United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name_ Chief Theater

other names/site number_ Gossett Theater; Stark's Comanche Theater

2. Location

street & number_ 122 East Main Street

[N/A] not for publication
city or town_ Coldwater

[N/A] vicinity
state_ Kansas code_ KS county_ Comanche code_ 033 zip code_ 67029

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination [ ] 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 [ ] 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/Title_ Christy Davis/Deputy SHPO Date_ 12/23/07

Kansas State Historical Society
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria.

(See continuation sheet for additional comments [ ].)

Signature of certifying official/Title

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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

See continuation sheet [ ].
## 5. Classification

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<td><strong>1 Total</strong></td>
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**Name of related multiple property listing.**

Historic Theaters and Opera Houses in Kansas

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register.**

0

## 6. Function or Use

**Historic Function**

RECREATION & CULTURE: Movie Theater

**Current Functions**

RECREATION & CULTURE: Movie Theater

## 7. Description

**Architectural Classification**

LATE 19TH & EARLY 20TH CENTURY

AMERICAN MOVEMENT: Two-part Commercial Block

**Materials**

Foundation: Concrete
Walls: Brick
Roof: Asphalt
Other: N/A

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)
8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

[X] 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.

[X] 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 values, 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

Property is:

[ ] A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

[ ] B removed from its original location.

[ ] C a birthplace or grave.

[ ] D a cemetery.

[ ] E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

[ ] F a commemorative property.

[ ] G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

Recreation & Culture
Architecture

Periods of Significance

1928-1955

Significant Dates

1928
1947

Significant Person(s)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Gossett, Paul E. (architect)
Howard, Thomas H. (general contractor)

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

[ ] 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

[ ] Other State Agency

[ ] Federal Agency

[ ] Local Government

[ ] University

[ ] Other:

Name of repository: Chief Community Theater, Inc.
10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property  less than 1 acre

UTM References

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[ ] See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title  Kristen Ottesen, Architectural Historian and Elizabeth Rosin, Partner
organization  Historic Preservation Services, LLC  date  June 2004

street & number  323 West 8th Street, Suite 112  telephone  816-221-5133

city or town  Kansas City  state  MO  zip code  64105

Additional Documentation
Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps
A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs
Representative black-and-white photographs of the property.

Additional Items
(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner
(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name  Chief Community Theater, Inc.

street & number  P.O. Box 513  telephone  (620) 582-2705

city or town  Coldwater  state  KS  zip code  67029
SUMMARY DESCRIPTION STATEMENT

The Chief Theater, located at 122 East Main Street, Coldwater, Comanche County, Kansas, is a two-story brick two-part commercial block building measuring approximately 28 feet wide by 120 feet deep. The building has a flat roof with a parapet. It is located on the north side of Main Street in Coldwater’s historic commercial district. The Chief Theater exhibits the general form and configuration of the movie theater property type that was built throughout American small town commercial districts during the early twentieth century. The simple buff-colored brick façade of the Chief Theater does not exhibit a particular architectural style; rather, it is a vernacular commercial block building, which was modified to accommodate its specialized use as a movie theater. With the majority of its character-defining stylistic features and its interior and exterior materials intact, the Chief Theater retains a high degree of architectural integrity.

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

SETTING
The Chief Theater is located on the main commercial street in Coldwater, Kansas, just east of U.S. Highway 183. With a population of approximately one thousand, Coldwater is the largest town in sparsely populated Comanche County. One-part and two-part commercial block building types constructed between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries line both sides of the 100 block of Main Street. The wide street provides parking in the center of the street and in front of the buildings. The Chief Theater’s primary (south) façade abuts the concrete sidewalk in front of the building. The theater shares party walls on the east and west sides with brick one-part commercial block buildings. The theater’s north (rear) façade faces a gravel alley.

BUILDING DESCRIPTION
The Chief Theater has solid brick walls and a concrete foundation. The theater’s primary (south) façade is three bays wide and has a simple design with very little ornamentation. At the first story, a movie poster
case in each of the outer bays flanks a large central opening. The opening contains two sets of double-leaf wood doors that flank a third, large movie poster case in the center of the facade. A fixed transom with three lights spans the openings. The wood doors, panel, and transom are currently painted green with burgundy trim. A limestone water table rises to the bottom of the movie poster cases and anchors the textured, buff-colored brick wall. The second story contains three window openings. A projecting limestone cornice is above the windows. Small projecting blocks consisting of three soldier bricks appear four courses below the parapet cap, roughly dividing the space between the cornice and the parapet coping into thirds. A course of alternating rowlock and soldier bricks with pieces of limestone on each end define the coping.

The second story features three steel casement windows painted a deep burgundy color. Each of the end bays has a tall rectangular window opening containing one sash with eight lights and a fixed two-light transom. The large window opening in the center bay contains three sashes, each of which has eight lights and a fixed two-light transom. Except for clear glass replacement panes, the window glazing is wire glass.

