

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE



**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD**  
**APPLICATION FOR HISTORIC LANDMARK OR HISTORIC DISTRICT DESIGNATION**

New Designation   X    
Amendment of a previous designation         
Please summarize any amendment(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Property name Sheridan Theatre and "Park 'n Shop"  
*If any part of the interior is being nominated, it must be specifically identified and described in the narrative statements.*

Address 621 through 6221 Georgia Avenue, NW

Square and lot number(s) Square 2979, Lot ~~33,34,35~~ 39

Affected Advisory Neighborhood Commission   4B  

Date of construction  1936  Date of major alteration(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Architect(s) John Eberson Architectural style(s) Classic Moderne

Original use Theatre/Retail Present use Retail

Property owner WACHOVIA BANK NA TRUSTEE C/O 3RD FLOOR

Legal address of property owner 1751 PINNACLE DR; MC LEAN VA22102-4903

NAME OF APPLICANT(S) DC Preservation League

*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/Telephone of applicant(s) 401 F Street, NW, Room 324, Washington, DC 20001, 202.783.5144

Name and title of authorized representative Rebecca Miller, Executive Director

Signature of representative *Rebecca Miller* Date 4/28/2006

Name and telephone of author of application Alison Luchs – (202) 783-5144

Date received \_\_\_\_\_  
H.P.O. staff \_\_\_\_\_

**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 Sheridan Theatre and "Park 'n Shop"  
other names \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Location**

street & number 6201 through 6221 Georgia Avenue NW  not for publication  
city or town Washington, D.C.  vicinity  
District of  
state Columbia code DC county \_\_\_\_\_ code 001 zip code \_\_\_\_\_

**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:

<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Determined not eligible for the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other (explain): _____	_____	_____

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**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	8	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	8	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

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)  
Recreation and Culture/theater  
Commercial/storefronts

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)  
Commerce/Trade/Retail stores

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)  
Moderne/Art Deco

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation Concrete

walls Brick/Steel/Glass/Tile

roof Slag

other \_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

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

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Sheridan Theatre and "Park 'n Shop"

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## Description Summary:

### Site Description

The Sheridan Theatre and "Park 'n Shop" is located on the east side of the 6200 block of Georgia Avenue NW. The southern boundary of the site is Rittenhouse Street NW. The northern boundary of the 6200 block is Sheridan Street NW.

The Park n' Shop Center includes the five storefronts between 6201 through 6211 Georgia Avenue NW, which stretch north from Rittenhouse Street NW behind a forecourt parking lot. It also includes three storefronts at 6213, 6215, and (currently) 6221 Georgia Avenue which front directly on the street. The theatre entrance, at 6217 Georgia Avenue, is situated between the storefronts near the north end of the complex.

### Architectural Description

The Sheridan complex includes the Sheridan Theatre and eight associated brick storefronts. The northern end of the complex is a storefront at 6221 (formerly 6219) Georgia Avenue. This storefront is one story tall, with a center entrance. Although a 1936 newspaper rendering shows large display windows flanking the entrance, these openings are now partially filled with brick. A brick façade ornament of eight parallel sharp-edged vertical rays rises from immediately above the front door to protrude just above the cornice line. A row of masonry bullets runs in parallel with the storefront's strong cornice line. These motifs are repeated on each storefront in the complex. Like the rest of the complex, 6221 has modern illuminated signage bolted to the façade. (Illustration 1)

The entrance to the former theatre is at 6217 Georgia Avenue, adjoining the south side of 6221. It is now used as a retail store. The theatre marquee and ticket booth have been removed and its entrance partially bricked-in. Above the entrance is a round-cornered streamlined upper fractional story which accommodated the raised lobby ceiling. The streamlining of this section is accentuated by four recessed horizontal speed stripes. This upper section is approximately four feet taller than the storefront cornices, a smaller distance than the pre-construction newspaper renderings suggested.

Behind the streamlined lobby section is a taller rectangular section which probably accommodated projection equipment. This section, which rises two stories, is set back approximately fifteen feet from the front of the lower story. It also features recessed horizontal speed stripes.

Behind this rectangular section, the auditorium rises to a full two and one-half stories above the street. The actual roof of the theatre is vaulted, but the auditorium has a peaked false cornice with stair steps at

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either end. This tallest section of the theatre is set back an additional twenty feet from the front of the section below. The facade of the upper story is also ornamented with horizontal "speed stripes".

These offset façade elements allow the theatre to rise from the street in a series of steps which visually minimize the sensation of height. The facades of each story suggest, in order of ascent, a polygon with rounded corners, a square, and a triangle.

