



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

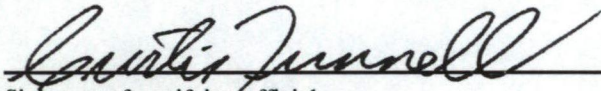
HISTORIC NAME: Border Theater  
OTHER NAME/SITE NUMBER: N/A

2. LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER: 905 North Conway Boulevard  
CITY OR TOWN: Mission VICINITY: N/A NOT FOR PUBLICATION: N/A  
STATE: Texas CODE: TX COUNTY: Hidalgo CODE: 215 ZIP CODE: 78572

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 ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☒ locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

  
Signature of certifying official

7-17-98  
Date

State Historic Preservation Officer, Texas Historical Commission

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria.  
(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

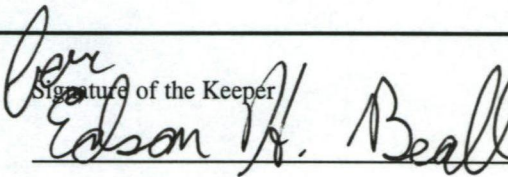
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☒ entered in the National Register  
☐ See continuation sheet.  
☐ determined eligible for the National Register  
☐ See continuation sheet.  
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register  
☐ removed from the National Register  
☐ other (explain) :

  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action 8-28-98



## 5. CLASSIFICATION

**OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY:** private

**CATEGORY OF PROPERTY:** building

<b>NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:</b>	<b>CONTRIBUTING</b>	<b>NONCONTRIBUTING</b>
	1	0 BUILDINGS
	0	0 SITES
	0	0 STRUCTURES
	0	0 OBJECTS
	1	0 TOTAL

**NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES PREVIOUSLY LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER:** 0

**NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING:** Historic and Architectural Resources of Mission, Texas

## 6. FUNCTION OR USE

**HISTORIC FUNCTIONS:** RECREATION AND CULTURE/movie theater

**CURRENT FUNCTIONS:** RECREATION AND CULTURE/movie theater

## 7. DESCRIPTION

**ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION:** Other: 2-part commercial block  
Late 19th and 20th century revivals: Pueblo

**MATERIALS:**

<b>FOUNDATION</b>	CONCRETE
<b>WALLS</b>	STUCCO; CERAMIC TILE
<b>ROOF</b>	ASPHALT
<b>OTHER</b>	BRICK; CONCRETE; WOOD

**NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION** (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-6)



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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 5

Border Theater  
Mission, Hidalgo County, Texas

The Border Theater occupies a 2- and 3-story commercial building at 905 North Conway Boulevard within the central business district of Mission, Texas. Built in a 2-part commercial block form typical of early 20th century theaters in Texas, the building exhibits references to the Pueblo Revival style. Its stucco exterior, faux *vigas* and heavy wooden lintels provide the ornamental hallmarks of this style. A prominent vertical marquee with large red lettering attached to the facade identifies the building as a theater, as do the tiled ticket window and flanking entrances. Despite recent modifications to the canopy, the theater retains sufficient integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association to remain recognizable to its period of significance.

The Border Theater stands within a row of commercial buildings on the west side of Conway Boulevard, just north of the intersection of Conway and 9th Street. Most of the buildings are 2-part commercial blocks, with public spaces at street level and upper stories relegated to office/private functions. The Border Theater is the dominant architectural resource on the block. Adjacent and to the south of the theater is a small, 1-story store whose parking lot marks the southern end of the block. To the north of the theater, several 1- and 2-story commercial buildings complete the block. The rear (west) of the theater backs to an alley. All buildings in the 900 block of Conway Boulevard, including the Border Theater, press forward to the streetside easement with commercial storefronts. A generous sidewalk spans from the buildings' facades to curb's edge.

The building is a wood frame construction faced with a red common-bond brick veneer. Stepped-parapet walls on the north and south elevations, visible above the rooftops of the adjacent buildings, conceal the theater's roof. The walls reveal that the theater's profile diminishes in height from the 3-story facade to the 2-story rear. Buttress-like brickwork on the side elevations visually supports the building and coincides with each step-down of the side parapets.

