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Statement of Significance

The Kiggins Theater, located on Main Street in Vancouver's City Center, is eligible for listing to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C (*The 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*). The Theater is Vancouver's, and Southwest Washington's, finest example of art deco and streamlined moderne architecture. The period of significance is 1936, when the theater opened.

Art deco is known primarily for its use of early modern ornamentation. The Streamline Moderne movement is similarly associated with early modernism, but is known for a less decorative approach than art deco, emphasizing instead smooth lines, bands and courses, and a more machine-like approach but with a continued emphasis on aesthetics. Prime examples of art deco design include William Van Alan's 1924 Chrysler Building, which is topped by concentric bands with radial features, creating a beautiful repetition of form, much like can be seen with the bands of cast concrete which wrap the upper story of the Kiggins theater and which divide, like pilasters, the store-front bays and theater on the western façade. Another fine example of the smooth lines emphasized in these styles is evident in the famous Odoen Theater in London England. The stage and the ceiling over the stage are surrounded by concentric bands which radiate outward creating a beautiful and systematic repetition, which is linked to the early machine era approach to design and production.

The art deco and related movements were a unique combination of aesthetics which were derived from and then influenced both popular culture and the avant-garde of the design trades. Art deco design was embraced by the public while frequently derided by critics. Brent Brolin has characterized art deco as a folk interpretation of the machine era's minimalist aesthetic (Brolin 1985). Streamlined moderne expressions especially embody the efficiency of the machine era. For example, the Kiggins's long lines and curved surfaces represent a departure from romantic and classical styles, but without entirely abandoning ornamental details. Later manifestations of modernism did away with all ornamentation. Art deco became roughly synonymous with successful urbanity, and as such became popular as an architectural expression in downtowns throughout the 30's. The Chrysler building has been considered the "epitome of urbanity and symbol of modern Gotham" (Brolin 1985). And the Kiggins Theater was built to represent vibrancy and success in downtown Vancouver.

The Kiggins Theater is the very best example of art deco and streamlined moderne design in Vancouver. There are other buildings with some similar features, some also designed by Hilborn. But none of the others

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have the same level of ornamentation or dedication to Streamlined moderne design. Designs like the horizontal band of lines that run around the upper corners of the Kiggins can be seen in other period structures in Vancouver. The Ford Dealership at 1004 Washington Street has a few features in common with the Kiggins. Construction was finished in 1920, when certain elements of the moderne movement were in their infancy. Yet, the original entrance on Washington has an early modern ornamental relief on the trim around the front door. The entrance is surrounded by a four-banded (fluted), glazed masonry, light green in color. The Arts Building at 1104 Main Street is a Hilborn design that can also be considered art deco, though the design elements are far more modest than on the Kiggins Theater. The Building was designed for local medical practices and may therefore have had a more sober approach to design than in the recreational excessive of the nearby Theater. A far less-well known Hilborn design is the Salvation Army Building at 311 W Evergreen Blvd. It was built in 1952, but still embodies very light representations of the Streamlined ideas found in the Kiggins façade. However, much like with the Arts Building, the features are very modest. The upper edge of the building is lined with a triple banded cornice, reminiscent of the bands encircling the Theater.

The Kiggins Theater may be the best example of art deco and streamlined moderne in Southwest Washington. The theater's design is also outstanding among the various related buildings in the entire Portland/ Vancouver metropolitan area. In Portland, other key art deco designed theaters include the very stylized Bagdad and Hollywood Theaters. Both of these represent variations on conventional art deco themes. The Bagdad Theater, built in 1927 and designed by Lee Thomas, has a distinctive Mediterranean-style with a stucco finish and red clay tile roof elements (King 2001). However the marquee is typical of art deco theaters with a tall vertical sign bearing the theater's name under which a wider marquee provides movie titles and show times.

The area's most well-known historic theater, the Hollywood Movie Theater is also considered by some to exhibit art deco influences. Built in 1926, the Hollywood started with live Vaudeville shows and silent films (Beck 2011). The Hollywood Movie Theater shares similarities with the Bagdad and Kiggins signs, but the Hollywood's sign was designed in the 1980's and meant to reflect the earlier traditions. The Hollywood Movie Theater's exuberant ornamentation is barely recognizable as art deco, though some have referred to the style as rococo art deco (King 2001). Within the theater, the rococo elements are tamer, and the more conventional deco features are prominent. The theater has thick red drapery which partly covers original art deco designs and murals.

Portland's Laurelhurst Theater also exhibits art deco elements and the resemblance to the Kiggins is rather clear. The Laurelhurst is an art deco theater that has occupied its spot on North Burnside Street for nearly 90 years (Beck 2011).