Immediately south of the theatre entrance are two storefronts which front directly on Georgia Avenue. The single story common façade turns a corner and runs at right angles to Georgia Avenue, fronting on the forecourt parking lot. The façade then turns a rounded oblique corner to present five additional storefronts facing Georgia Avenue across the parking lot. Architectural decoration is limited to the brick vertical ray ornaments above each storefront. The verticality of these ornaments, in counterpoint to the row of masonry bullets immediately beneath the strong cornice line, underscores the horizontality and sweeping streamlines of the storefronts. (Illustration 2)

The forecourt parking lot accommodates approximately forty cars. Entry is facilitated by driveways to both Georgia Avenue and Rittenhouse Street NW.

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**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

Entertainment/Recreation

Social History

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1937-1976

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder** John Ebersson and Morton Levy

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**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

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University

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recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey  
# \_\_\_\_\_

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record  
# \_\_\_\_\_

Other  
Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

## Summary Statement of Significance:

The Sheridan Theatre complex is significant because it is:

- 1) an intact highly-stylized art deco design by master architect, John Eberson;
- 2) an influential force in the development of the Brightwood community, as well as that of semi-suburban neighborhoods throughout the District;
- 3) the first Washington development to fully integrate a theater with a "Park 'n Shop";
- 4) the "missing link" between John Zink's Uptown Theater of 1936, located adjacent to Washington's original Park 'n Shop (1930), and Eberson's nationally-renowned Silver Theatre Shopping Center (1938). Park 'n Shop complexes which incorporated theatres like the Sheridan and Silver are the direct ancestors of the modern mall-with-multiplex.
- 5) an important venue for community-based African-American drama during a period of rising cultural consciousness and redefinition;

The Sheridan Theatre meets National Register Criteria A, B, and C. Its areas of significance are entertainment/recreation, social history, and architecture.

The Sheridan Theatre meets National Register Criterion A because it is "associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history" -- initially, these events were the evolution motion picture industry at the apogee of its contributions to American art, entertainment, recreation, and popular culture. Subsequently, these events include the development of the African-American theatrical community and African-American produced and themed drama.

The Sheridan Theatre meets Criterion B because it is "associated with the lives of persons significant in our past" -- specifically, the internationally-acclaimed architect John Eberson.

The Sheridan Theatre meets Criterion C because it embodies "the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represent the work of a master" -- specifically, the type, style, and method of construction embodied in 1930s cinema. It is one of a few surviving regional examples of this building type that retains these characteristics with integrity. It is the work of an architect universally-acknowledged as the most

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prominent theatre designer in the world and represents a significant phase in this architect's career. In addition, it is an outstanding example of the "Classical Moderne" period of the Art Deco style.

### Resource History and Historic Context:

#### 1. Historic Context

As Robert K. Headley's definitive Motion Picture Exhibition in Washington, DC observes, motion pictures were first exhibited in Washington stores, auditoriums, lecture halls, vaudeville houses, and even outdoor locations called "airdomes".<sup>1</sup>

The first theaters in the city devoted primarily to moving pictures appeared in the years 1906-1912. Some were modified storefront nickelodeons, others small purpose-built structures. Two theaters from this era survive, although they have long been dedicated to other uses. The Minnehaha (1911) at 1312 U Street NW now houses a restaurant, while the Georgia (1912) at 3320 Georgia Avenue NW has been an automotive repair shop since the 1920s.

The period beginning in 1913 saw the building of the city's first "movie palaces". These theaters accommodated audiences of as many as 3,000. They included stages for the live performances that bracketed the featured motion pictures, as well as a pit for the orchestra that provided dramatic accent to silent films and accompanied the stage acts. Most were lavishly decorated in an ornate style which suggested a palace as conceived by Hollywood. They primarily clustered in the fashionable retail district along F Street NW, which was the hub of the city's streetcar system. Although smaller theaters were built in outlying neighborhoods, these large downtown theaters dominated the trade and presented the first runs of every major studio's releases.<sup>2</sup>

The widespread introduction of sound films between 1927 and 1929 greatly changed theatrical architecture. Most existing theaters were retrofitted with audio systems and phased out their house orchestras over the next several years. However, the larger theatres built in Washington during this period still included performance stages.

The Depression administered a profound shock to the film industry. Although the 1930s are today symbolized by their gaudy film productions, weekly cinema attendance fell by one-third from 1930 to 1932<sup>3</sup>. In 1932

<sup>1</sup>Headley, Robert K. Motion Picture Exhibition in Washington, DC. McFarland Company. Jefferson, North Carolina. 1999. Pg. 1-52.