The façade’s most prominent feature is the bold metal marquee that hangs above the entrance and projects over the sidewalk. The rectangular marquee has cylindrical corners accented with neon lighting. The front features painted diamond shapes flanking the theater’s name—“Chief”—painted in cursive letters, all of which have a neon light overlay. The marquee is painted burgundy, green, and yellow, harmonizing with the colors of the windows, doors, trim, and the movie poster cases.

Unadorned brick walls form the east and west elevations and extend to the north beyond the party walls. Single doors toward the rear (north) of each side elevation provide egress from the auditorium. A small addition extends from the rear (north) elevation and houses mechanical equipment and an evaporative cooling unit. Constructed of structural clay tile, the addition is approximately one-story tall and has an arched roof covered with corrugated metal.

**INTERIOR**

Directly inside the building, restrooms and a ticket booth flank the small foyer that occupies the center of the building. The east wall contains the ticket window; the west wall has mounted movie poster cases. A pressed metal ceiling decorates the lobby and carpet covers the floor.

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The foyer features a series of murals painted by local artist
Don Nicholas in 1947. The scene on the east wall above the
ticket window depicts the town of Coldwater with oil derricks,
a train, farm implements, buildings, and a cloud producing
tornadoes — all symbols of the town’s industry, built
environment, and climate. On the north wall, above the doors
leading into the auditorium lobby, a painting depicts Native
Americans and Euro-American settlers hunting on the plains.
On the west wall, above the movie poster cases, there is a
painting of a Native American domestic scene with a pueblo
and a native Kansas sunflower. On the south wall, above the
entrance, there are simple line drawings of a southwestern
landscape. The swinging paneled wood doors to the lobby
have painted stylized Native American designs on the foyer
side and full-length corn stalks on the lobby side.

A set of double-leaf doors on the north wall of the foyer leads
to the lobby, which spans the width of the building. Doorways on either side of the north lobby wall flank
a makeshift concession stand² and provide access to the auditorium. The east and west walls have
staircases leading to the balcony. The southwest corner of the lobby contains a single restroom. The
southeast corner of the lobby contains a ticket booth. Composition tile covers the lobby floors and an
acoustical-ceiling tile covered with a brown textured paint³ covers the ceiling. Carpeted
runners cover the middle of the balcony stairs. Stenciled on the east and west walls,
just below the ceiling, is a semi-circular stylized border. Painted above the doorways
to the auditorium are stylized landscape and
floral images. On the north wall, behind the
concession stand, a painting of a Native
American face with a flowing headdress is the
most prominent feature in the lobby. The
painting is above the louvered opening in the
center of the north wall. The wainscot in the
lobby is painted dark green, the walls are
painted white, and the trim around the doors is painted dark red.

² The concession stand was possibly added during the 1947 renovation.
³ This treatment may date to the building’s 1947 renovation.
Two doorways flanking the concession stand provide access to the long rectangular auditorium. The concrete floor slopes down from the rear of the auditorium toward the stage at the north end of the building. Near the stage, the floor slopes upward slightly. The wooden stage curves outward toward the auditorium and is accessed from two sets of semicircular concrete stairs in the front corners. The proscenium walls that separate the stage from the auditorium and enframe the stage are plain. The basement is located under the stage and is accessed from the center front of the stage at the auditorium floor. It originally housed two dressing rooms as well as the building's mechanical systems. An addition to the rear (north) elevation of the building now houses mechanical equipment. From the south wall, the balcony extends forward approximately one-quarter of the auditorium's depth.

The Native American decorative scheme continues into the auditorium. Most of the interior finishes date to the 1947 renovation. Fibrous panels cover the walls and larger square panels cover the ceiling. The wainscot has a plaster finish that is painted dark red. Decorating the matching side walls are large stencils of stylized Native American-inspired designs. The center bays feature three different design elements. Mounted to the center of each stencil and incorporated into the design are long, vertical, Moderne style glass sconces with circular metal reflective panels. The plaster pilasters along the side walls are painted blue with small, simple line drawings in gold. Painted on the front of the balcony is a southwestern landscape scene similar to the one on the south wall of the foyer.