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A key design feature which ties these theaters together, and provides a good measure for the Kiggins is the use of a prominent, stylized marquee. The marquee for the Kiggins defines the look of Main Street for many blocks. In many ways, it is a symbol of downtown Vancouver, and perhaps the Southwest Washington region as well. Deco-influenced theaters feature a vertical marquee, expressing a strong architectural intent atop a rectilinear sign that allows for the posting of movie titles. The same general sign form can be found in many examples of movie houses from the 30's. In addition to the local theaters discussed herein, and the other theaters that Hilborn designed for the region, this type of marquee is evident nation-wide. Many historic theaters have a similar marquee, including the Illinois Theater in Macomb Illinois, the Babcock Theater in Billings Montana, the Orpheum Theater in Madison Wisconsin, the Washoe Theater in Anaconda Montana, the Fort Theatre in Kearney Nebraska, and the Ambler Theater in Ambler Pennsylvania. These theaters also have bright light arrays, frequently using neon, under the signs - making for a grand entrance into the theaters and helping to define the outdoor space, differentiate it from the rest of downtown, and create a glow of urban excitement.

In all of Portland, the Charles F. Berg Building, at 611 Broadway is the most remarkably fine example of art deco ornamentation, with a front façade of gold and black designs and panels of cream and dark aquamarine. Similar colors on cast bands within the Kiggins Theater speak to the embrace of lush gold and rich jewel tones. The Charles F. Berg building, however, actually has 18 karat gold in the paint (King 2001). The front façade was redesigned in 1930, though the building had been built in 1902. It was the 1930 design which so exemplifies art deco.

The Kiggins Theater also provides some of the region's best examples of streamlined moderne design. For example, the rounded corners with bands of modern lines running around them is a key to the early modern movement and the embrace of concrete which is so important with the Kiggins. In Portland, similarly rounded corners can be seen in the Coca-Cola Syrup Factory and the Arnerich, Massena, and Associates Building on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. For the Coca Cola Syrup Factory, architect James M. Shelton, was inspired by the rounded lines of the 7-Up Bottling Building being built in northeast Portland in the same year, 1941 (King 2001). The second floor of the building also towers vertically with lines and massing running upward in a characteristic Moderne manner. These elements are traditional in art deco design and critical to streamlined moderne design. The Arnerich, Massena, and Associates Building, by F.M. Stokes, was built in the same year as the Kiggins Theater (King 2001). It has a central tower with vertical accents and a sense of composite massing. Though not a large building, the tower is designed as if it were a skyscraper with staggered massing above the first floor. Unlike somewhat similar examples of art deco design, this building provides a clear representation of streamlined moderne design as it lacks any ornamentation other than the strong vertical lines and massing.

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Kiggins Theater

On April 24th, 1936, the first night of the Theaters operation, there were elaborate ceremonies; the star spangled banner was played; and a new, color cartoon named *Let It Be Me* was also played. The *Columbian* dedicated many pages to the opening ceremonies and construction methods, referring to the theater as "latest exposition of streamlining in architecture." There were numerous floral displays around the theater donated by local merchants and area businesses. The first night was sold out and the theater was at capacity. Opening remarks were provided by John Kiggins, and the Mayor at the time C.A. Pender, and Herbert J. Campbell (*Columbian* 1936b). Claudette Colbert starred in the first movie titled "She Married Her Boss." The film starred Colbert, Melvin Douglas, and Michael Bartlett. Though there was a discount for the first night, thereafter tickets cost adults 28 cents plus 2 cents in tax. Children paid 10 cents plus one cent in tax (*Columbian* 1936).

The *Columbian* praised the innovative use of concrete, the sign, and the interior, stating that the interior "presents a clear illustration of modern decorating trends... pile carpeting, uniform design and color throughout the building, and painted walls and ceiling that though modernistic are reminiscent of Aztec or Navajo art. The Vancouver Sign Company won 3,000 dollar contract for the neon work in marquee outside the theater. In 1959 the signage below the marquee was redesigned and reconstructed converting to the current triangular design. The *Columbian* spoke of how the original sign hung from a cantilever beam showing no visible means of support to the average viewer. (*Columbian* 1936a).