<sup>2</sup>Headley. Pgs. 53-124.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~CAP/PALACE/thirties.html>

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studios and exhibitors lost over \$85,000,000 and in 1933 one-third of the nation's theaters closed.<sup>4</sup> In Washington, the tiny Fairlawn Theatre on Good Hope Road SE (1930) was only new theatre built during the first five years of the decade.<sup>5</sup>

As business revived slightly in 1935, the film industry fought to win back its audience by constructing theaters that brought the movies closer to home. These neighborhood theatres were frequently owned by local chains or by the studios themselves. Smaller than the downtown palaces, they seated approximately 1,000 patrons. Designed solely for cinema and engineered for efficient projection of recorded sound, they dispensed with orchestra pits and stages. For atmosphere, they often employed the streamlined aesthetic of art deco, substituting strong building lines, dramatic color, and theatrical lighting for ornate plaster ornament and statuary. Frequently they were designed by nationally-known theatre architects with no particular ties to Washington. Two of the most prominent theatre designers of the day were John J. Zink of Baltimore and John Eberson, whose home office was in New York.

### 2. The Architect

John Eberson (Illustration 3) was born in Cernauti, the capital of Bukovina, then a province of the Austro-Hungarian empire and now a region of Romania. He apparently grew up in a German-speaking family and attended school in Dresden before graduating from the University of Vienna with an engineering degree in 1896.<sup>6</sup>

Eberson emigrated to the United States around the turn of the century and became an electrical contractor in St. Louis. He eventually began to design "opera houses" for a promoter who built small town theaters and, after a few years, opened his own architectural firm in Hamilton, Ohio.<sup>7</sup>

Eberson and his family, which by now included his son and eventual partner Drew, left Hamilton for Chicago shortly after April, 1910.<sup>8</sup> Although biographies state that he began designing big city theaters almost immediately, furthering his architectural career does not seem to be the reason he relocated the family.

<sup>4</sup> Preddy, Jane. Glitz, Glamour, And Sparkle: The Deco Theaters of John Eberson. Theatre Historical Society of America 1989 Annual. Chicago, Illinois. Pg. 25.

<sup>5</sup> Headley. Pg. 260. The Fairlawn seated just under 500 patrons.

<sup>6</sup> Ben M. Hall. "the Best Ree-maining Seats". American Heritage. October, 1961

<sup>7</sup> Fowler, Brother Andrew C. et al. A John Eberson Scrapbook. Theatre Historical Society of America. 2000 Annual. Elmhurst, Illinois. Pg. 25.

<sup>8</sup> The 1910 U.S. Census of Population shows the Eberson family living in Hamilton, Ohio as of April, 1910.

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In 1906 the "Julian Syndicate" from Cincinnati and nearby Hamilton had acquired an exclusive, lucrative, and politically controversial contract to process Chicago's garbage.<sup>9</sup> However, the "Ohio capitalists'" Chicago Reduction Company Plant had numerous operating difficulties, including an explosion which destroyed the plant and killed ten workers in 1908.

During his Ohio years, Eberson had developed a professional relationship with W.A. Julian, the millionaire Cincinnati banker, businessman, and political financier behind the syndicate, who thirty years later would develop Eberson's Silver Theatre shopping center while serving as Treasurer of the United States.<sup>10</sup> Eberson became manager of the rebuilt reduction plant soon after arriving in Chicago. His name was soon prominently featured in the Chicago Tribune's front page accusations against the reduction company, which included gifts of stock to aldermen in exchange for favored treatment, election dirty tricks, and holding the city hostage in negotiations for sale of the plant.<sup>11</sup> After the city acquired the plant, Eberson was accused of personally profiting from a sweetheart deal for the purchase of the grease it refined.<sup>12</sup> Investigated in 1920, Eberson was not charged with a crime, but began concentrating exclusively on his architectural practice thereafter.

The theaters Eberson designed during the nineteen-teens were in the conventional ornate style of the era. However, his Wichita Orpheum and Houston Majestic of 1922-1923 started a revolution as the first "atmospheric theatres". "Atmospheric theaters" were in many ways the first act of the show. They sought to pull the audience from prosaic reality to a suspension of disbelief and state of impressionability. On the exterior, they resembled fantastic castles or Moorish palaces. Their interiors suggested such outdoor spaces as gardens, royal courts, or grottoes, an illusion furthered by such stagecraft as cloud images projected on the ceiling and

<sup>9</sup> Chicago Daily Tribune. February 3, 1907. Pg. 7.

