

RECEIVED
Nov 16 4 36 PM '89

RECEIVED

HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD Nov 16 4 36 PM '89

APPLICATION FORM
HISTORIC LANDMARK

APPLICATION TO:

- designate
- amend

Summary of amendments _____

- rescind

GENERAL INFORMATION:

Name of Property: Senator Theater

Address: 3950 Minnesota Avenue, N.E.

Square and Lot Number(s): Square 5044, Lot 29

Present Owner: Celia Properties Ltd.

Address: 4801 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W. #325, 20016

Original Use: Movie Theater

Date of Construction: 1942

Date of Major Alterations, if any: No major alterations

Architect: John Jacob Zink

Name of Applicant: Art Deco Society of Washington

(If applicant is an organization, it must submit evidence that among its purposes is the promotion of historic preservation in the District of Columbia. A copy of its charter, articles of incorporation, or by-laws, setting forth such purpose, will satisfy this requirement.)

Address of Applicant: P.O. Box 11090, Washington, D.C. 20008

Telephone: 231-3793

Signature of Applicant or Authorized Representative

11/16/89
Date

President
Title of Authorized Representative

D.C. HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

APPLICATION FOR HISTORIC LANDMARK

APPLICATION TO:

- _ Designate
_ Rescind
xx Amend

Summary of Amendments Clarify that application is for nomination of both interior and exterior of Senator Theater as an historic landmark. Expanded text describing interior is included.

GENERAL INFORMATION:

Property Name Senator Theater

Address 3950 Minnesota Avenue, N.E.

Square and Lot Number(s) Square 5044, Lot 22

Present Owner Celia Properties Ltd.

Owner Address 4801 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., #325, Washington, D.C. 20016

Original Use movie theater

Present Use movie theater

Date of Construction 1942

Date of Major Alteration(s) No major alterations

Architect(s) John Jacob Zink

Architectural Style/Period Art Deco

NAME OF APPLICANT Art Deco Society of Washington

(If the applicant is an organization, it must submit evidence that among its purposes is the promotion of historic preservation in the District of Columbia. A copy of its charter, articles of incorporation, or by-laws, setting forth such purpose, will satisfy this requirement.)

Address and Telephone of Applicant Post Office Box 11090,

Washington, D.C. 20008 202-231-3793

Lauren Adkins, Preservation Committee Chair, Art Deco Society of Washington
Name and Title of Authorized Representative

June 11, 1990
DATE

Lauren Adkins
SIGNATURE

D.C. HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

APPLICATION FOR HISTORIC LANDMARK

APPLICATION TO:

- Designate
- Rescind
- Amend

Summary of Amendments Technical amendment to clarify
Lot and square information in the original application

GENERAL INFORMATION:

Property Name Senator Theater

Address 3950 Minnesota Avenue, NE

Square and Lot Number(s) square 5044, Lot 22*

Present Owner Celia Properties Ltd.

Owner Address 4801 Massachusetts Avenue NW, #325 20016

Original Use Movie Theater

Present Use Movie Theater

Date of Construction 1942

Date of Major Alteration(s) No Major alterations

Architect(s) John Jacob Zink

Architectural Style/Period Art Deco

NAME OF APPLICANT Art Deco Society of Washington

(If the applicant is an organization, it must submit evidence that among its purposes is the promotion of historic preservation in the District of Columbia. A copy of its charter, articles of incorporation, or by-laws, setting forth such purpose, will satisfy this requirement.)

Address and Telephone of Applicant P.O. Box 11090, Washington, DC, 20008
(202) 231-3793

Thorn Pozen, Deputy Preservation Chair - ADSW
 Name and Title of Authorized Representative

April 13, 1990
 DATE

[Signature]
 SIGNATURE

* See attached sheet

310.21 A statement of the prehistoric, historic, architectural and/or cultural significance of the property proposed for designation.

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 to be a neighborhood theater, meaning that it would be used to show 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 around the same time, 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.

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.

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.¹

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.

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. The 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].²

In addition, Zink was accomplished at fitting the exterior of his buildings well 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 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 was finished, he would take a razor blade, trim out the finished layouts and run blueprints on the whole shooting match.³

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.

310.22 If the property is proposed for designation principally for its architectural significance, a detailed architectural description of the property, including where possible its original and present appearance.

The Senator Theater (3950 Minnesota Avenue, N.E.,) is a remarkably intact representative of the architecture of John Jacob Zink. Although suffering from neglect, the Senator, completed in 1942, retains almost all of its architectural integrity in the interior, as well as the exterior. It exemplifies the grand art deco style of the great "movie palaces" popularly used from the 1920's through the 1940's, with few intact survivors.

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.

