

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Victoria Theatre

and or common Victoria Theatre

2. Location

street & number 46 West Independence Street

N/A not for publication

city, town Shamokin

N/A vicinity of N/A

state Pennsylvania

code 42

county Northumberland

code 097

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	N/A in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	N/A being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Karl Bowers

street & number 147 South Shamokin Street

city, town Shamokin

N/A vicinity of

state Pennsylvania 17872

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Northumberland County Courthouse

street & number Market and Second Streets

city, town Sunbury

state Pennsylvania 17801

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Northumberland County Historic Site Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 11-26-80 federal state county local

depository for survey records Northumberland County Planning Commission

city, town Sunbury

state Pennsylvania

7: Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date N/A

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Victoria Theatre is located at the intersection of Independence and Diamond streets in downtown Shamokin. It has been in continuous operation since its opening in January, 1918. The building is sited on a trapezoidal corner lot and is built to the property line. The lot is approximately 20' wide at the front (north) and 120' wide at the rear (south). The west elevation is approximately 190' in length and the east elevation is 160' in length. See tax map (Exhibit A) and architectural drawings (Exhibit B, First Floor Plan) for specific forms and dimensions.

The interior is elaborately ornamented with molded plaster ceilings and cornice work. Its focal point is a central dome with a suspended chandelier and perimeter lighting. The original stage and orchestra pit are concealed by a modern movie screen erected behind the proscenium arch. The first eleven rows of seating have been removed to accommodate the change. A snack bar was added in the foyer in 1952. Other than these minor modifications, the theatre remains much as it was when originally built.

Chamberlain Amusement Company offices were located on the second floor of the theatre directly above the covered outdoor entrance. These offices contain many of the records of the Company, including architectural drawings for the Victoria and other Chamberlain theatres designed by W. H. Lee, drawings of lighting fixtures, marquees, signage, and seating charts. The files also contain company memorabilia, e.g. financial records, booking receipts, newspaper clippings, photos and posters which contribute to our present understanding of regional theatres and their development in the twentieth century (Exhibit E).

The theatre is four floors in height (57'6") at the front. The side walls step down 16' from the front to the center line of the west elevation. Wall height is 41'7" at this point. The roof ridge is at a constant elevation over its entire length (Exhibit B, West Elevation). With the possible exception of the facade, the exterior appearance of the structure is not reflective of the spatial and decorative qualities of the interior.

The front facade is highly decorative, open and inviting, possessing much the same character as storefronts of the period (Exhibit C, Photo 1). The main entrance doors are of wood construction with a glass panel set into wood

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below				
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> theater	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention			

Specific dates 1918

Builder/Architect W.H. Lee, Architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Victoria was constructed during Shamokin's "heyday" and during the early years of the motion picture industry. Built to show movies as well as accomodate live stage performances the theatre is representative of a distinct transitional period in the evolution of popular entertainment. The theatre was designed by noted theatre architect W.H. Lee with offices in Shamokin and later in Philadelphia. The theatre was built for and housed central offices of the Chamberlain Amusement Company, which operated eight theatre houses in the east central region of Pennsylvania. In addition to the Shamokin Victoria, the Chamberlain Company operated theatres in Mahonoy City, Lansford, Mt. Carmel, Danville, Pottsville, Tamaqua, and Bloomsburg.

Theatres like the Victoria were preceded by a different type of theatre. There were at least 28 entertainment houses in Shamokin during the first decade of the twentieth century. Typically, these were storefront operations with folding chairs and primitive equipment.

In its conception, the Victoria was an attempt to sanitize the entertainment environment in Shamokin and broaden its appeal to a wider segment of the population. As a result the Victoria became a popular theatre for the masses. It did not possess the refined and lavish elegance of old world theatres, although it attempted to create such effects through the profuse use of ornamental plaster. The Victoria was a "safe" theatre for women and children. As an architectural form and singular facility, it led to the demise of the prolific and bawdy storefront cinemas and burlesque houses which preceded it. Live stage entertainment specialty acts were common up to the mid 1920's. Many famous stage artists performed at the theatre, including Ray Bolger, Fritz Kreisler, Pablo Casals, Madam Schuman Heinke, and Gella Gurci.

