

**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 for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

historic name Newton Theater  
other names \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Location**

street & number 3601-3611 12<sup>th</sup> Street, NE  not for publication  
city or town Washington, D.C.  vicinity  
state District of Columbia code DC county \_\_\_\_\_ code 01 zip code 20017

**3. 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments).

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
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 certifying official/Title 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 \_\_\_\_\_

Newton Theater  
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

- Private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	1	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
1	1	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

**number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**  
**0**

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/Theater

COMMERCE/TRADE/Department Store

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Art Deco/Moderne

foundation Brick and terra cotta

walls Glazed brick

roof Slag with copper cornice

other Metal marquise

**Narrative Description**

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

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Newton Theater

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

Section 7 Page 1

## Description Summary:

The Newton Theater, located at 3601-3611 12<sup>th</sup> Street, NE in the Brookland neighborhood of Washington, D.C., was constructed in 1937 to the designs of noted theater architect John J. Zink. It is large brick structure consisting of a two-story auditorium and attached one-story lobby entry with a metal marquee and is an excellent example of Art Deco theater design, popular in the 1920s and 1930s. The building sits on a foundation of brick and terra cotta, and the exterior walls are of a smooth, monochrome, glazed brick with bands of darker brick intersecting at key points along the façade. The roof of the auditorium is pitched, while that of the lobby is flat, both with copper cornice coping.

The building is rectangular in plan, with the depth of the auditorium aligned to face the commercial 12<sup>th</sup> Street, and the length extending along Newton Street. A one-story lobby area along the 12<sup>th</sup> Street elevation is appended to the two-story auditorium wall, while the main entry and ticket booth is strategically located at the corner intersection of 12<sup>th</sup> and Newton to maximize visibility. The auditorium was created to provide a 1007-seat theater space.

The marquee facing the corner at 12<sup>th</sup> and Newton Streets is the most distinctive element of the theater building, featuring undulating wall surfaces of glazed yellow brick with intersecting bands of dark brown brick interrupting the yellow brick in regular intervals. Sitting atop the projecting marquee is a neon sign including an ornamental ziggurat—a traditional Art Deco detail—on center above the large letters forming the building name (originally “Newton;” now “CVS” reflecting the building’s new use).

Set upon a lot measuring 150’ x 100’, the theater building measures 150’ x 84’ x 36’.

## General Description:

### Exterior Description:

The Newton Theater occupies a corner site such that the principal entry faces the corner and the side walls of the double-story auditorium extend down Newton Street and 12<sup>th</sup> Street, with a one-story lobby appended to the 12<sup>th</sup> Street elevation. The corner entry is denoted by one-story brick pylons supporting an overhanging canopy and providing a gateway to the ticket window and entry door. These pylons—undulating piers—are faced with yellow glazed brick with contrasting bands of dark brown brick (“streamlining”) running every fifth course and emphasizing the horizontality of the building. The pylons support the overhanging kidney-shaped canopy (marquee), but rise above it to support the neon signage above. The main entry

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Newton Theater

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

Section 7 Page 2

lobby, including the vertical ziggurat-shaped neon sign above the canopy, breaks up the relatively unadorned walls of the auditorium that rise behind it.

The 12<sup>th</sup> Street elevation consists of the one-story lobby with the two-story wall of the auditorium above and behind it. The lobby elevation is divided into a series of four bays defined by window openings (bricked up). Above each window and on center of them, Art Deco inspired pilasters form an exaggerated keystone that extend to the rounded cornice of the lobby roofline. The rear bay of the lobby counters the vertical streamlining effect of the pilasters with bands of dark brown brick, alternating with coursings of yellow brick, running horizontally along the wall. The pilasters are painted a pale pink and the cornice a light blue. Behind the lobby elevation rises the unadorned two-story auditorium elevation. This wall is an unadorned yellow brick façade with now openings. The pitched roof of the auditorium is hidden behind a sort of stepped parapet roofline along 12<sup>th</sup> Street.

The Newton Street elevation extends four bays deep with each bay separated by two-story brick buttresses. Copper cornice coping caps the roofline of this elevation.

The rear elevation, facing a narrow passageway, is a utilitarian elevation providing service entry and facilities. The walls are laid in red brick and lack any Art Deco detailing.

## Interior Description:

The interior of the theater, like many theater interiors, has been adapted to accommodate a commercial use. Historically, however, and according to the local press, the entrance foyer led directly into “a richly furnished lobby of modified modernistic design, softly illuminated with indirect lighting and made inviting by deep cushioned divans and potted palms.” The auditorium was described as “elliptical in shape, the side walls curving gracefully to the proscenium and giving an immediate impression of spaciousness and comfort.” It was further noted that “[E]very seat in the house has perfect sight lines to the screen.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “The Newton is Picture House of First Rank,” *The Washington Post*, July 30, 1937.