The auditorium seats date to the 1947 renovation. They are in fair to poor condition. The wooden veneer on many of the seat’s backs is peeling and the red upholstery on many of the seats is ripped. The all-wood seats in the balcony are generally in poor condition. The balcony seats appear to

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4 The panels appear to be Celotex or a similar product.
be older than those on the main floor and may date to the building’s 1928 construction.\footnote{While the balcony seats are not upholstered, an article in the November 16, 1928 \textit{Western Star} mentions that the new theater had upholstered seats.}

\textbf{INTEGRITY}

The Chief Theater continues to reflect its historic function as an entertainment venue. The building retains its historic form, plan, spatial arrangement, proportions, scale, and massing, as well as the majority of its functional and character-defining elements and materials. While many of the theater’s original finishes were altered during the 1947 renovation, these changes occurred over fifty years ago and are historic in their own right. They reflect the evolution of the movie industry and contribute to the significance of the property. The building retains a very high degree of integrity and clearly communicates its historic associations and feelings as a movie theater.
STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Chief Theater at 122 East Main Street, Coldwater, Comanche County, Kansas is significant under National Register Criterion A for the area of ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION and under Criterion C for the area of ARCHITECTURE as documented in the Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) “Historic Theaters and Opera Houses of Kansas.” The Chief Theater has direct associations with the historic context “Historical Development of Public Entertainment in Kansas, 1854-1954,” developed as part of the MPDF and meets the MPDF registration requirements. Constructed in 1928 and renovated in 1947, it is an excellent example of the movie theater property type built in small towns throughout Kansas and the United States in the early twentieth century. Designed and built by local residents, the Chief Theater illustrates a vernacular commercial building form, the two-part commercial block, adapted to fulfill a specialized function as an early movie theater. The 1947 renovation of the theater altered some aspects of its original plan and décor, but these changes reflect a common trend in movie theater operation that required cosmetic updating to remain attractive to audiences tempted by newer theaters and technologies, such as radio and television. Added over fifty years ago, the interior artwork depicting aspects of local history created by local artist Don Nicholas has become a significant character-defining feature of the building’s interior. While the use and form of many similar theaters have been drastically altered for other commercial endeavors when more modern movie houses opened in their vicinity, the Chief Theater remains intact. The period of significance for the Chief Theater begins with its construction in 1928 and ends in 1955, the fifty-year threshold for National Register eligibility.

PROPERTY HISTORY

Designed in 1928 by its first owner, Paul E. Gossett, The Chief Theater was originally called the Gossett Theater. Thomas S. Howard was the general contractor and R. E. McGaulley was the interior designer. Review of the Sanborn maps suggest that it was the only movie theater in town at the time it was constructed, and given the small size of the town, it may be the only movie theater that has ever operated in Coldwater.

The theater’s seats were purchased from the American Seating Company in Grand Rapids, Michigan. A November 16, 1928 article in the Western Star described the building’s features as including hardwood covering the auditorium’s sloping concrete floor; upholstered chairs with arm rests provided seating for two hundred patrons on the main floor and one hundred additional chairs were
at the balcony level. The interior featured “harmonizing colors with appropriate lighting fixtures for both bright and dim lights.” In the new age of talking pictures, the theater had a Kolster-Tone machine to provide synchronized music.

In 1940, Gossett sold the theater to Bernard Stark and Victor and Donita Stark and they held a contest to select a new name for the theater. The winner, Mrs. C. G. Lyon, won twenty free movies for her suggestion of “Comanche” and the theater became known as Stark’s Comanche Theatre. ⁶ The Starks owned the theater for six years before selling it to Sol and Lucille Frank. In 1947, the Franks remodeled the theater and renamed it the Chief Theatre. ⁷

The theater acquired its notable Native American motif during the 1947 remodeling. The art work, which interprets the history of Coldwater and Comanche County, has precedent in the public art created during the New Deal era. At this time, the owner’s enclosed the original recessed entrance area to form a foyer. A historic photograph from the fall of 1940 shows the theater with a different marquee that had scalloped edges and a rectangular sign mounted to the front of the canopy. What is now the entrance foyer appears to be open to the outside and recessed into the building.

In 1952, Porter and Betty Smith purchased the building from the Franks and began operating the theater only on the weekends. ⁸ In the early 1980s, the Smiths leased the theater to Joe and Connie Sunderland; however, shortly thereafter they closed the theater for eighteen months. In the summer of 1985, the Coldwater Chamber of Commerce bought the theater and began showing movies again. In 2002, eleven local residents formed the Chief Community Theater, Inc. and purchased the theater. The not-for-profit organization was established to restore the theater and to continue showing films at the theater. ⁹ The Chief Community Theater group wants to preserve the building’s historic integrity and plans to restore the theater.

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⁶ Coldwater (Kansas) Chamber of Commerce, “75 Years of Chief History,” fundraising brochure (Coldwater: Chamber of Commerce, n.d.).
⁷ Ibid.
⁸ Ibid.
⁹ Ibid.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION
Lot 7, Block 32, Coldwater Original Town, Comanche County, Kansas.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION
This nomination includes the parcel of land that is historically associated with the resource.
**PHOTOGRAPH LOG**

Photographer: Kristen Ottesen  
Date of Photographs: June 2004  
Location of Negatives: Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas

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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Rear elevations, view looking to the southeast</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Rear elevations, view looking to the southwest</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Marquee</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Entrance</td>
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<td>Mural on the east lobby wall</td>
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