The Beaux-Arts Theatre is substantially intact and original in spatial arrangement and decoration. It possesses both exterior and interior integrity. Original finishes are well preserved and provide substantial research evidence for restoration. The theatre is built on a trapezoidal shaped corner lot which represents a different and possibly unique physical form for a theatre. The projection room and equipment offer insight into the early technology of motion pictures.

The Victoria is also significant in that it is representative of the early work of architect W.H. Lee. Lee began his private practice in Shamokin and went on to distinguish himself in the field of theatre design. He began his career as an employee of the Shamokin Lumber Company, where he was employed

9. Major Bibliographical References

1. Original Architectural Drawings (attached)
2. Chaberbain Amusement Company Records
3. Northumberland County Planning Commission, North'd Co. Historical Site Survey (1980)
4. Theatre Historical Society of America Correspondence

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property .26 acre

Quadrangle name Shamokin, Pa.

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	8	3	6	8	5	3	0	4	5	1	6	4	5	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

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D

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E

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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property is located on Northumberland County Tax Assessment Map #1-9, Block 22, Lot No. 251 (copy attached). The property is located on the corner of Independence & Diamond Streets. Dimensions are 19'x185'x120'x160'.

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

state	N/A	code	N/A	county	N/A	code	N/A
-------	-----	------	-----	--------	-----	------	-----

state	N/A	code	N/A	county	N/A	code	N/A
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Thomas S. Grbenick

organization SEDA-Council of Governments

date 7-5-85

street & number ED #1

telephone (717)524-4491

city or town Lewisburg

state Pennsylvania 17837

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Dr. Larry E. Tise, State Historic Preservation Officer

date

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

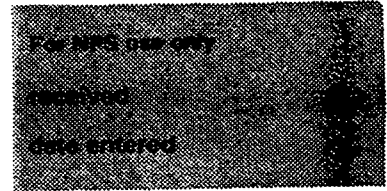
Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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frames. Double hung, single glazed windows with terra cotta surrounds, provide light to the upper floor offices and stairway. A cast bronze inscription (VICTORIA THEATRE) is displayed on a marble panel below the cornice. The remainder of the structure is plain and undecorated (Exhibit C, Photo 2). The only openings in the wall are fire exits and access doors to mechanical spaces. These doors are of wood construction with a recessed panel set into wood frames. A cantilevered fire escape is attached to the west wall.

The theatre walls are constructed primarily of Dennison interlocking structural tile and laid in running bond. The tile walls are laid double thickness (16") to a height which is approximately 60% of the total exterior wall height. Tiles are laid single thickness from this point to the roof parapets. Double thickness tile piers extend upward to the base of the roof parapets. These piers provide bearing for the roof trusses. The front facades of the theatre are constructed of concrete block and veneered with glazed white terra cotta quoins, belt coursing, window surrounds and cornice, with tan brick infill (Exhibit B, West Elevation).

The first floor elevation rises gradually upward from the exterior entrance, through the vestibule, and across the foyer to the rear of the auditorium. The first floor elevation is approximately 3'6" higher than the exterior sidewalk elevation at this point. The auditorium floor slopes downward toward the stage and levels out near the foot of the stage. At this point the first floor elevation is approximately 3' below the exterior sidewalk elevation (Exhibit B, West Elevation).

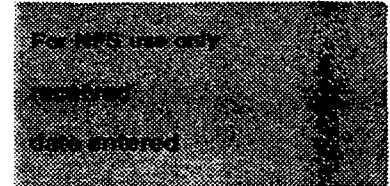
A modified hip roof slopes east and west from a central ridge. Parapet walls at the perimeter contain the water runoff. Roof drains are installed at the low points to carry away rainwater. The roof deck is of wood plank construction and is supported by 2" X 6" wooden rafters on 6" X 8" timber purlins. The purlins are bolted to steel trusses which are supported by masonry bearing walls. The roofing material is of built up composition (Exhibit B, Cross Sections).

The roof structure follows the downward slope of the upper level balcony, i.e. the trusses are stepped downward from the front of the structure toward the main auditorium. The roof structure is level over the main auditorium space. Given the shape of the building lot and the resultant shape of the structure, trusses are variable in length and height. The width of the roof varies, being most narrow at the front of the theatre and widest at the rear (Exhibit B, Balcony Plan).