<sup>10</sup> W.A. Julian (1871-1949) made millions as a Cincinnati shoe manufacturer before embarking on a banking career. Active in Democratic Party politics, he was an unsuccessful candidate for one of Ohio's U.S. Senate seats in 1920. In 1933, he became FDR's Treasurer of the United States, a post he held until his death in a 1949 automobile accident at the corner of River Road and Burdette Lane in Bethesda. See Washington Post,

<sup>11</sup> Even allowing for the excesses of "The Front Page" era of Chicago journalism, the accusations against the Reduction Company and its plant were extraordinary and wide-ranging during Eberson's tenure. During Eberson's tenure, the Tribune and civic associations bitterly criticized the reduction company for returning excess profits and accused the company of shadow ownership, election chicanery, and secret gifts of stock to alderman. While Eberson was not personally accused of wrongdoing, he was frequently the public defender of the company and its operations.

Other criticism of the company went beyond financial ethics. In 1913, Father Maximillian Kotecki, pastor of a neighborhood church told Chicago's Mayor Harrison and the Finance Committee of the Board of Aldermen "there are seven of my men working in that plant...and they have told me of the horrible conditions. The children of my people die like flies. This plant breeds flies, they carry disease, and the children die." (Chicago Daily Tribune, July 15, 1913. Pg.5)

<sup>12</sup> Chicago Daily Tribune, August 20, 1920.Pg. 1, August 23, 1920. Pg. 17., August 25, 1920, Pg. 4.

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faux marble-textured plaster statuary. While many theaters of the day had ornate décor, Eberson's Atmospheric stylings expressed a storyline. As he wrote of a major Chicago project:

I am working on a French interpretation of an atmospheric theater—the Garden of the Tuileries. We picture a Louis sending a message through the Land calling for painters, sculptors, gardeners, artisans of all kinds. And he gives the command to transform the spacious lawns lying in front of his palace into a festive ground, as he is going to entertain his grandees and dames at a glorious magic night feast... Surprises, illuminated fountains, music niches, lovers' lanes—a marvelous setting for a fantastic artful dance, the frills of the satin-and-silk-gowned nobles, the coquettish silk and ruffle-covered damsels, the air laden with jasmine.<sup>13</sup>

Little wonder that Eberson's romantic sensibilities led him to be called "the Valentino of theatre design".

In 1925, the same Chicago Tribune that had once pilloried him noted that Eberson had projects underway in fourteen states. While his theatres attracted the most notice, his other projects included a Houston office building, said to be the tallest in the south, sixteen story buildings in Tampa and Miami, and a million dollar hotel and million dollar Masonic temple in Kansas City.<sup>14</sup> In 1929, Eberson moved what was now a national practice from Chicago to New York.<sup>15</sup> He made his son Drew his partner shortly before the stock market crash, after which the bottom quickly dropped out of the market for large ornate theaters.

In 1930, Eberson produced a set of stock designs for the Warner Studios chain. These designs dispensed completely with atmospheric detailing ; their style is described as "zigzag deco" characterized by an emphasis on "verticality" with "Busby-Berkeley-type elevations ...pulled from the structures of Mayan culture and incorporated into the art deco design vocabulary." These designs feature "energetic" surface detailing with raised zigzag patterns with sharp angles and edges in face brick. Importantly, these theaters were flanked by a storefront on each side.<sup>16</sup>

Economics in the years 1930 through 1934 were not conducive to building even theatres in Eberson's new, stripped-down style. His firm struggled until he declared personal bankruptcy in 1934<sup>17</sup>, while his son departed architecture for a stint as a Hollywood director.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Ben M. Hall. "the Best Ree-maining Seats". American Heritage. October, 1961

<sup>14</sup> Chicago Daily Tribune, November 22, 1925. Pg. B1

<sup>15</sup> Chicago Daily Tribune, July 21, 1929. Pg. B3

<sup>16</sup> Preddy. Pgs. 20-21.

<sup>17</sup>New York Times. May 9, 1934. Pg. 37.

<sup>18</sup> According to the Internet Movie Database (<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0248120/#director>), Drew Eberson served as director or assistant director on 11 Hollywood films 1935-1938.

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As the building climate improved in late 1935-1936, Eberson's designs metamorphosed again, becoming even less ornamented. Eberson's new style retained some art deco elements but incorporated a "Stripped Classicism Style", with "streamlining created by such details as wrap-around panels, curved sweeping marquees, and... new materials". The new designs were "cool, restrained, and practically unadorned", with "speed stripes" or hard edges that led the eye to follow their lines. Their design expressed "horizontal" rather than the "verticality" of his "zigzag deco" period. This style has been dubbed "Classical Moderne" by architectural historian Eva Weber.<sup>19</sup>

Eberson's Classical Moderne designs won market acceptance and he rode the gradually rising economic tide. Transformed from Valentino to Fred Astaire, he designed theatres all over the country in collaboration with his son. Over the next 15 years, his theater facades became increasingly less adorned and more characteristic of the more upright International Style. He continued collaborating with his son until his death at age 79 in 1954.<sup>20</sup>

Attachment 1 lists the twenty-seven Eberson-designed buildings on the National Register of Historic Places as of June, 2005.