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad pattern of our History.
- B** Property 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 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**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

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.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

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

**Area of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance**

1937-1945

**Significant Dates**

1937

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

**Cultural Affiliation**

**Architect/Builder**

John Jacob Zink

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

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

**Previous documentation on files (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:

\_\_\_\_\_

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section  8  Page  3

---

Newton Theater  
Name of Property

---

Washington, D.C.  
County and State

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## Summary Statement of Significance:

The Art Deco Newton Theater at 12<sup>th</sup> and Newton Streets, NE is a small neighborhood theater that opened to the public on July 29, 1937 in the Brookland neighborhood of northeast Washington, D.C. The theater was designed by prominent theater architect John Jacob Zink, and was erected by Davis, Wick and Rosegarten for Louis J. Bernheimer's "circuit" of motion picture theaters. The Newton Theater meets National Register Criteria A and C with the Areas of Significance being Architecture and Entertainment/Recreation. The Newton Theater is a good example of Art Moderne/Art Deco design and is an excellent example of a relatively scarce building type whose exterior retains high integrity. The Newton Theater is a worthy work of a recognized and prolific master of theater design of the second quarter of the twentieth century. In addition, the Newton Theater is important to the history of Washington in that it is associated with and expresses the patterns of growth and change that contributed significantly to the heritage, culture or development of the District of Columbia, including the development of one of the city's distinct neighborhoods and the development of the motion picture screening industry.

The Period of Significance for the Newton Theater extends from 1937 when the building was constructed and opened, to 1945 when it began to lose popularity and began its slow demise. In the 1990s, after a period of vacancy, the historic theater building was completely renovated on the interior to accommodate a new use as a CVS store.

## Resource History and Historic Context:

### Brookland and the Newton Theater:

Served by both the railroad and streetcar, Brookland emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a sizeable middle-class residential community with small town characteristics. During this period, the surrounding farmland of such rural estates as the Greek Revival Brooks Mansion were improved with freestanding houses built upon newly platted suburban house lots. The Catholic University of America, ultimately the nucleus of many other Catholic institutions in the vicinity, established itself adjacent to the burgeoning Brookland, ensuring the community's long-term stability as a middle-class enclave throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

As most of Brookland developed into a residential neighborhood, the community's streetcar line along 12<sup>th</sup> Street prompted the growth of an important commercial corridor. Shops sprang up along the route, as did churches and other neighborhood amenities. The Brookland Baptist Church stood at the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> and Newton Streets until it burned down in 1926. Just over

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section  8  Page  4

---

Newton Theater  
Name of Property

---

Washington, D.C.  
County and State

---

one decade later, the Newton Theater arose on the site, opening to movie-goers on July 30, 1937 with a showing of “I Met Him in Paris.”

Designed by prominent theater architect John J. Zink, the theater was erected by Davis, Wick and Rosegarten for Louis J. Bernheimer’s “circuit” of motion picture theaters at an estimated cost of \$40,000. Because he was dealing with a prominent corner site, Zink created the 1007-seat auditorium with its depth running the parallel to 12<sup>th</sup> Street, Brookland’s principal commercial avenue, with a corner entry at 12<sup>th</sup> and Newton Streets to maximize visibility and box office access. To engage but not overwhelm Newton Street, he projected a one-story lobby to the sidewalk. This lobby piece and a large vertical Art Deco “ziggurat” sign motif break up the blank auditorium wall behind. In addition to the glazed yellow field brick, Zink used contrasting dark brown brick in a “streamlining” manner most notable at the curved entry piers that support the canopy and signage.

Upon its construction, the Newton became the anchor of Brookland, as it was one of the most distinctive buildings in the community and was widely used by area residents. Indeed, throughout the two decades of the mid-1920s through the 1940s, Washington, D.C. saw an upsurge in popularity of the movie theater and movies were becoming a very important aspect of community life. Before the Newton Theater was built, the Brookland community viewed silent motion pictures at Saint Anthony’s Church.

### Architect: John Jacob Zink

John Jacob Zink (1886-1952), a notable theater designer, was a native Baltimorean, who began his architectural training at the Maryland Institute, practicing for a short time with Baltimore architects Wyatt and Nolting. By 1910, he had established his own office. But shortly thereafter, Zink relocated to New York City to attend the Columbia School of Architecture. During this period, he interned with renowned theater architect Thomas W. Lamb (1871-1942). With such training, Zink returned to Baltimore in 1916 and worked in the office of Ewald G. Blanke, where he was involved in numerous movie house renovation and new design projects, including downtown Washington’s Rialto Theater (1918). In the early 1920s he again went out on his own, and among his first commissions were the Century Theater (1921) in Baltimore and the Takoma Theater (1922) at 6833 4th Street, NW, Washington, D.C.<sup>2</sup> Zink is credited with more than 200 movie theater projects in this region, including entirely new designs and remodeling projects. (For a list of his theater work, see the NR Continuation Sheets.<sup>3</sup>)

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<sup>2</sup> EHT Traceries, MacArthur Theater National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.