The covered entrance to the theatre contains a ticket sales window and movie poster display window cases. The flooring is ceramic tile. The ceiling and

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ornamental cornice are of plaster construction. Additional movie poster window display cases are built into the front of the west facade. The projecting sidewalk marquee is constructed of pressed metal and supported by steel tie rods anchored into the front wall. The marquee is original to the theatre. The original lighting system is no longer operable. A stained glass transom originally existed above the marquee adding visual interest and luminosity to the covered outdoor entrance. The transom was blown out in a windstorm and completely destroyed (Exhibit C, Photo #1).

The first floor contains the ticket sales office, entrance vestibule, foyer, mens and ladies rest rooms, ladies lounge, snack bar, coat room, main auditorium and stage (Exhibit B, First Floor Plan). The vestibule is a triangular shaped space with plaster walls, ornamental plaster ceiling and tile floor. Original incandescent lighting fixtures remain in the ceiling. The foyer has ornamental plaster work on walls and ceilings. The walls also contain framed acoustical insulating panels covered with a decorative fabric. The foyer is carpeted throughout.

The ladies lounge is carpeted in the same pattern as the foyer. A corner fireplace (unvented gas heater) is framed by a floor to ceiling mantel piece with a mirror inset (Exhibit D, Photo #5). The fireplace is not original to the theatre. It was installed to provide supplemental heating. A snack bar was added to the foyer around 1952 (Exhibit D, Photo #4). It has since been replaced by a modern stand (Exhibit C, Photo #7).

As originally designed the theatre was used for both live stage performances and movies. Overall seating capacity was approximately 1,700 including the balcony boxes. The first floor auditorium seated 1,150 and the balcony seated 511. Seating capacity has been reduced by eliminating the first eleven rows of seating to accommodate a new movie screen across the proscenium arch. In addition, three rows of seating were removed from the rear of the auditorium to allow for restroom alterations and a new snack bar.

The first floor is a bowl shaped concrete slab poured on grade. Heating and ventilation ducts are built into the floor (Exhibit B, West Elevation and Cross Sections). The curvilinear design of the interior plan and details is also reflected in the floor elevations which vary continuously and subtly throughout most of the theatre.

A dome of significant proportions covers the auditorium (Exhibit B, Cross Sections, Exhibit C, Photo 5 and Exhibit D, Photo H3). The dome, which is in very good condition, is suspended by cables from the roof superstructure. Dome lighting was designed to create multi-color light spectacles. The lighting fixtures within the dome are intact and can be mechanically lowered to the auditorium floor for servicing. The lights are not presently operable.

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The dome and many of the interior surfaces of the theatre are trimmed with gilded ornamental plaster moldings (Exhibit C, Photos 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7). Throughout the auditorium and balcony, original plaster walls have been furred out, covered with acoustical panels and faced with decorative fabric to match that of the main curtain. This wall treatment is acoustically absorptive and improves auditorium acoustics.

The chairs are of cast iron frames with plywood backs, upholstered vinyl covered seats, and hardwood armrests. Seating is original to the theatre and is in poor condition. Cast end panels of the aisle seats display the monogram of the Chamberlain Company (Exhibit C, Photo 4). Decorative ceiling lighting panels under the balcony have been removed and replaced with painted plywood. These oval shaped medallions with stained glass insets once encircled the auditorium along the perimeter of the lower balcony (Exhibit B, First Floor Plan and Exhibit C, Photo 3). The original leaded stained glass exit signs remain in place throughout the theatre.

The original movie screen was located at the rear of the original stage. It was small in comparison to the size of the auditorium (Exhibit B, First Floor Plan). Around 1952 the theatre stage area was revamped to accommodate a large cinemascope movie screen and modern audio system. The original stage opening and all its ornamental plaster work still exists behind the current movie screen which is installed slightly back of the proscenium arch. It is in very good condition. The original orchestra pit has been covered over. The stage alterations have not significantly damaged the original finishes. The main drape which matches the wall fabric is in poor condition. A comparison of photographs will assist in visualizing the changes which have been made to the stage area (Exhibit C, Photo 4 and Exhibit D, Photo H2).