The new Kiggins Theater was unique both in its design and in its use of materials. The April 24th 1936 *Columbian* Newspaper reported 5,000 sacks of cement were used to build the solid concrete walls of the theater. The walls were reinforced with steel. Monolith Cement and Copeland Lumber Yard worked together on the construction of the building. John Kiggins served as the project manager. Central Wood Products located at Mill Plain Boulevard (15th) and Main Street made the concrete molds from wood and made mahogany trim and doors for the interior of the building. Over 100,000 board feet of wood from the Dubois mill in Vancouver were used for the structure. Air conditioning and heat ducts are constructed by Harvey's Tin Shop in Vancouver, using over 6 tons of iron sheet. The work by the Tin Shop was led by Harvey Tyrell. Plaster molds were used extensively throughout the building's interior, providing rounded

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corners and scrolling accents. The molds were made by V.J. Schneider of the Columbia Feed and Fuel Company (Columbian 1936a).

Murals were painted by hand on the lobby ceiling and walls. The Charles Amman Company hired renowned artist R. B. Robert to lead the painting project. Roberts was a member of the British Artist Society and had recently completed a multi-year project within England's Windsor Castle. None of the murals are visible now, having been painted over after suffering water damage resulting from a leaking roof. Also, no photographs have been found that show the murals. The Columbian reported that the "murals" were mostly architectural, emphasizing features of the building's unique interior. Only in the central corridor of the lobby did one of the mural panels provide a pictorial representation (Columbian 1936a).

During World War II, the theater was well-patronized as Vancouver's population greatly increased with the arrival of many individuals to work in the shipyards and other industries. Following the war and the passing of John Kiggins in 1941, the theater changed little until new management, in 1958, took over operations from the original Evergreen Amusement Corporation (Polk 1938). Soon after that time new owners updated the concessions area facilities and changed the original rectangular sign with the current triangular sign (Chapman and O'Brien 2004).

After the war, urban renewal in the 1950s changed the face of Vancouver. Neighborhood housing was replaced with commercial development, while modern residential growth occurred to the north and northeast of the city core (Van Arsdol 1986). In 1961, an urban renewal project covering a total of 28 city blocks in the downtown area removed or altered many 19th and early 20th century buildings. In the 1970s the downtown area lost business from competition by shopping malls at Jantzen Beach in Portland and the Vancouver Mall (Chapman and Wilson 2006). The Kiggins Theater suffered from trend toward suburban shopping and living and also by the development of private entertainment. In 1953, Portland's first television station (KPTV) started operations. And by 1956 residents in Vancouver could receive broadcasts from NBC, CBS, and ABC (Gregg 2006). During this time when the television was overtaking public entertainment venues, the Kiggins closed numerous times. The theater would close at the end of June, and reopen when the schools reopened. The theater was also closed in 1955 and the fate of the business and building were uncertain. (Gregg 2006).

The Adamson Theaters management company took over operations of the Kiggins and other theaters in Vancouver. The company already operated many theaters in Portland. Adamson management selected family-oriented films from Disney and other production companies. And the firm has its first run movies start at the nearby Broadway Theater (Gregg 2006).

In the 1980's the theater fell into disuse and was temporarily converted to a church, providing services for youth and others. Marantha Evangelical Church had programs which included live shows and live music (Gregg 2006). In a few years it reopened as a movie cinema showing mostly second-run films. The Broadway

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Theater was demolished in 1982 enabling the Kiggins to capture its patrons. But in 1997, the Theater closed again (Gregg 2006).

Chuck Nakvasil engaged the owner at that time Gary Hubbard, and started plans for a restoration and reopening. They had soon managed to “re-create the theatre’s 1936 ambiance. Surfaces were returned to their original colors. Furnishings were cleaned and renewed. Delicate glass fixtures were carefully washed and replaced” (Gregg 2006). Neon in the marquee was also repaired and returned to its original glory. Other upgrades were less historically appropriate, but much needed for the viability of the Theater as a business. There was the introduction of a Dolby Sound system, and other changes to projection equipment. The original seats were removed and replaced. The marquee was painted bright red at this time.

The small businesses occupying the storefront spaces have also changed over time. The following provides an listing of the small businesses which occupied the buildings spaces. The following data are based on Polk Directories for Vancouver.

The building is now occupied by Moxie Salon in the two far-north bays. This space had been combined many years ago and was occupied for many years by Main Street Vision. The Vision clinic modified the space, constructing many non-load bearing walls to separate the large area into small rooms. Before opening as the salon, the space was slightly altered again. The next space to the south is currently occupied by Angst Gallery, which opened in 2009. This space was occupied by the Christian Science Reading Room from 1983 to May of 2008 (Walt 2011). The most southerly space, adjacent to the Theater lobby is now occupied by the Niche Wine Bar. Before the opening of Niche in 2010, the space was occupied by Gallery 21. Much like with the vision clinic and reading room, the gallery had been a long-term tenant, occupying the same space from 1988 to 2010 (Steinbaugh 2011).

