

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name SENATOR THEATER  
other names/site number N/A

### 2. Location

street & number 3950 Minnesota Avenue, NE  not for publication N/A  
city, town Washington  vicinity N/A  
state District of Columbia of code DC county DC code 001 zip code 20008

### 3. Classification

<b>Ownership of Property</b>	<b>Category of Property</b>	<b>Number of Resources within Property</b>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<b>Contributing</b>	<b>Noncontributing</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u>          </u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u> objects
		<u>1</u>	<u>          </u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A      Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

### 4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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.  See continuation sheet.

*[Signature]* 3-7-91  
Signature of certifying official STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER Date

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

### 5. 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. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture  
Entertainment/Recreation

Period of Significance

1942

Significant Dates

1942

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Zink, John Jacob

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Senator Theater, at 3950 Minnesota Avenue, N.E., is a significant building architecturally, historically, and because it is a rare intact example of the work of noted theater architect John Jacob Zink. This 1942 structure built by the religious and community leader Fred S. Kogod (co-founder of the prominent Washington theater chain, K-B) is one of the last substantially unaltered, large art deco "presentation houses" still functioning as such in the region.

Architecturally, the theater exemplifies the fully developed art deco style. Unlike many other surviving buildings of its time, the Senator remains completely intact, without major alterations, "modernizations", or substantial cover-ups of original ornamentation (both on the exterior and the interior), blemished only with minor damage due to a lack of regular maintenance. Behind its handsome facade, the Senator consists of a large functional "box" containing the auditorium. Two one-story stores are incorporated into the Minnesota Avenue street frontage.

The Senator was designed as a neighborhood theater, meaning that it would present films which had already played downtown. The neighborhood welcomed this new entertainment option and, together with the row of commercial establishments built along Minnesota Avenue at the same period, the small neighborhood shopping district flourished. It is scaled extremely well into its surroundings and remains a popular local facility maintaining the feeling of a neighborhood house, despite the fact that it is now one of the larger facilities in town.

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The majority of these decorative elements are concentrated at the theater entrance, a large rectangular monolith with corner pylons, and projecting marquee fronting on Minnesota Avenue. The composition of the entry consists of vertical and horizontal bands framing three horizontal panels. The top and bottom panels are sections of decorative glass block, while the middle panel served as the primary movie billboard, back lit by rows of incandescent fixtures.

The entry pylons contain striking inlays of red, white and blue vitrolite, creating strong vertical bands which turn 90 degrees and terminate at the cornice of the entry facade. This cornice is emphasized by tripartite horizontal metal bands. Within the cornice area is the large (approximately seven feet in width), original neon sign, framed in blue metal letters spelling "Senator", in stylized type face.

A one story-high marquee with angled edges cantilevers over the sidewalk in front. The three-foot deep edge of the marquee is faceted metal, painted in hues of blue, forming a visual carryover from the vitrolite stripes of the facade. The soffit, or underside of the marquee, features rectangular and octagonal geometric patterns of incandescent fixtures, which catch the eye of the passerby and epitomize the image of the "movie palace".

Also of note under the marquee is the original ticket booth, centrally located between two identical pairs of wood and glass doors typical of the period. The ticket booth is faced in form, recalling the geometry of the incandescent fixtures on the underside of the marquee. The booth features a stainless steel and glass exterior, with interesting etched-on patterns on the sheet stainless below the counter level, including vertical bands which further recall the decorative elements on the facade, and and etched letter "s" of the same typeface as the neon lettering on the large exterior sign.

Behind the entry, the exterior of the auditorium mass, as viewed from Minnesota Avenue, is an angled form of buff brick walls, emphasized at the corners with stripes of contrasting brick, adding visual interest. This form and abstract pattern create an appropriate backdrop for the entry and shops. The material changes to a more common red brick in the rear, and from the back the theater is purely a form following its function.

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The commercial shops on either side of the entry, integral parts of the original design, are strictly functional store fronts with buff brick spandrels above--yet serve to form a base for the entire theater ensemble.