The original stage was rather small. It was not designed to accommodate large theatrical productions. Stage performances were limited to small concerts and traveling Vaudeville era entertainers. The original orchestra pit contained a large Moheller organ. When opened in 1918, the purported cost of the organ was \$25,000. The organ was acclaimed for its ability to replicate the sound of a 126 piece orchestra. The organ was eventually repossessed for lack of payment. A keyboard plan of the organ console is found in the files of the Chamberlain Amusement Company (Exhibit E).

A mezzanine overlooks the first floor foyer. Finishes are similar to those of the foyer. Lighting fixtures and railings are original. The mezzanine is reached by double stairs from each side of the foyer (Exhibit B, First Floor Plan and Exhibit C, Photo 7). The mezzanine provides access to both the upper and lower balcony.

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The balcony is broadly curving. It wraps around the sides of the first floor and extends upward to the third floor. Private box seats (3 on each side of the theatre) step down one to another from the lower balcony. These are situated along the narrow sides of the balcony and provide a transition space between the proscenium arch and the main area of the balcony (Exhibit C, Photos 3 and 4). The private box seats were originally furnished with wicker lounge chairs (Exhibit D, Photo H2).

The balcony is floored with wood and has painted pipe railings. Aisles are carpeted. The walls are furred with acoustical material and decorative fabric wallcovering. The ornamental plaster work around the box seat exit doors is deteriorating due to water damage. Original wall mounted lighting fixtures and supply air grills are still in place. Seating is similar to that of the auditorium.

A box office for advanced ticket sales was located adjacent to the second floor office of the Chambelain Company. The Chamberlain office has an inside window which provides a view of the first floor foyer and the mezzanine. Access to the office area is provided via the hallway from the mezzanine or from the street via an enclosed staircase. The staircase is entered at the right front corner of the covered outdoor entrance (Exhibit B, First Floor and Balcony Plans).

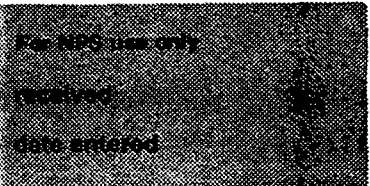
The third floor of the theatre contains an additional office which is reached by means of the same stairway as the second floor office. A projection booth and rewinding room are located on the fourth floor of the building (Exhibit B, Balcony Plan). The projection booth and rewinding room contain original carbon-arc projection equipment (Exhibit C, Photos 8 and 9). Because of the skew of the theatre, the projectors are not perpendicular to the screen. This required local adaptation of the equipment to obtain a correct and undistorted image on the screen.

Because the theatre has been in continuous operation since 1918, it remains in good overall condition. No known or apparent structural problems exist. The roof has been maintained, but requires replacement. Plaster repairs are mostly of a minor nature, although chronic leaking at the center downspouts has resulted in the need for plaster restoration at these points. Presently, a study funded by a National Trust Preservation Services Grant is being conducted to determine the feasibility of architectural restoration.

The theatre is an amalgam of architectural features. Although not Beaux Arts in the colossal sense, it appears to be of the Beaux Arts tradition, striving to achieve the magnitude and grandeur generally found in urban public buildings. Features such as the interior foyer and balcony stairways, the dome, cartouches, decorative swags and medallions all contribute to a sense of motion and spectacle that is uncommon in movie houses and altogether lost in our contemporary stock of buildings.