Facing east onto Conway Boulevard, the building's facade presents a 2-part asymmetrical composition. The theater and a small store occupy the larger (3-story) section and a smaller (2-story) wing extends to the north. This arrangement typifies small- to medium-sized theaters of similar vintage. The theater entry consists of a centrally placed ticket booth and flanking double-door entrances. The 5-sided ticket booth has a base faced with terra cotta tiles and a few decorative tiles with a southwestern motif. The theater's doorways are recessed on either side of the ticket booth and have paired aluminum and glass doors. The side walls leading to the entrances have glass cases for displaying movie posters. A small retail space, set within the southernmost bay of the facade and containing a jewelry store, completes the building's 3-story section. This commercial storefront has a recessed single-door entrance and angled display windows. Like the theater entrance, the storefront has a terra cotta tile and stucco finish. The building's northernmost section is the 2-story, commercial



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Border Theater  
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space containing a separate commercial/retail space and resembles the storefront at the opposite end of the facade. The storefront features large display windows and a single-door entrance that is set at an angle to the street. A barber shop currently occupies the space. Despite the disparity in size and function of the two distinct components of the facade, however, the spaces are combined into a single element through the skillful use of certain visual cues on the facade—the most obvious being a common stylistic language. Several features on the facade identify this building as influenced by Pueblo Revival style. A stucco veneer completely covers the brick superstructure of the facade and wraps around the corners covering a 3-foot vertical section of the adjacent north and south walls. *Vigas*, or projecting roof beams, are evenly spaced across the facade three feet below roof line, as well as over the entry portico. Heavy timber lintels and decorative wooden grilles grace the upper-story windows. A heavy timber spandrel beam extends across the length of the theater's facade.

The theater's interior has remained relatively unaltered over the years. In the 500-seat auditorium, the balcony retains the original "Floating Comfort" International seats. Renovations include the installation of new seats on the main floor in 1967 and the replacement of the original screen with a wide-view Cinemascope screen in 1952. The most noteworthy features of the auditorium are the murals, which fill the two long side walls of the theater. On one side, a group of covered wagons heads toward a mission in the distance while figures in sombreros look on. The second wall depicts scenes from a typical early Hispanic homestead. The paintings were originally highlighted with fluorescent paint so that, with the use of black lights, the scenes would be readable when the house lights were dimmed. The murals were painted in 1942 by E. Risser of the Dallas firm, King Scene Company, from images copyrighted by the McCrossen Manufacturing Company in Sante Fe, a firm famous for their weavings.

Early photos and drawings of the building show that a metal canopy originally spanned the facade, sheltering pedestrians from the glare of noontday sun. The canopy provided visual continuity between the theater and adjoining commercial space. During early 1990s renovations, workmen replaced the metal canopy with a narrow, Spanish-tiled, hipped-roof portico over the main entry, just below the marquee. The updated entry, while no longer strictly utilitarian, detracts little from the overall massing and composition of the theater. The addition of the Spanish tiles on the portico enhances the themes portrayed by the decorative ceramic tiles surrounding the entry doors and ticket booth, and the interior murals. Despite this replacement, the theater retains its integrity to a high degree.



## 8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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### APPLICABLE NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA

- ☒ **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 VALUE, 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.

CRITERIA CONSIDERATIONS: N/A

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: Community Planning and Development; Entertainment/Recreation

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE: 1942-48

SIGNIFICANT DATES: 1942

SIGNIFICANT PERSON: N/A

CULTURAL AFFILIATION: N/A

ARCHITECT/BUILDER: Moore, William J. (architect); Holliday, George (builder)

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (see continuation sheets 8-7 through 8-8)

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## 9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

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BIBLIOGRAPHY (see related multiple property documentation form, Section I)

PREVIOUS DOCUMENTATION ON FILE (NPS): N/A

- ☐ 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 #

PRIMARY LOCATION OF ADDITIONAL DATA:

- ☒ State historic preservation office (*Texas Historical Commission*)
- ☐ Other state agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other -- Specify Repository:



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Border Theater  
Mission, Hidalgo County, Texas

Built in 1942 by Rio Grande Valley theater entrepreneurs Robert N. and Dell Smith, the Border Theater served as the flagship of their entertainment chain in South Texas. The brothers constructed this facility during a period of economic prosperity in the valley fostered by training facilities for America's armed response to World War II. It provided entertainment for soldiers stationed at nearby Moore Army Air Corps Field, as well as the Anglo and Hispanic citizens of Mission. One of several entertainment facilities built in the community during the early 20th century, the theater is a rare surviving example of the Pueblo Revival style. Its ornamentation is distinctive in a community where interpretations of the Spanish Colonial Revival style are much more common. As it illustrates commercial development patterns enumerated contextually by *Grapefruit's Lone Star Home: the Development of Mission, Texas*, the theater is nominated at the local level of significance under Criterion A in the areas of Entertainment/Recreation as well as Community Planning and Development.