The Senator's well preserved exterior is matched by the remarkably intact interior; which consists of a thin entrance area, perpendicular to a lobby area housing the concession stand and stairs leading to the Men's and Ladies' Lounges on the mezzanine level, and a large wide auditorium. Unlike other theaters of this era, the Senator has been spared from interior "modernization". Most all of the decorative finishes within the theater's public spaces are original, including the original wall coverings and large decorative murals. The floor plan is straightforward and streamlined, serving to move the patron comfortably and easily from the entry, conveniently past the concession stand to the seat.

Once inside the entrance, a long linear lobby, sheathed on both sides with wood veneer panels and mirrors of large geometric shapes, directs the patrons into the theater proper. Much of the terrazzo flooring remains intact. The patron next meets an area running perpendicular to the entrance lobby, with the concession stand at its center. The walls in this area are now covered in blue burlap which is lightly tacked over the original wall covering still in good condition behind. Also of note are the recessed ceiling fixtures of round decorative glass, and the signage marking the Men's and Ladies' Lounges and the exits, all stylized to accentuate the glamor of the moviegoing experience.

Upon entering the auditorium, the eye is immediately drawn to the dramatic large murals placed above each exit door on either side of the screen. These murals, in colorful pastels, are of a high artistic quality and feature classical themes. On either side of the murals are panels of fluted wood with gold leafing and sections of wall covering in an abstract wave pattern. Above the exit doors are small canopies with finely stencilled linear designs on a gold-leafed background. The remaining sections of the side walls are covered in original fabric, all in excellent condition. A raised platform creates a stage area at the front of the auditorium under the large screen. The rear wall of the auditorium contains curved sections recalling the streamlined architecture so common of the late Art Deco period. There is no balcony. The floor of the auditorium contains eight hundred and eighty seats.

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Because of the rare degree of integrity present in the interior of the Senator Theater, the applicant hereby states that this application is intended to apply to the interior as well as the exterior premises of the Senator Theater and that the provisions for interim protection under D.C. Law 2-144 should, to the extent applicable, pertain to the interior as well as the exterior premises of the above-referenced property.

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Historically, the Senator Theater recalls an era in movie production in which style and glamor were attached to all aspects of film making, including the final stage--viewing. Theaters were deemed "palaces" and were filled, inside and out, with luxury appointments. That era is gone; the Senator being one of the last intact remnants of this important piece of Washington (and American) social history.

The first public showing of a movie in the District of Columbia was in 1897 at Willard Hall. In 1906, the public had access to movies on a steady basis at the Star Theater at 10th and D Streets. Thirty-six years later, the Alfred Hitchcock thriller, Suspicion starring Cary Grant and Joan Fontaine played at the Senator's grand opening, Thursday, February 19, 1942. An advertisement run in the Evening Star the day before the theater's opening said of the theater, "not only is the Senator comfortably and luxuriously appointed, beautiful and modern in every detail, but it is pledged to the furthering of all forms of civic progress. It intends to play an important part in the citizenship of future generations."

The Senator's original owner, Fred S. Kogod, used the theater empire he and his brother-in-law, Max Burka, built to give cultural amenities back to the community that had allowed him to prosper. Kogod, who died at the age of 57, was the vice president of the Public Welfare Advisory Council, a member of the Public Welfare Board, active in the Jewish Community Center and president of the Adas Israel Congregation. Kogod made all his theaters available at no cost to religious congregations which had no place to worship. At a time in which the Holocaust was claiming what was left of his family still in Poland, Kogod opened the doors of his theaters as temporary places of worship to the Jewish community in Washington.

On his 50th birthday in 1949, the Washington Times-Herald (June 22) wrote of Kogod,

There are men-known in the film industry known as "exhibitors"--who are in the business for the sole purpose of keeping the moviegoer happy and, incidentally, making a living at it. One of these is Fred S. Kogod...He is a respected citizen in the Washington community and one of the men responsible for putting up those convenient and snazzy neighborhood movie houses.

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Kogod is senior partner of the K-B chain--the Apex, Atlas, MacArthur, Naylor and Senator--string of theaters that have helped convince exhibitors in other cities that Washington moviegoers are the most coddled in the country...

Tomorrow we can go back to taking those fancy sliding chairs, popcorn stands and other luxury details for granted. But today let's salute Kogod and his fellows for making moviegoing such a pleasant experience.

Of course, upholstered seats and a couple of tons of shiny chrome can't change a stinker into an entertaining film but, on such occasions, they do help to reduce the pain.