### 3. The Theatre

John Eberson designed fourteen theaters in the Washington, DC area. The Sheridan Theatre represents an important phase in both his design career and the evolution of Washington's theaters. In significant ways, the Sheridan is a precursor of Eberson's famed 1938 Silver Theatre complex in downtown Silver Spring, a National Register Landmark now the headquarters of the American Film Institute.

Eberson's first Washington theatre was his largest in the city; the Penn, which opened on December 27, 1935 at 650 Pennsylvania Avenue SE (Illustration 4). The Penn was the first theater built in Washington since the Fairlawn in 1929-1930. Larger than the standard neighborhood theatre it seated 1,500 patrons. Although it was located outside the downtown theatre district, its site on a major streetcar line was just six blocks from the Capitol. In a sense, it was a combination of downtown and neighborhood theatre types.

The Penn's concrete façade has restrained cast ornamental patterns characteristic of Eberson's "Stripped Classicism" period and a sweeping curved Portland cement marquee. However, the façade is a sheer concrete cliff approximately two-and-one-half stories tall, giving a perspective that is more vertical than horizontal. The theatre entrance is flanked by one story concrete storefronts which front directly on the sidewalk of Pennsylvania Avenue.

<sup>19</sup> Weber, Eva. *Art Deco In America*. Exeter Books, New York, NY. 1985 quoted in Preddy. Pg.14.

<sup>20</sup> New York Times, March 7, 1954. Pg. 90.

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Like the Penn, Eberson's next two Washington designs became Warner Brothers' theatres. Although not erected until 1938, his Beverly Theatre was designed in 1936. The Beverly was situated in a neighborhood business district near 15<sup>th</sup> and E Streets NE near the terminus of a streetcar line. Like the Penn, it had a curved cement marquee, and a tall, sheer façade, this time made of white brick and flanked by three storefronts. Its height was accentuated by a tall, vertical sign.<sup>21</sup>

Like the Beverly, Eberson's 1936 Sheridan was designed as a true neighborhood theatre with approximately 1,000 seats. Its location at 6217 Georgia Avenue NW was much more convenient to the semi-suburban neighborhoods adjoining Silver Spring than to downtown Washington. Eberson's 1938 Silver Theater in Silver Spring has won fame for its incorporation into an elaborate art deco "Park and Shop"-style shopping center. However, the Sheridan, not the Silver, was Eberson's first local involvement with a shopping center project and the first such project to link a theatre and integral "park and shop" style shopping center in Washington.

The story of Washington shopping centers began with Shannon and Luchs' 1930 "Park and Shop" development at Connecticut Avenue and Ordway Street NW. At first considered a novelty, the concept of stores separated from the street by a parking forecourt became an almost immediate success. The success of John Zink's Uptown Theatre, which opened opposite the original Park and Shop on October 29, 1936, is sometimes credited with inspiring the concept of the shopping center with a theater at its nucleus.<sup>22</sup> However, the Sheridan complex, which included eight storefronts with a forecourt parking lot and was called a "Park 'n Shop" in obvious imitation of the original, was already well under construction when the Uptown opened.

Just a few days before the Penn Theatre opened, the December 22, 1935 Washington Post reported plans to build an Eberson-designed Warner Brothers' theatre at Georgia Avenue and Sheridan Street.<sup>23</sup> Warner Brothers agreed to lease the theater from its developer, Kass Realty Company, who in turn would lease the storefronts to tenants. This arrangement was a first for Warner Brothers, which had previously owned all its theatres. Kass Realty was already developing a similar type of shopping center in Clarendon, Virginia. Its Colonial Village Park and Shopping Center, associated with a garden apartment complex, would open on April 1, 1936.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Preddy. Pg. 27.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Linda B. Lyons. "National Register Nomination for the Bethesda Theatre", (1990) Section 8 at <http://www.adsw.org/site/MD/Bethesda/WisconsinAve/7719/nomination/index.html>. Although the Uptown incorporated a strip of six storefronts, these fronted directly on Connecticut Avenue without off-street parking.

<sup>23</sup> Washington Post, December 22, 1935. Pg. R3.

<sup>24</sup> Washington Post. March 29, 1936. Pg. R14.

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On May 4, 1936 the Post published a rendering of the proposed Sheridan complex, which showed the theatre incorporated into the Park and Shop-style development.<sup>25</sup> (Illustration 5) At the time the drawing appeared, the theatre construction process had already begun. On April 15, 1936 Kass Realty had applied for a permit to demolish a two story frame building at the corner of Georgia Avenue and Rittenhouse Streets NW.<sup>26</sup>

On June 23, 1936, the firm received a permit to build a "brick and tile theatre" at 6217 Georgia Avenue NW.<sup>27</sup> Work began quickly, with excavation underway by June 26<sup>th</sup>.<sup>28</sup> On July 7<sup>th</sup>, the builders were digging foundation trenches, and by July 23<sup>rd</sup> they were setting forms for basement walls.