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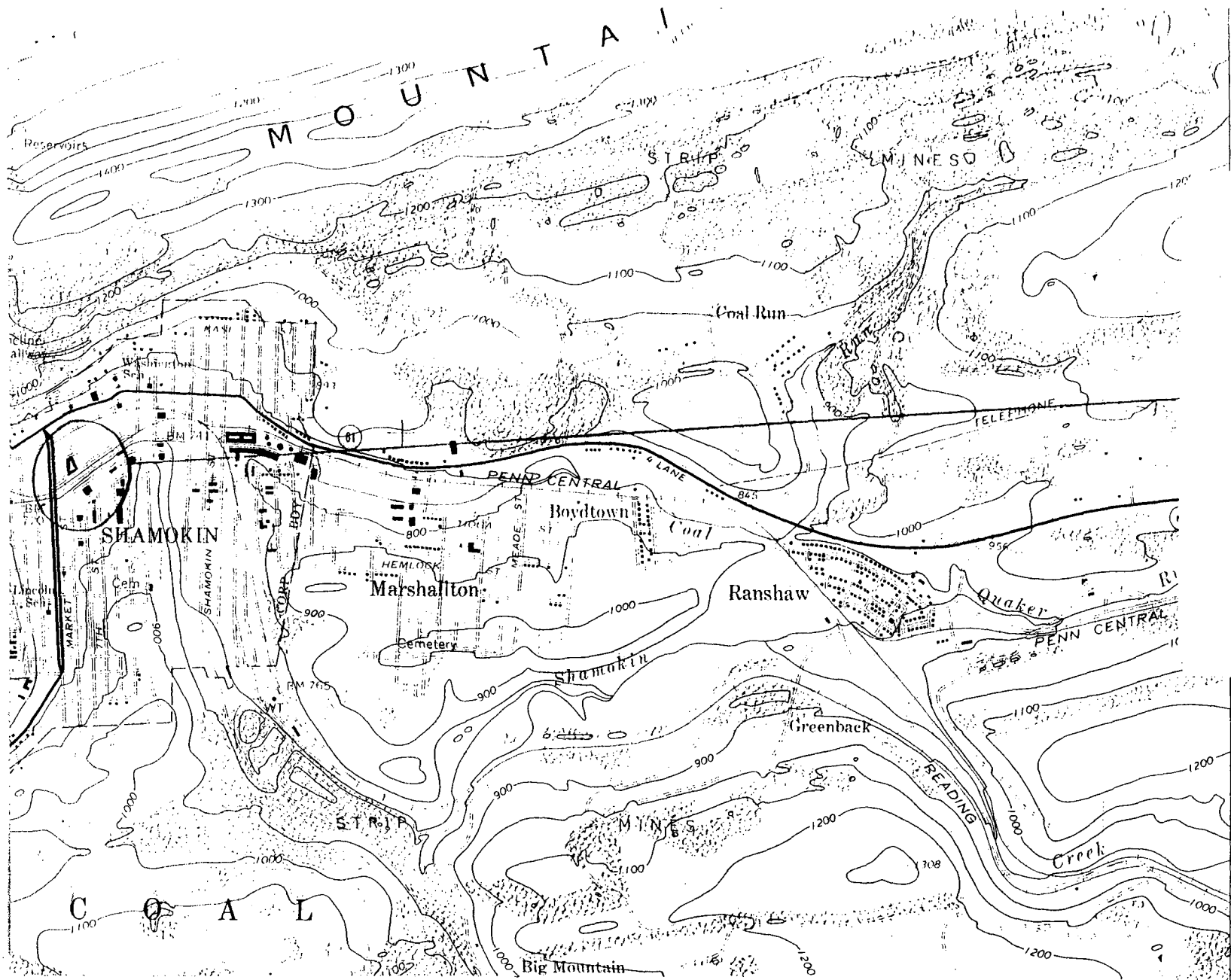
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until 1912. From 1912-1920 he practiced architecture privately in Shamokin. In 1920, he moved his practice to Philadelphia.

From his early years in Shamokin, Lee developed a lasting relationship with L. J. Chamberlain of the Shamokin based Chamberlain Amusement Company. In 1912, he engaged Lee to design the first Chamberlain Company Theatre. It was constructed on the site of the present Woolworth's building one block east of the present Victoria (1918). There is much local lore which suggests this could have been Lee's first theater commission. The theatre was less than desirable in many respects. It was destroyed by fire in 1916.

Lee developed a long term relationship with the Chamberlain Amusement Company and designed a number of theatres for the Company. In 1918 the New Victoria was constructed under Lee's supervision. It would appear that the Victoria is one of Lee's earliest commissions. Clearly, it is representative of his early professional development. Lee went on to design over 200 theatres in his lifetime.

The lot configuration of the 1918 Victoria presented a challenge to Lee and it can be said that he resolved the design with exceptional skill, given the technology of the period. Lee's Philadelphia firm continued to practice architecture until 1971. During these years he published articles on theatre design and was the subject of trade magazine articles pertaining to theatre designers. Some of Lee's later works include Easton's State Theatre (1926), Reading's Astor Theatre (1928), and Philadelphia's Tourison Theatre. Lee's early commissions in Shamokin no doubt helped to establish his success in the world outside the local region.



18

VICTORIA THEATRE
 Northumberland County
 Shamokin Quadrangle
 Zone 18
 E368530 N4516450

4515