STATE OF CONNECTICUT

CONNECTICUT HISTORICAL COMMISSION
39 South Prospect Street, Hartford, Connecticut 06106
(203) 566-3005

HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY FORM
For Buildings and Structures

IDENTIFICATION

1. BUILDING NAME: Common: Old Middlesex Theater
   Historic: Middlesex Opera House

2. TOWN/CITY: Middletown VILLAGE: ____________________________ COUNTY: Middlesex

3. STREET & NUMBER (and/or location): 109-111 College Street

4. OWNER(S): City of Middletown Historic: Opera House; Movie Theater
   x PUBLIC _ PRIVATE

5. USE: Present: Vacant Interior accessible: x yes no
   w/ permission of Redevelopment Agency

6. ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC: Exterior visible from public road: x yes no
   Interior accessible: x yes, explain:

DESCRIPTION

7. STYLE OF BUILDING: Early Modern Commercial- Art Deco DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: entrance 1927

8. MATERIAL(S) (indicate use or location when appropriate):
   x clapboard
   x wood shingle
   x board & batten
   x aluminum siding
   x other:

   x brick
   _ fieldstone
   _ cobblestone
   _ cut stone:

9. STRUCTURAL SYSTEM:
   x wood frame: post and beam
   _ balloon
   _ load bearing masonry
   _ structural iron or steel interior framing
   _ other:

10. ROOF: type:
    _ gable
    _ flat
    _ mansard
    _ monitor
    _ sawtooth
    _ gambrel
    _ shed
    _ hip
    _ round
    _ other

    _ wood shingle
    _ roll asphalt
    _ tin
    _ slate
    _ asphalt shingle _ built up
    _ tile
    _ other:

11. NUMBER OF STORIES: 2 APPROXIMATE DIMENSIONS: entrance 30'x83'; Theater 86'x138

12. CONDITION: Structural:
    __ excellent
    __ good
    x fair
    __ deteriorated

    Exterior:
    __ excellent
    __ good
    x fair
    x deteriorated

13. INTEGRITY: Location: x on original site _ moved, when:
    Alterations: _ no _ yes, explain: Interior of theater remodelled (See #18)

14. RELATED OUTBUILDINGS OR LANDSCAPE FEATURES:
    _ barn
    _ shed
    _ garage
    x other landscape features or buildings: Passways
    _ carriage house
    _ shop
    _ garden
    _

15. SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT:
    x open land
    _ woodland
    _ residential
    _ scattered buildings visible from site
    _ commercial
    _ industrial
    _ rural
    _ high building density

16. INTERRELATIONSHIP OF BUILDING AND SURROUNDINGS: The two story theater entrance facing north on College Street presents the largest facade in an area of small 19th century commercial buildings; it also contrasts stylistically. Together with the large theater behind it, it is included in a proposed historic district covering the west side of Main Street from College Street to Church Street.
17. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING OR SITE (interior and/or exterior):
- Domed vault in theater ceiling
- Art Deco chandeliers
- Ground level access to stage

SIGNIFICANCE

Architect: Francis A. Kimball (Theater)  Builder: construction (Theater)

18. HISTORICAL OR ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE: This elaborately decorated theater was constructed in 1892 by the Middlesex Mutual Assurance Co. "as a contribution to the artistic development of Middletown and Middlesex County." Francis H. Kimball of New York designed the theater which opened May 26, 1892. The entrance was through the Middlesex Mutual Building (1867) on Main Street, which contained lounges on the third floor for theater patrons. A few days after the theater's dedication a fire destroyed the interior. The theater reopened in October 1892. Providing a seating capacity of 1,100, it contained a balcony and gallery, two tiers of box seats, and was decorated with plaster relief work, mural paintings, and artistic design work on panels; the overall effect displayed the exuberant color and lavish detail typical of the late Victorian era. The Middlesex Theater was a regional entertainment center, and presented musicals, concerts, opera, drama and vaudeville to its patrons. First silent movies and then talkies supplanted live entertainment after World War I.

In 1926 the Grand Theater acquired the property, only to have the interior destroyed by fire in December. The Arrigoni interests bought the damaged theater and redecorated it, (see continuation sheet)

PHOTOGRAPH

photographer: Robert Svec  date: 3/78  view: north  negative on file: Roll 20, #35

COMPILED BY:

name: John E. Reynolds  date: 6/78  organization: Greater Middletown Preservation Trust
  address: 27 Washington St., Middletown, Ct. 06457


20. SUBSEQUENT FIELD EVALUATIONS: (see continuation sheet)

21. THREATS TO BUILDING OR SITE:

X renewal  ___ highways  ___ vandalism  ___ developers  X other:

X renewal  ___ private  X deterioration  ___ zoning  X explanation: Despite the building's inclusion in a proposed restoration/reuse historic district, its large size, specialized nature, and deteriorated condition limit its possibility for reuse.
removing the gallery and boxes, and installing a single large balcony which increased
the theater's capacity to 1,397 seats. In 1927 the present entrance on College Street
was constructed to make the theater independent of the Middlesex Mutual Building on
Main Street. It also contained commercial space on its two floors.

The interior of the theater now combines art deco and art nouveau motifs with vestiges
of the Victorian interior which survived the 1926 fire. The domed vault in the ceiling
is decorated with the signs of the zodiac and the art deco chandelier which hung from
this vault is stored on the theater floor. Molded and stipled plasterwork panels along
the walls are decorated with foliated patterns. The overall color scheme includes blue,
pink, cream and imitation gilt.

The theater has been vacant since 1960, and its condition deteriorated rapidly since
its mechanical support systems were turned off in 1974.

#19

(Middletown: E.F. Bigelow, 1896); See also Survey Form 179-181 Main Street, Middlesex
Mutual Building, GMPT, 1978
CONTINUATION SHEET
Item number: Date: 1/90

Middlesex Opera House
109-111 College Street, Middletown, CT 06457