<sup>3</sup> Much of this information is drawn from Robert K. Headley, *Motion Picture Exhibition in Washington, D.C.* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1999) and from various Web-based sources. Some renovations were relatively

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section  8  Page  5

---

Newton Theater  
Name of Property

---

Washington, D.C.  
County and State

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Zink has sometimes been characterized as a technician, focusing on and becoming very accomplished at achieving optimal sightlines, lighting and acoustics within the auditoria, as well as incorporating amenities such as nurseries, lounges, and smoking rooms into his movie house plans. Indeed, his skills were suited to the early era of talking pictures and to subsequent technical advances. But his talent for exterior design should not be underestimated simply because his clients often limited his budget, particularly in their second- and third-run neighborhood theaters.

Among his Deco/Moderne movie houses, Baltimore's Senator<sup>4</sup> Theater (1939), possibly Zink's most arresting architectural expression, and that city's innovative Ambassador (1935) along with Washington D.C.'s Uptown provide clear evidence of Zink's aptitude, particularly with the non-traditional forms and decoration of that era. Nearly 50 years old when he began to design in modernistic modes, he proved more assured with the Deco and Moderne styles than some of the older generation of Beaux-Arts-trained atmospheric movie palace designers. In fact, Zink often made a virtue of necessity in his employment of simple masonry gestures that conveyed a contemporary look while keeping costs down.

Anticipating construction of the Newton, the *Washington Post's* movie columnist praised Zink as "the man who can contrive more unusual features for the motion picture theaters he designs than any other architect, not excepting Tom Lamb... Mr. Zink knows his way around the drawing board." Given the fickleness of fashion and constraints on construction during the Depression and World War II, no architect could turn out more than a handful of Deco or Moderne movie houses, despite the fact that that era was a period of growth in the motion picture industry. Zink managed more than 20 such design projects during the roughly thirteen-year period during which he was practicing primarily in that mode.

### The Art Deco Style and the Newton Theater

The Newton Theater was thus one of a handful of Art Deco or Art Moderne (or more frequently, a combination of the two styles) theaters that Zink designed, several of which have been demolished, and several others of which have been altered dramatically, sometimes beyond recognition.<sup>5</sup> Art Deco became popular in the United States in the early 1920s, and by the late

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minor, but others, like Alexandria's Lincoln Theater "remodeling," were really reconstructions and are therefore included in this list.

<sup>4</sup> The earlier Northway Theater in Baltimore seems like a less successful first stab at the Senator's towering lobby space.

<sup>5</sup> Baltimore's Linden and Washington's Carver fall under the latter category. The Naylor Theater on Alabama Avenue, already having lost a significant amount of historic integrity, is likely to be demolished in the near future for redevelopment of the 1940s Skyland Shopping Center.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section  8  Page  6

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Newton Theater  
Name of Property

---

Washington, D.C.  
County and State

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1920s was put to wide use in such buildings as hotels, restaurants and theaters. This style was one of the first to break away from the Beaux Arts style which had been so popular. Where the Beaux Arts tradition had emphasized the Greek and Roma way, with large scale buildings, monumental stairs, and the use of stone, Art Deco popularized smaller scale buildings and the use of modern ideas and materials in futuristic ways. This style strove to express the machine age with its streamlined structure and ornamentation. With its streamlined brickwork, its use of aluminum and neon, its prominent entry marquee and its “ziggurat” sign motif, the Newton did all that.

The Newton is better understood as one of a few Zink movie houses that opened in the mid 1930s and whose motifs served as prototypes for those of future theaters. It was at the Ambassador (1935), for instance, that Zink apparently introduced a massing that included a one-story entrance lobby, with successive, higher parapets behind it to the roof of the auditorium. One intended effect was to break the buildings up visually into horizontal bands whose horizontality was accentuated by “streamlining” consisting of masonry bands of contrasting colors. This effect is more pronounced on the 1937 Reed Theater in Alexandria where, given the low neighborhood scale, the horizontality and setbacks were emphasized. There, the limestone-faced lobby was expressed at a typical storefront scale—indeed, containing small shops—and the entrance was marked by Deco piers and a massive marquee and lighted blade sign. While the Reed was the “flagship” location for the Alexandria Amusement Company, and by extension, the entire city of Alexandria, the Newton Theater was to be a second-run house principally serving the Brookland, Woodridge and Michigan Park neighborhoods. It too had a monumental marquee, however, and a one-story lobby with Deco fluted pilasters projected in front of the auditorium and its stepped parapet.<sup>6</sup> The building’s curved entry piers or columns, shaped like volutes in plan, Zink used in subsequent designs and as late as the 1948 Carver in Alexandria, where he used taller examples to bracket a corner canopy.<sup>7</sup>

The Newton’s exterior is remarkably intact, with merely some openings bricked up, the canopy repainted and some changes to the building’s signage. The original sign remained intact until the 1980s, when the main section was replaced with a similar and sympathetic sign of a local drugstore chain, but the “ziggurat” remains.