Exterior

Like many of Zink's theaters, such as the theater of the same name in Baltimore and the Uptown in upper Northwest Washington, the Senator is an ensemble of parts, with particular emphasis on the street front. The facade is symmetrical, with a two and a half story wall framed by two heavy pylons and surmounted by a large neon and metal sign spelling "Senator" over the entrance. Two one-story glass-fronted stores flank the entrance. The formal entry into the Senator is on Minnesota Avenue, and the building's location is in the center of a low-scale urban commercial block.

From the street, one perceives the theater as the tall front entry facade, rather than as the collection of its three dimensional parts. In back of the facade, the mass of the theater auditorium rises to form a wall behind the facade. Functionally lacking in fenestration, this wall does carry the same brick patterns found on the facade. This "mixed-use" solution of low, one-story shops, taller theater entrance, and large auditorium behind combines to form an interesting massing scheme. The lower roofline of the shops helps to emphasize the taller lines of the entry, while softening the transition to the larger auditorium mass behind.

Constructed of non-combustible materials, the theater complex is clad primarily in buff brick, creating expanses of wall broken and articulated by horizontal and vertical bands. These bands consist of a variety of materials, including enameled metal, glass block, vitrolite and contrasting brick.

The majority of these decorative elements are concentrated at the theater entrance, a large rectangular monolith with corner pylons, and a projecting marquee fronting on Minnesota Avenue. The wall above the marquee is composed 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, backlit by rows of incandescent fixtures. The entry pylons contain striking inlays of red, white and blue vitrolite (a structural glass), creating strong vertical bands which follow the pylons upward 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. It is framed in blue metal letters and spells "Senator", in stylized type face.

A one-story marquee with angled edges cantilevers over the sidewalk in front of the theater. The three-foot deep edge of the marquee is faceted metal, painted in hues of blue, and forms a visual carry-over 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 passerby's eye and epitomize the image of the "movie palace."

Also of note under the marquee is the original ticket booth, centrally located between wood and glass doors typical of the period. The ticket booth is faceted 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 patterns on the sheet of stainless steel below the counter level. The patterns include vertical bands which further recall the decorative elements on the facade, and an etched letter "S" of the same typeface and 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 wall, emphasized at the corners with stripes of contrasting brick for added 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 for the side and rear walls. From the back, the theater is purely a form following its function.

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. They form a broad base for the entire theater ensemble. Historic photos indicate that the store front windows originally projected outward from the facade wall, creating a rectangular window box.

Interior

The Senator's well-preserved exterior is matched by the remarkably intact interior, which consists of a thin entrance lobby, a mezzanine level for the restrooms and projection room, and the large wide lobby. Unlike other theaters of this era, the Senator has been spared from interior "modernization." Almost all of the decorative finishes within the theater's public spaces are original, including the original fabric wall coverings and large decorative murals. Aside from a new paint scheme in the rear of the auditorium and new seats, the interior is largely unchanged.

The floor plan is straightforward and streamlined, serving to move the patron comfortably and easily from the front door to the seat. Once past the ticket booth, patrons enter through six wood-framed glass doors. A long linear lobby, sheathed on both sides with wood veneer panels and elongated oval mirrors directs patrons into the theater proper. The linear lines are emphasized by three lines of different types of wood veneer on the panels. The panels occupy the central two-thirds of the walls. The mirrors, located in the center of the wood panels, are punctuated on each side by three wood frames for movie posters. The wood panels terminate at the rear wall which separate the lobby from the auditorium. This wall contains three wood doors set in an unadorned plaster wall. Much of the terrazzo flooring remains intact. A long narrow lobby obviously left more room for the storefronts on either side of the theater. The auditorium balloons out from the lobby, maximizing valuable street frontage.

Once in the auditorium, patrons found themselves in an intermediate area, or secondary lobby, which is separated from the seating area by a lower ceiling height and a curving row of six columns. The secondary lobby currently contains the concession stand, located between two of the columns. The stairs to the mezzanine are to the left and right ends of this space. The stairs are straight L-shaped staircases. The walls in this area are now covered in blue burlap, lightly tacked over the original wall covering behind. This area contains most of the decorative lighting fixtures found on the interior. The circular wells for the recessed ceiling fixtures are fluted and gilded. A flat piece of glass is suspended within the well to the same plane as the ceiling. This glass is painted in alternating orange and black circular patterns with the final circle ending with a fluted edge. Backlit glass sign boxes mark the lounges and the exits. Lettering on the sign boxes is stylized and accentuates the glamour of the movie-going experience. It is doubtful that the linoleum flooring in this lobby is original.

The columns separating the secondary lobby from the auditorium also define the aisles and banks of seating. There are four aisles and three seating banks. A waist-high wall is set between the columns behind the seats. There is no wall between the columns which lead to the aisles. Columns and walls are painted plaster. The column capitals are similar to the Tuscan style, with two bands of gilding and three narrow raised bands separating the gilded bands. As stated before, the concession stand currently occupies the space between the center columns.