Exactly one month after applying for the theatre permit, Kass Realty applied for a separate permit to construct the shopping center. Although news stories always implied that John Ebersson was architect for the entire complex, the building permit listed the storefronts' designer as D. Morton Levy, who had designed many other storefronts for Kass Realty. Construction of the stores began in early August and proceeded with that of the theatre.

On August 12<sup>th</sup>, structural steel and fabricated trusses for the theatre arrived at the job site but were found not in compliance with plans by the building inspector. The trusses were returned to Baltimore for rework the next day. Corrected trusses were installed by August 17<sup>th</sup> and by August 27<sup>th</sup>, bricklaying was in progress. However, a labor dispute which began on August 31<sup>st</sup> then shut down the job until September 4<sup>th</sup>.

Whether because of labor unrest or other reasons, completion lagged well beyond the September 15<sup>th</sup> date reported by the Post in May. In November, 1936, Kass Realty was issued a permit for night work, but the theatre still missed the Christmas movie season.

The Sheridan finally opened at 8:00 PM on January 14, 1937 as the fifteenth theatre in Warners' Washington area chain. The opening ceremonies followed the script for most of Warner Studios' Washington openings. Audrey Seiber, mistress of ceremonies at Warners' downtown flagship, the Earle Theater, opened by introducing keynote speaker Ernest H. Pullman, president of the Manor Park Citizens Association. Joseph Bernard, vice-president for theatrical operations led the delegation of Warner Studios officials. After the speeches, the audience saw "Sing Me a Love Song", a new Warner Brothers feature starring James Melton and Patricia Ellis which has since vanished into oblivion.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Washington Post. May 4, 1936. Pg. 14.

<sup>26</sup> DC "Application for Permit to Raze Building" #189997, April 15, 1936.

<sup>27</sup> DC Building Permit 192689, June 23, 1936.

<sup>28</sup> Construction progress information comes from DC Building Inspectors Notes for Building Permits 192689 and 194100.

<sup>29</sup> Washington Post. January 14, 1937. Pg. 11.

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The Sheridan opening was more low-key than that of the Penn, which had featured the Earle Theatre orchestra and included Eberson well as many local political celebrities.<sup>30</sup> Eberson did not attend the Sheridan opening, although he did return to the Washington area for the opening of his Silver Theatre in 1938.

In style, the Sheridan is much closer to Eberson's "classical moderne" style than its predecessor, the Penn, contemporary, the Beverly, or immediate successor, the more purely art deco Calvert on Wisconsin Avenue NW. Instead of a tall, vertically-oriented façade at street side, the Sheridan presented the ticket buyer with a single story entrance beneath a curving marquee, with a round-cornered, slightly setback upper story to accommodate the lobby ceiling. Behind this was a set back rectangular section to accommodate projection equipment, and behind that the two and one-half story auditorium. By rising to its full height in a series of steps with increasing setbacks, Eberson's design created the impression of streamlined horizontality, a sensation that was augmented by brick speed stripes across the façade.

The creative relationship between Eberson and Levy is difficult to assess in the absence of original drawings of the storefronts. However, the "Park 'n Shop" is shown as an integral unit with the theatre in drawings published well in advance of construction and the storefronts fully compliment Eberson's art deco themes. In particular, the strong cornice line and contrasting vertical ray pattern of the façade ornaments underscore the horizontality and sweeping streamlines of the design. The crest at the top of the facade ornaments is an Ebersonian motif. A variant of it is found on the marquee of his Atlantic Theatre, among other places (Illustration 6).

Fully 20 months before the Silver Theatre and Shopping Center opened, the Sheridan Theatre "Park 'n Shop" was an immediate success. Its original roster included several national chains whose stores acted as "anchors" for the local business tenants. Overall the Park 'n Shop provided a wide range of necessities and conveniences which could be accessed by finding a single parking space. Its original 1937 tenants included:

6201-6203 Georgia	S.H. Kresge 5 & 10
6205 Georgia	Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company
6207 Georgia	Carnell's Beauty Shop
6209 Georgia	Joseph Kipperman Womens' Furnishings
6211 Georgia	John Noppinger Bakery
6213 Georgia	People's Hardware Company
6215 Georgia	Edward Wortman Millinery
6219 Georgia	Carl Edlen Menswear

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These tenants exhibit the same pre-planned mix as the original "Park and Shop" on Connecticut Avenue. Although the Sheridan shopping center was smaller, it shared the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea and People's Hardware Companies as tenants. Both centers also featured a bakery and beauty shop. The more upscale Shannon and Luchs center included a "Dutch Chocolate Shop" and a restaurant<sup>31</sup>, while the more "middle-middle class" Kass Realty project featured a 5 & 10 and apparel merchants.