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<sup>6</sup> The Earle Theater in Baltimore, sometimes attributed to Zink but apparently designed by his sometime collaborator, builder John Eyring, is remarkably closely related to the Reed and the Newton (although on a much more constrained mid-block site), including the brick streamlining, setbacks and stepped parapet.

<sup>7</sup> Across Queen Street from the Carver, incidentally, is the Lincoln Theater, a stripped-down and smaller version of the Newton but with matching brickwork and another corner entrance.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section  8  Page  7

Newton Theater  
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.  
County and State

### The Neighborhood Theater

The Newton Theater was a social and physical center of Brookland, one of the city's distinct neighborhoods at a time when local movie-going tended toward smaller, neighbor-based theaters and away from the larger, downtown venues. The fortunes of the neighborhood rose and fell with the theater. The Newton's opening was a boon to the 12<sup>th</sup> Street commercial district, and downtown theaters could soon complain of the loss of business to their outlying competitors. But such new theaters ultimately suffered from increasing competition themselves, not only from other venues, but from other media such as television. Theaters' troubles were aggravated by the flight of both population and capital from urban neighborhoods. And in a climate of dropping demand, desegregation contributed to making redundant theaters unsustainable.

The Newton was popular for a single decade, before it began a slow decline, ultimately closing in the mid-1960s. From then on, its vacancy would be considered not only a symbol but a cause of the neighborhood's flagging health. A new use for the theater was seen as central to the revitalization of the area. Catholic University purchased the building, and its music department used it until 1971. Leased by a neighborhood community group, the theater was again occupied and again showing movies from the summer of 1977 to the beginning of 1979. "The lobby was [then] used by a bookstore, and the auditorium was used by a nursery school and as a warehouse." A People's Drugstore and a CVS followed, restoring the viability of the property and re-establishing it as something of a center of at least the commercial district, making up in a small way for the 1982 closing of the neighborhood's supermarket.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Headley, Chapter pp. 138-167 and 298; *Washington Post* February 23, 1938, July 28, 1977, February 2, 1978, August 31, 1978, February 8, 1979 and February 25, 1982.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places

## Continuation Sheet

Section   9   Page   8  

Newton Theater

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Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

---

County and State

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### Major Bibliographical References:

Bell, Nelson. "The Newton is Picture House of First Rank," *The Washington Post*, July 30, 1937.

Headley, Robert K. *Motion Picture Exhibition in Washington, D.C.* Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1999.

McDaniel, George W. and John N. Pearce. *Images of Brookland: The History and Architecture of a Washington Suburb.* Washington, D.C.: George Washington University, 1988

Morrison, Andrew Craig. *Theater Guide of Washington, D.C.* Washington, D.C.: Theater Historical Society, 1972.

Poppeliers, John; Allen Chambers Jr.; and Nancy B. Schwartz. *What Style is It?* New York: Preservation Press, 1983.

Stevens, Joann. "Planning a Brookland Business Renaissance," *The Washington Post*, July 28, 1977.

Wirz, Hans and Richard Striver. *Washington Deco, Art Deco in the Nation's Capital.* Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1984.

Newton Theater  
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** 14,000 square feet

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	1   8 Zone	3   2   7   4   3   8 Easting	4   3   1   1   2   8   9 Northing	3	 Zone	 Easting	 Northing
2	 Zone	 Easting	 Northing	4	 Zone	 Easting	 Northing

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 Rebecca Toepfer, Student; Tim Dennee, Architectural Historian; Kim Williams (editor)/Architectural Historian

Organization D.C. Historic Preservation Office date April 2006

street & number 801 North Capitol Street, N.E. telephone 202 442-8840

city or town Washington, D.C. state District of Columbia zip code 20002

## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

### Continuation Sheets

### Maps

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

### Photographs

- X 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 Monroe Newton, LLC

street & number 6917 Arlington Rd., Suite 304 telephone                     

city or town Bethesda state Maryland zip code 20814

**Paperwork Reduction Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et. seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

The Newton Theater

Name of Property

Washington, D.C.

County and State

Section 10 Page 9

## Verbal Boundary Description:

The Newton Theater occupies Lots 800, 801 and 802 of Square 3927 in Washington, D.C. These lots are at the northeast intersection of 12<sup>th</sup> and Newton Streets, NE.+

## Boundary Justification:

The building has occupied these lots since its construction on the site in 1937.

+