Year 1936

1011 Kiggins Theater

1013 Vacant

1015 -1017 Vacant

1019 John Allan B. Electrical Appliances

Year 1938

1011 Kiggins Theater

1013 Tower Top Shop Children’s Clothing / Nick’s Bus Service stage line

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1015 Miller's Beauty Shop

1017 Moore's Women's Clothing

1019 John Allan B. Electrical Appliances

Year 1940

1011 Kiggins Theater

1013 Tower Top Shop Children's Clothing / Nick's Bus Service stage line

1015 Miller's Beauty Shop

1017 Scott Williams E. Photography

1019 March Card and Gift Shop

Year 1946

1011 Kiggins Theater

1013 Tower Top Shop Children's Clothing / Nick's Bus Service stage line

Year 1946 continued

1015 Myerson Sol Shoes

1017 Gilbert, Robert A. Optometrist

1019 Vacant

Year 1952

1011 Kiggins Theater

1013 Van Duvn Chocolate Shops Inc.

1015 Vaughn Myrtle Mrs. women's clothing

1017 The Curtain Shop

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1019 Gilbert R.A. Optometrist

Year 1957

1011 Vacant

1013 Necchi-Elna Sewing Center

1015 Irene's Apparel women's clothing

1017 Randy's Jewelry

1019 Gilbert R.A. Optometrist

Year 1963

1011 Kiggins Theater

1013 Tower Top Shop Children's Clothing

1015 Household Finance Corp. of Washington Loans

1017 Ordway & Lee Jewelers

1019 Gilbert, Robert A. Optometrist

Year 1968

1011 Kiggins Theater

1013 Tower's Tot 'N Teen Clothing

1015 Household Finance Corp. Loans

1017 Ordway & Lee Jewelers

1019 Gilbert R.A. Optometrist

Year 1972

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1011 Kiggins Theater

1013 Tower Top Shop Children's Clothing

1015 Household Finance Corp. of Washington Loans

1017 Vacant

1019 Gilbert, Robert A. Optometrist

Year 1977

1011 Kiggins Theater

1013 Tower Top Shop Children's Clothing

1015 Household Finance Corp. of Washington Loans

1017 No listing

1019 Gilbert, Robert A. Optometrist

Year 1980

1011 Vacant

1013 Fepan Export Co. Stereo

1015 H H Finance

1019 Gilbert

Year 1986

1011 Kiggins Theater

1013 Country Style Gift Shop

1015 Christian Science Reading Room

1019 Schur and Associates Optometrist

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Year 1988

1011 Kiggins Theater

1013 Artist Gallery 21

1015 Christian Science Reading Room

1019 Schur and Associates Optometrist

Year 2011

1011 Kiggins Theater

1013 Niche Wine Bar

1015 Angst Gallery

1017 Salon Moxie

1019 Salon Moxie

Day Walter Hilborn

Day Walter Hilborn was born on February 1, 1897, on a farm in Michigan. His family moved many times during Hilborn's childhood, eventually settling in the Yakima, Washington area to be near an uncle. He attended grade school in Columbia City before his family moved to Fort Prairie in the Centralia area where he graduated from high school June 9, 1916. While in high school, Hilborn played basketball and developed an interest in theater arts. After graduating from high school, he joined the U.S. Army. He spent his service time on the Texas/Mexican border helping in the hunt for the Mexican Revolutionary General Pancho Villa. After his brief stint with the Army, Hilborn returned to Washington to settle in Pullman where he could attend Washington State College.

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Shortly after he began college, on May 17, 1917, World War I started. Hilborn was drafted back into the army and sent to Europe on one of the first ships to cross the Atlantic during WWI. While on his tour of duty in France, he served in a Whippet Tank and eventually became a sniper. While in France, Hilborn's natural interest in the arts became stronger. He admired the local architecture he came across in the countryside he travelled through, and sent many postcards home to his mother that depicted the local architecture, often adding his own comments and notes about the distinguishing details of these buildings.

After Hilborn's finished his tour of duty as a second lieutenant for the U.S. Army, he once again returned to Washington State College. He switched his studies to the Arts and Architecture School, and studied under architect, Rudolph Weaver. From his studies under Weaver, Hilborn developed a strong interest in the Beaux-Arts design. He was also a member of the Glee Club, played the piano, and belonged to social and civic groups at the college. Before graduating from Washington State with a degree in Architectural Engineering, Hilborn had the opportunity to design a fraternity house located on the college campus.