For approximately 35 years, the Sheridan Theatre successfully served the Brightwood neighborhood, running features approximately ten days to two weeks after they opened downtown. After a Supreme Court anti-trust decision compelled the studios to divest themselves of their theaters, independent operators took over the lease at the Sheridan.<sup>32</sup>

After the Sheridan's screen went dark in approximately 1968, the theatre became an important venue for community-based African-American theatre. In 1971, the theatre was acquired by the Blackman's Development Center, a controversial community action group that was affiliated with the Blackman's Volunteer Army of Liberation headed by Colonel Hassan Jeru- Ahmed. Colonel Hassan's group removed some of the theater's seating and converted it to a conventional stage venue as part of a plan to rehabilitate drug and alcohol abusers through theatrical training.<sup>33</sup> However, the group foundered after it lost government funding after accusations of Anti-Semitism.<sup>34</sup> For a time, the Sheridan became known as the "Cream Beaux Palace" and presented productions by Theatre West, an African-American theater company organized in Dayton, Ohio. The Sheridan was then taken over by the Black American Theater, a group dedicated to bringing works by African-American dramatists to the stage (Illustration 7).<sup>35</sup>

By 1976, the Sheridan became a church<sup>36</sup> and now is a retail store. Today, it is among three relatively intact Eberson Theatres in the District of Columbia. Although none currently show movies, these fellow survivors are:

The Highland Theatre (1940) at 2340 Pennsylvania Avenue SE, designed in a combination art deco-International Style for Wineland Theatres, is now a daycare center. The Highland has an adjacent Park N' Shop similar to the Sheridan's.

<sup>31</sup> Wood, Kathleen Sinclair. "Application for Historic Landmark: Park and Shop". August 7, 1985. 310-22 and 310.23. Pg. 4.

<sup>32</sup> Washington Post. April 25, 1953. Pg. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Washington Post, March 1, 1971. Pg. B6.

<sup>34</sup> Washington Post, July 7, 1971, Pg. C1.

<sup>35</sup> Washington Post. January 14, 1973, Pg. K1, November 22, 1973, Pg. C21, and November 24, 1973, Pg. D2.

<sup>36</sup> Washington Post. October 19, 1975. Pg A19.

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The Atlantic Theatre (1945), designed in an International Style at Atlantic and South Capitol Streets SW, has been vacant for years but is now reportedly awaiting restoration.

Eberson's other Washington, DC theaters either have been demolished or exist only as facades.

The Penn Theatre auditorium was demolished in the 1980s. The façade now serves as the entrance to a large office and retail building.

The art deco Calvert Theatre (1937) at Wisconsin Avenue and Hall Place NW was Eberson's only Washington façade that made extensive use of Vitrolite. It was demolished for a parking lot in 1967.<sup>37</sup>

The Beverly Theatre (1938) stopped showing films in 1963 and served as a church until it was demolished in the late 1970s.<sup>38</sup>

The Kennedy Theatre (1939) at 326 Kennedy Street NW was an anomalous exercise in the neo-Georgian style totally unlike any other Eberson theatre of the 1930s.<sup>39</sup> In early 2006, the Kennedy's auditorium was demolished for a health center, although the façade and an adjacent row of storefronts were retained.

The Anacostia Theatre (1945) at 1415 Good Hope Road SE was an International Style-accented design demolished in 1967.<sup>40</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

As Architectural Historian Kathleen Sinclair Wood has written, early shopping centers like the Sheridan Park 'n Shop and Silver Theatre Shopping Center served as prototypes for the larger shopping centers that dominated retailing beginning in the 1960s;

The Park and Shop is significant as an earlier and smaller version of what was to become the standard neighborhood shopping center. The later ones were larger and included more stores, but the supermarket

<sup>37</sup> Headley. Pg. 238.

<sup>38</sup> Headley. Pg. 235.

<sup>39</sup> Headley. Pg. 278.

<sup>40</sup> Headley. Pg. 227.