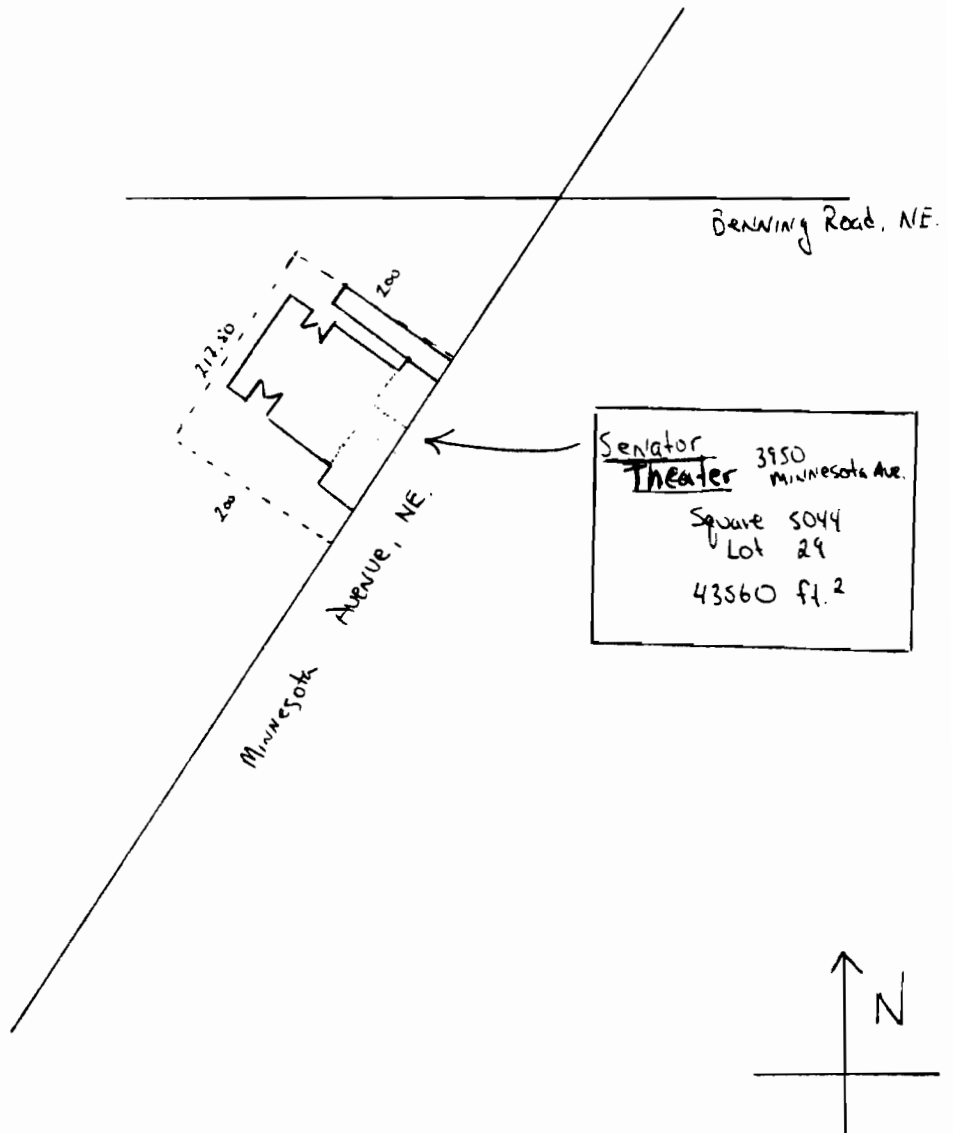
Upon entering the auditorium, the eye is immediately drawn to the dramatic large murals placed above the exit doors on either side of the screen. These murals, in colorful pastels, are of a high artistic quality and feature classical themes. Each panel contains several figures, male and female, in seated and standing positions. All the figures are shown in a garden landscape. Flanking either sides of both murals are double fluted pilasters covered in gold leaf. Above the exit doors, and as a base to the murals, are projecting rounded canopies with finely stencilled floral designs in a gold-on-gold leaf color scheme.

The rear and side walls are covered in the original fabric, a dark colored woven fabric with a swag pattern. All the fabric is in excellent condition. The rear wall of the auditorium contains two projecting planes which curve towards the central section recalling the streamlined architecture so common of the late Art Deco period. The central section contains the view holes for three projectors. A larger opening for spotlights also remains and indicates an original intention to use the theater for live performances. A large raised stage area under the screen, with foot lights, also accommodates live performances. There is no balcony. The floor of the auditorium contains eight hundred and eighty (880) seats.