Besides building theaters, Kogod has been active in the fight for better pictures and earlier uptown runs. He also pioneered bringing foreign films to neighborhoods when the wise-acres said they could only be shown at the so-called art houses.

A very happy fiftieth birthday, indeed, Mr. K.

The theater is the creation of renowned architect John Jacob Zink (1886-1952), a native Baltimorean who spent most of his professional life working in the Washington-Baltimore area. After finishing the eighth grade, he enrolled in the Maryland Institute to begin studies relating to architecture. Prior to World War I, he studied theater architecture with the acclaimed master Thomas Lamb in New York, and attended Columbia School of Architecture in the evenings. He married Ann Krieger in 1913 and returned to practice in Baltimore in the mid-1910s. Zink designed a family home in Montebello Park, Maryland, which accommodated his three children and an office, where he lived about 30 years. He was a long-time member of the American Institute of Architects and was a president of the Baltimore chapter.

During the early 1920s, Zink designed primarily using classical and colonial motifs. By the '30s, much of his work included Art Deco or Moderne elements. He was mainly known for his theater designs, in which he was involved as early as 1920. He eventually designed more than 200 theaters in Baltimore, Washington, New York and other eastern cities. Many of these theaters--including the Milo (Rockville, Md.), the Reed (Alexandria, Va.), and Apex and Langston (Washington, D.C.)-- have been destroyed.

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John Zink was much sought after for his masterful approach to the technical aspects of theater design, such as acoustics (he was an accomplished musician), sight lines, and lighting. He was also known for the amenities he was able to incorporate into his theater plans, including nurseries, lounges and smoking rooms. His designs were often not only visually innovative but quite technically innovative as well. Zink's son Albert wrote of his father's use of new design techniques:

I remember one instance involving the design of a theater where the lot topography was such that it became necessary to use a reverse curve in the main floor contour--which I believe was the first time this idea was ever used in a theater. Th reverse curve means that the low point in the main floor of the auditorium is about one-third the distance from the stage to the back of the theater, (now a common practice in large theater design).

In addition, Zink was accomplished at fitting the exterior of his building into their sites--often incorporating small stores to the street-fronts of his theaters located in neighborhood shopping districts, such as the Uptown Theater in Northwest Washington (now an integral part of an historic district) and the Senator Theater in Baltimore (now listed on the National Register of Historic Places). He was clearly the pre-eminent regional specialist in theater design, and the Senator was one of his finest works.

Zink's Washington Senator Theater bears a great deal in common with other locally and nationally recognized historically significant theaters he designed, specifically the Uptown Theater and the Baltimore Theater also named the Senator. All three are neighborhood facilities, and despite their size all blend in remarkably well with their neighborhood surroundings.

What little is known of Zink's working methods has been learned from his son Albert. In his later years, John Zink spent time talking about his work with Albert, who wrote of his father's methods:

After determining what the client wanted, he (Zink) would spend hours and hours thinking about the job site, the building shape, the general arrangement of areas within the building, colors, materials, details, etc. He'd never put a line on a piece of paper until he had it all together in his head. When he had his total concept defined, he would lay out a sheet of



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tracing paper, glue it down around the edges, moisten it with a damp cloth and wait 'til it dried and stretched like a drum head. The first sheet was the foundation plan, showing the dimensions of the building. When this was completed, he'd take another sheet of paper, stretch it over the first sheet and lay out the basement floor, including the boiler room, mechanical equipment room, etc. The next sheet would be the first floor layout, the next the mezzanine or balcony, the next the roof layout showing ventilation openings, etc. In some instances, he would have as many as 10 or 12 sheets of paper glued to his drafting table, and when the basic concept of the theater or church or whatever it was finished, he would take a razor blade, trim out the finished layouts and run blueprints on the whole shooting match.

All the original K-B theaters have all been sold--all but the Uptown and the Senator torn down, altered or divided into small multiple halls. Throughout the region a great number of John Zink's theaters have been demolished, substantially altered, or put out of use. The Senator, one of the last large Washington theaters to be built on the eve of America's active involvement in World War Two, is a rare intact example of Zink's and Kogod's great contribution to theater design and movie presentation, and is one of very few remaining unprotected large movie theaters still in use as such in Washington, D.C.