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continued to be the anchor facility. These neighborhood convenience centers were intended to compliment the downtown shopping districts rather than to compete with them or replace them.<sup>41</sup>

The Sheridan Theatre Park 'n Shop complex is significant as a "proving in" of this concept as well as providing an important transitional link between the street front theater with associated store development characterized by the Uptown and the highly-stylized large shopping center exemplified by the Silver Theatre. The construction of the Uptown and the Silver are widely-accepted as milestones in the economic and architectural development of the Washington area. The Uptown, while listed a contributing building to the Cleveland Park Historic District, could undoubtedly be designated a landmark in its own right. The Silver Theatre complex is listed on the National Register. (Illustration 8)

### Major Bibliographical References:

The Chicago Daily Tribune. Published at Chicago, Illinois. (1847-Present)

The New York Times. Published at New York, New York (1853-Present)

The Washington Post. Published at Washington, DC (1877-Present)

Fowler, Brother Andrew C. et al. A John Eberson Scrapbook. Theatre Historical Society of America. 2000 Annual. Elmhurst, Illinois.

Hall, Ben M. "The Best Ree-maining Seats". American Heritage. October, 1961

Headley, Robert K. Motion Picture Exhibition in Washington, DC. McFarland and Company. Jefferson, North Carolina. 1999

Lyons, Linda B. "National Register Nomination for the Bethesda Theatre" (1990)

Preddy, Jane. Glitz, Glamour, And Sparkle: The Deco Theaters of John Eberson. Theatre Historical Society of America. 1989 Annual. Chicago, Illinois..

Weber, Eva. Art Deco In America. Exeter Books, New York, NY. 1985

<sup>41</sup> Wood. Pg. 310-22 and 310.23 Pg 1.



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### 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 \_\_\_\_\_  
street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

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### Verbal Boundary Description:

The Sheridan Theatre and Park 'n Shop occupies Lots 33, 34, and 35 in Square 2979.

### Boundary Justification:

Index by Architect report		National Register of Historic Places					
ARCHITECT	STATE	COUNTY	RESOURCE NAME	ADDRESS	LISTED		
Eberson, John	IN	Allen	Embassy Theater and Indiana Hotel	121 W. Jefferson St.	9/5/1975		
Eberson, John	MD	Montgomery	Bethesda Theatre	7719 Wisconsin Ave.	2/5/1999		
Eberson, John, et al.	IN	Lake	Gary City Center Historic District	Chicago, South Shore and S	11/25/1994		
Eberson, John	FL	Dade	Olympia Theater and Office Building	174 E. Flager St.	3/8/1984		
Eberson, John	FL	Hillsborough	Tampa Theater and Office Building	711 Franklin St.	1/3/1978		
Eberson, John	IN	Madison	Paramount Theater Building	1124 Meridian St.	8/29/1991		
Eberson, John	IN	Vigo	Hippodrome Theatre	727 Ohio St.	6/30/1983		
Eberson, John	IN	Vigo	Indiana Theatre	683 Ohio St.	11/13/1997		
Eberson, John	KS	Sedgwick	Orpheum Theater and Office Building	200 N. Broadway St.	11/28/1980		
Eberson, John	KY	Jefferson	Loew's and United Artists State Theatre	625 S. 4th St.	3/28/1978		
Eberson, John	KY	Jefferson	Theater Building	625--33 S. 4th Ave.	8/12/1982		
Eberson, John	MI	Genesee	Capitol Theatre Building	140 E. 2nd St.	1/31/1985		
Eberson, John	MI	Ingham	Strand Theatre and Arcade	1-219 S. Washington Av	9/17/1980		
Eberson, John	MI	Wayne	Grand Riviera Theater	9222 Grand River Ave.	4/22/1982		
Eberson, John	MO	Jackson	Uptown Building and Theatre	3700--3712 Broadway	6/27/1979		
Eberson, John	NY	Oswego	Oswego Theater	138 W. Second St.	9/19/1988		
Eberson, John	OH	Marion	Palace Theater	272 W. Center St.	3/26/1976		
Eberson, John	OH	Stark	Palace Theater	605 Market Ave., N.	4/26/1979		
Eberson, John	OH	Summit	Loew's Theatre	182 S. Main St.	7/16/1973		
Eberson, John	OK	Oklahoma	Sinopoulo, John, House	4000 N. Kelley	11/28/1978		
Eberson, John	TX	Bexar	Majestic Theatre	230 E. Houston St.	10/1/1975		
Eberson, John	TX	Bexar	Majestic Theatre	230 E. Houston St.	10/1/1975		
Eberson, John	TX	Dallas	Majestic Theatre	1925 Elm St.	11/14/1977		
Eberson, John	VA	Richmond	Central National Bank	3rd and Broad Sts.	9/20/1979		
Eberson, John	VA	Richmond	Loews Theatre	6th and Grace Sts.	11/20/1979		
Eberson, John & Drew	MI	Ingham	Strand Theatre and Arcade	1-219 S. Washington Av	9/17/1980		
Eberson, John, et al.	TX	Travis	Paramount Theatre	713 Congress Ave.	6/23/1976		