two stories high; the attached large rear addition is built of light-colored brick. The original theater faces roughly north. Entrance is in the center of this north facade, through two sets of double doors, inset beneath a prominent projecting marquee. The walls flanking the entrance curve in toward the doors. Originally the curved box office window opened on the left (east) side of the curving wall; the box office window opening has been bricked in, but its lines can be clearly seen in the brickwork of the curved easterly flanking wall.

The flanking walls of the main block are surmounted by a brick cornice, corbelled in three courses, topped by a narrow concrete upper band. Above the marquee, the center part of the brick wall rises higher than the two flanking curved sections. This center section is decorated with three wide vertical panels: each panel is composed of nine vertical courses of sawtooth brick corbelling. This section, like the flanking curved walls, is surmounted by three courses of brick corbelling, topped by a narrow concrete band.

At the curved outer corners, at second story level, are two-part curved strip windows of glass brick. That on the east corner lights the ladies' lounge from above; on the west, the strip window lights the office space. Originally the front of the curved walls of the theater were painted in a very prominent scalloped rainbow design of several colors.

When the theater was first built in 1947, huge letters spelling out CHEVERLY dominated the top of the central section. They have been replaced with letters which spell out the new name of the theater - PUBLICK PLAYHOUSE.

The long walls of the rear addition are unfenestrated, and are punctuated by buttresses on east and west.
# 8. Significance

### Specific dates

1947, 1974, 1984

### Builder/Architect

check: Applicable Criteria: __A__ __B__ __C__ __D__

and/or

Applicable Exception: __A__ __B__ __C__ __D__ __E__ __F__ __G__

Level of Significance: national  state  local

Prepare both a summary paragraph of significance and a general statement of history and support.

The Publick Playhouse is brick theater building of Art Deco design. It is the only surviving theater of this type and period in Prince George’s County, and although altered from its original appearance, is a visible landmark at the intersection of two important roads into Bladensburg.

This building was constructed and opened in 1947 as the Cheverly Movie Theater. It was located just a short distance west of the community of Cheverly, which had been developed during the early 1920s by real estate developer Robert Marshall. Cheverly was incorporated in 1931, and grew slowly during the Depression and the Second World War. In the prosperous period following the war, approximately 1/2 acre on the Bladensburg road was purchased, and the highly decorative Art Deco theater opened as the Cheverly Movie Theater.¹

For many years, the old "Cheverly" was a neighborhood institution, one of the finest of the Sidney Lust chain of movie houses. The neighborhood flocked to see first-run films in a movie house distinguished by Art Deco designs, with ornate sky scenes in the ceiling, plush seating for more than 900, and even air conditioning.²

By the late 1960s, the theater was no longer in steady use. For several years it stood vacant, and then in 1975 was acquired by MNCPPC. At this time, renovations were undertaken

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¹ See Cheverly Survey area, PG#69-22, P.G. Historic Preservation Section, MNCPPC, Upper Marlboro; Prince George’s County Deed #1315:383.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property: 16669 sq ft
Quadrangle name: Washington East
Quadrangle scale: 1:24000

UTM References: do NOT complete UTM references

A
Zone
Easting
Northing

B
Zone
Easting
Northing

C
D
E
F
G
H

Verbal boundary description and justification

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>state</th>
<th>code</th>
<th>county</th>
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Susan G. Pearl, Research/Architectural Historian
organization: Prince George's County Historic Preservation Commission
date: March 1993
street & number: 14741 Gov. Oden Bowie Drive
telephone: 301-952-3521
city or town: Upper Marlboro
state: MD

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust
Shaw House
21 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
(301) 269-2438

PS-2746
The interior of the main block consists of three basic spaces: box office area, lobby and auditorium. The box office area is just inside the exterior double doors. This area in turn leads into a curved lobby area and then through doors into the large sloping auditorium. In the auditorium, the walls are panelled with small green acoustical panels in geometric pattern. Drapes hang in parallel rows from each side of the auditorium. All decoration is in green and beige and salmon colors. Doors are beige with green panels, and the surrounds are painted salmon pink. In the original 1947 theater there was a low balustrade behind the last row of seats; it has been replaced by a full wall.
to convert the building into a place for live theater performances. The rear space was constructed, and the theater opened as the Prince George's Publick Playhouse in 1977.³

The original colorful exterior decor was retained until the renovations of 1984. At this time, the scallop decoration was painted over; the exterior box office was closed, and the box office window bricked in. On the interior, many of the lowest rows of seats in the auditorium were removed in order to make room for a large stage. Backstage space was added in the rear wing. Also the low balustrade behind the last row of seats was replaced by a full wall, creating a complete separation between auditorium and lobby.⁴

The Publick Playhouse now operates a full schedule of many types of performances. Although considerably altered from its original configuration and appearance, the theater still represents the only surviving Art Deco theater in Prince George's County, and is still a noticeable landmark in its neighborhood.

³ ibid, conversation with theater manager, December 1992.
⁴ ibid.
Public Playhouse
Prince George's Co MD
Season A. Pearl
December 1992
MD SHPO
The 1984 phased West facade
2/2
Public's Playhouse
Henri LeRoy's Co., MD
Susan St. Pearl
December 1992
MD SAPO
North facade, 1001 NW
122