The ceiling of the auditorium still shows its original painted decoration. Two elongated rectangles along the side walls feature the same floral designs found on the canopies above the exit doors. The designs are executed in a one-color scheme which appears to be black on a wine background. The entire ceiling is painted the wine background color. A narrow stripe of contrasting color defines a large square over most of the ceiling. In the center of the ceiling, a rectangular geometric design is faintly visible.

310.24

A map showing the exact boundaries of the property for designation; the square and lot number(s) or parcel number; square footage of the property proposed for designation; north arrow; and contiguous streets, if any.



(NOT DRAWN TO SCALE)

310.25 A contemporary, good quality photograph of the property proposed for designation which provides clear and accurate visual representation of the property and its setting.

PHOTO 1) The Senator Theater facade, from Minnesota Avenue.

PHOTO 2) The Senator Theater facade, looking south down Minnesota Avenue.

PHOTO 3) Entrance lobby of the Senator Theater.

PHOTO 4) Interior of auditorium of the Senator Theater; visible are original ceiling decorations; large, original mural above exit door; and original wall ornamentation.

PHOTO 5) Large original mural still intact over exit door (stage right) in the auditorium of the Senator Theater.

PHOTO 6) Large original mural still intact over exit door (stage left) in the auditorium of the Senator Theater.

PHOTO ONE



PHOTO TWO



PHOTO THREE



PHOTO FOUR

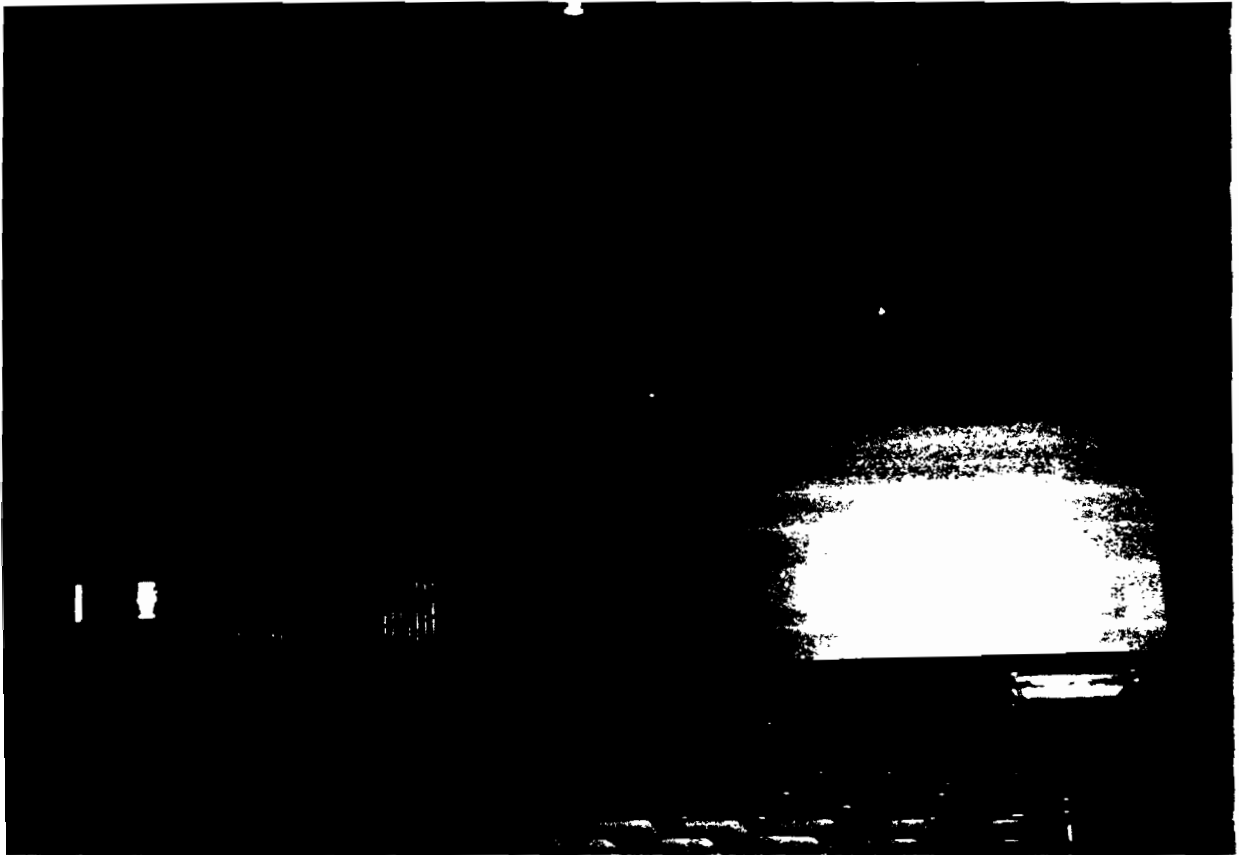


PHOTO FIVE



PHOTO SIX