## END NOTES

1. "His Specialty is Building Those Fancy Theaters;" Ernie Schier. Times Herald. 22 June 1949.
2. Letter to Robert K. Headley, Jr. Albert Zink. 21 August 1971. Theater Historical Society.
3. Ibid.

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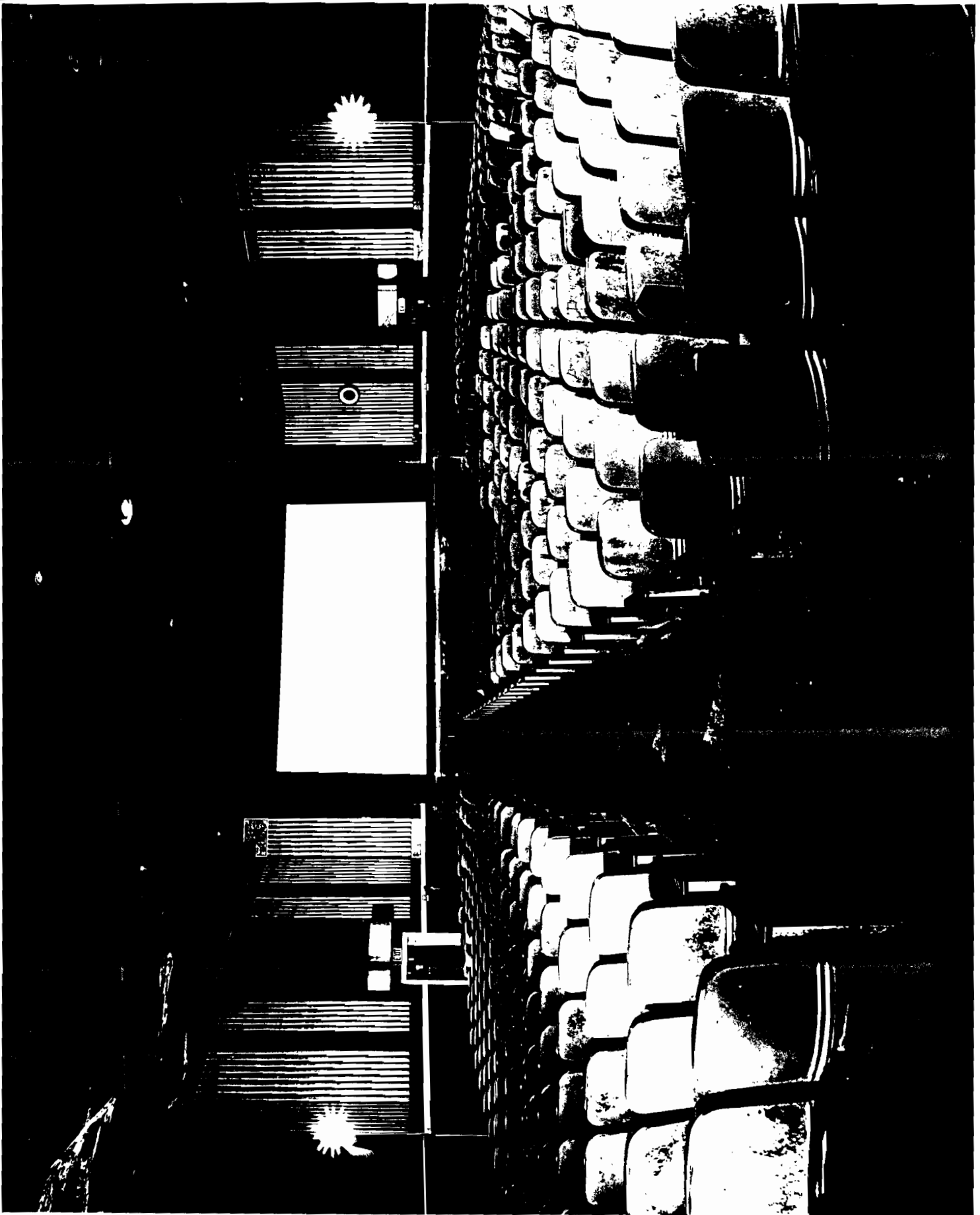
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Telephone interview with Thomas A. Kiefaber, owner and  
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SENATOR

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