Prominent Dallas theater architect William J. Moore designed the Border Theater, which was built in late 1941 and early 1942. Lower Rio Grande Valley contractor George Holliday served as general contractor for the project. What the 1942 newspapers hailed as "...the Valley's newest and most beautiful show house...", the Border Theater highlighted several modern features. In the early 1940s, the Border Theater was the only movie house in the Valley with air conditioning throughout the building. When the theater complex was completed, it included office spaces, a clinic, two stores, and two apartments. Employees of the Border Theater used the offices and apartments in the building, and the other spaces were leased to local businesses and professionals. Dr. Ottis Walker's clinic fronted 9th Street and the mercantile units were immediately north and south of the main theater entrance (*Mission Times* 3 April 1942).

The Border's interior contained seating for 500 people on a main floor and in a balcony. Stylized murals graced either side of the inside walls of the theater. The murals, painted by Dallas artist E. Risser, depicted idealized scenes of Hispanic life in Mission and the Rio Grande Valley before Anglo occupation. The figures in each mural were highlighted with fluorescent paint both to impart three-dimensional quality to the images, and to allow their visibility in the darkened theater. The Border was the second theater in Texas, after one in nearby Alice, to use this decorative technique. The Border Theater opened on April 3, 1942, with the thematically appropriate Roy Rogers film, "Heart of the Rio Grande" (*Mission Times* 3 April 1942).

Owned and operated by independent theater operators Robert N. and Dell Smith, the Border Theater was one of five facilities operated by the family in South Texas. The Smiths also owned the Mission Theater (razed) in Mission, the Rio and Raymon theaters in Raymondville, and the Cactus



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Section 8 Page 8

Border Theater  
Mission, Hidalgo County, Texas

Theater in Falfurrias. For a brief period, they also operated the Plaza Theater in Donna. A member of the National War Activities Committee of the motion picture industry, Robert Smith showed many nationally sanctioned "patriotic" propaganda pictures and Hollywood movies with military themes during the war years (*Mission Times* 3 April 1942). The national economic boom resulting from U.S. involvement in World War II enhanced Mission's economy, as did the construction and operation of nearby Moore Army Air Corps Field. Incoming civilian workers, military personnel and long-time Mission citizens alike attended shows at the luxurious, air-conditioned new theater.

A succession of absentee owners operated the theater following the Smith management of the property. Mission businessman Hector Garza and his aunt, Concepcion Gavilan of Rio Grande City, purchased the theater in 1978, operated it for several years, then sold it to the Bill and Gen Long in the 1990s.

The Border Theater survives as a prominent architectural landmark in Mission's northern business district. This area has traditionally served as the town's primary center for commercial activity and over the years has experienced many changes. Most of the area's historic commercial architecture has been modified and remodeled, thereby compromising the downtown's overall historic character and integrity. The Border Theater, however, is an exception, and it remains a vital tangible link to the city's past. Moreover, it retains its integrity to a high degree and is a rare example of a building with Pueblo Revival stylistic embellishment. The stucco veneer and decorative *vigas* are indicative of the style. The Border Theater has sustained few alterations since its original construction in 1942. The well-attended movie house retains the atmosphere of a theater built during the early 1940s. It is the only movie theater in Mission that was built during the town's historic period that remains in operation today.



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**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

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**ACREAGE OF PROPERTY:** less than one acre

**UTM REFERENCES**

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

1 14 567360 2899500

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

Lots 14-15, Block 159, City of Mission, Hidalgo County, Texas

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

Boundaries encompass all property historically associated with the theater.

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**11. FORM PREPARED BY (with assistance from Bruce Jensen, THC Architectural Historian)**

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**NAME/TITLE:** Anne Malanka (Historian); Gretchen Bostedt (Research Assistant)

**ORGANIZATION:** Hardy-Heck-Moore & Myers

**DATE:** February 1998/July 1998

**STREET & NUMBER:** 1414 West Sixth Street

**TELEPHONE:** (512)478-9014

**CITY OR TOWN:** Austin

**STATE:** TX **ZIP CODE:** 78703

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**ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION**