In 1927, Hilborn moved to Vancouver, Washington, where he began a real estate business under the name Kresky-Hilborn Real Estate Services. In 1928, Hilborn eloped with Dorothy Janet White to Seattle, returning to Vancouver where he designed and built their first home, a Craftsman. He remodeled homes for some of the elite residents of Vancouver during his early years in business, and maintained these relationships throughout his career which, in turn, created more design work for him in his later career.

Evidence that he was developing his architectural style towards the art deco and streamline moderne styles shows in one of his earliest designs, a "mixed-use" building, the Columbian/Storm King Ice Cream building, circa 1927. Other buildings/structures followed shortly thereafter, e.g. the CC Store in 1932; Kiggins Bowl in 1933; the Welcome to Vancouver memorial monument in 1933.

In 1936, Hilborn received his Washington structural engineer license, and in 1937 became an architect licensed in the states of Washington and Oregon. He designed and built his own office space, a small, colonial building on Evergreen Boulevard. The building was removed, in 2009, to provide a space for the new Vancouver Community Library.

The downtown area contains several buildings designed by Day Hilborn, arguably Vancouver's most notable architect. Hilborn practiced from 1927 to the early 1960s, designing over 380 buildings in Vancouver and many others in Washington and Oregon. Hilborn-designed buildings in the project area include the following. Those marked with an asterisk have been determined eligible for the NRHP.

Vancouver First Federal Savings & Loan (1961) at 1205 Broadway* (I620)

Arts building (1928) at 1104 Main Street (I609)

Luepke Florist (1945) at 1300 Washington Street* (I610)

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Kiggins Theater (1935-36, 1951) at 1011 Main Street* (I621)
First United Methodist Church (1950) at 401 E 33rd Street* (I611/612)
Spick-n-Span Drive-in (1949) at 1411 Washington Street* (I613)
Fort Motel (1959-60), now apartments, at 500 E 13th Street* (I608)
Hoffman's Men's Clothes Building (ca. 1945) at 812 Main Street (I614)
Kiggins Bowl (1933) at approximately 45th and Main Street* (I615)
Clark County Court House (1941) at 1200 Franklin Street* (I603)
Salvation Army Building (1952) at 311 W Evergreen Blvd (I616)
Welcome to Vancouver monument (1930) on N Main (I618)
Storm King Ice Cream Store (1927) at 102 E Evergreen Blvd (I606/607)
Shumway Junior High School (1929) at 3101 Main Street (I617)

Other Hilborn Designed Theaters:

Hilborn designed a number of theaters in addition to the theater he designed for John P. Kiggins. Hilborn's other theater projects include the following. Many share design treatments and elements with the Kiggins Theater. There are many similarities between the Kiggins, Eltryum, and Cameo theaters.

Aumon Theater in Canby OR
Cameo Theater (1930) in Newberg, Oregon
Eltryum Theater (1940) in Baker City, Oregon
Kelso Theater, currently Kelso Theater Pub (1937) in Kelso, Washington
Roxy Theater, currently Family Cinemas (1932) in Tigard, Oregon
Odem Drive-in Theater in Redmond, Oregon
Star Theater (demolished) in Goldendale, Washington
Sellwood Theater in Portland, Oregon
Liberty Theater in Longview, Washington

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Mayor John P. Kiggins

The early 20th Century history in Vancouver was significantly shaped by John P. Kiggins. Through many development projects and many terms as Mayor, he left a legacy which is still evident today. The Columbian newspaper reported him to be “One of the County’s most durable and dynamic politicians on the 1900’s.” (Columbian, 1999).

John Kiggins was born October 3, 1868; and died May 21, 1941. Born in Nashville TN, and raised in Washington D.C. Kiggins moved to Vancouver in 1892. He served at Fort Vancouver and was Mayor many different times from 1909 to 1939. Kiggins terms as Mayor included: 1908 to 1911, 1920 to 1925, 1927 to 1935, and 1937 to 1939.

Kiggins worked as a successful contractor, becoming familiar with major downtown property owners and decision makers. His early projects include the development on the west side of Main Street from 8th to 9th. The 1927, Castle Theater was also a Kiggins project. It was located at 10th or Evergreen and Main Street. The theater was closed in the 1960’s.

The Kiggins House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1995. The house retains a high degree of architectural integrity. It is two and a half stories with Craftsman styling, narrow wooden bevel siding, a painted metal tile roof and a front gable with Tudor false half-timbering set in stucco. In 2008, the home was moved from its original location at 411 E. Evergreen Boulevard to its current location at 2404 H Street.