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**CONTINUATION SHEETS**

**MAPS** (see continuation sheet Map-9)

**PHOTOGRAPHS** (see continuation sheet Photo-10)

**ADDITIONAL ITEMS** N/A

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**PROPERTY OWNER**

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**NAME:** Bill and Gen Long

**STREET & NUMBER:** 128 Rio Grande Drive

**TELEPHONE:** (956)581-8107

**CITY OR TOWN:** Mission

**STATE:** TX **ZIP CODE:** 78572



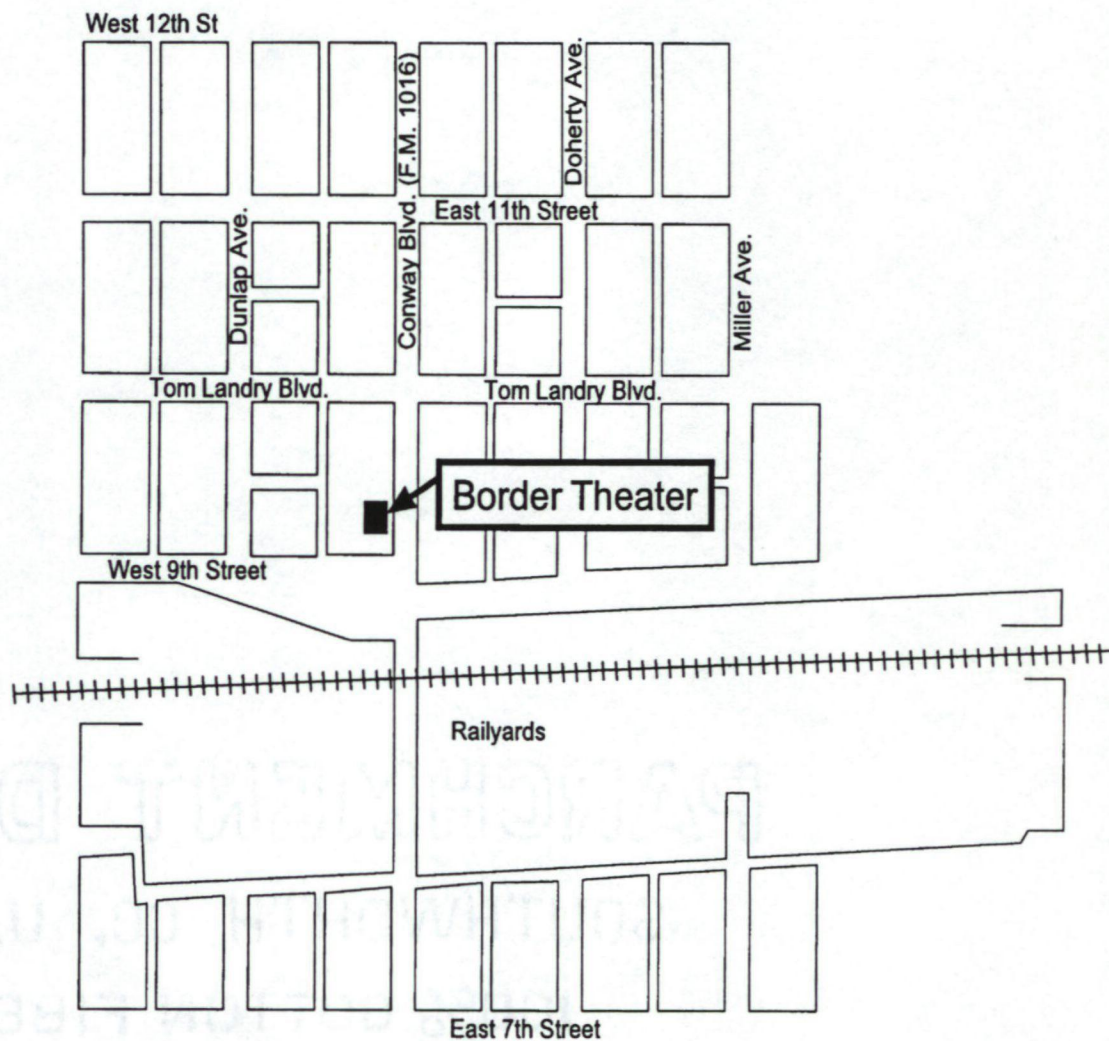
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Border Theater  
Mission, Hidalgo County, Texas

CONTEXTUAL SITE MAP





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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Original Town Residential Historic District  
Grapevine, Tarrant County, Texas

Section PHOTO Page 10

**HISTORIC PHOTO, C. 1943**  
(SOURCE: HIDALGO COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM)





UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Border Theater  
NAME:

MULTIPLE Mission, Texas MPS  
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: TEXAS, Hidalgo

DATE RECEIVED: 7/31/98 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 8/11/98  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 8/27/98 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 9/14/98  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 98001124

NOMINATOR: STATE

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

☒ ACCEPT ☐ RETURN ☐ REJECT 8.28.98 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in the  
National Register

RECOM./CRITERIA \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_ DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N







Border Theater

Mission, Hidalgo County, Texas

Photographer: Terri Myers

July 1996

Oblique view, camera facing west-northwest

Photograph 1 of 1



BORDER THEATER  
105 N. CONWAY  
MISSION, HIDALGO CO., TEXAS  
UTM REFERENCE: 14/567360/2899500

