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ILLUSION THEATRES OF ORHEI IN THE BEGINNING OF XX CENTURY. HISTORY OF THEIR CONSTRUCTION AND THE LEGISLATION IN THE FIELD OF CINEMATOGRAPHY



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Illusion Theatres of Orhei in the Beginning of XX Century.
History of their Construction and the Legislation in the Field of Cinematography

Abstract. Starting in 1910, the illusion theaters and other performance buildings appeared in Bessarabia, which later became quite widespread in all provinces. The National Archive Agency holds some documents on the consideration of the inquiry of the Orhei townspeople Shlema Gurevich and Froim Pagis for permission to open the first cinema in the center of Orhei town at the end of 1910. This cinema worked successfully in that town for about a half of year. However, on May 12, 1911, the so-called normal rules on cinematography No. 688 were adopted, also published in the Bessarabian Provincial Bulletin No. 74 of July 18 (31), 1912. The illusion theater of Pagis and Gurevich did not meet all the new standards. Despite anonymous complaints to the Bessarabian governor, in May 1913 a new illusion theater opened in Orhei, owned by Shlema Tomashin. He was allowed to hold theatrical and concert evenings in his own cinema. The National Archive Agency has preserved the projects and plans of the first illusion theatres in Orhei.

Keywords: illusion theatres, Orhei, cinematography, construction, projects, normal rules, archival documents.

Teatrele de iluzie din Orhei la începutul secolului XX.
Istoria construcției lor și legislația în domeniul cinematografiei

Rezumat. Începând din 1910, în Basarabia a apărut teatrul de iluzii și alte clădiri de spectacol, care ulterior au devenit destul de răspândite în toate provinciile. Agenția Națională de Arhivă deține câteva documente privind luarea în considerare a anchetei orheienilor Shlema Gurevich și Froim Pagis pentru permisiunea de a deschide primul cinematograf în centrul orașului Orhei la sfârșitul anului 1910. Acest cinematograf a funcționat cu succes în acest oraș timp de aproximativ o jumătate de an. Totuși, la 12 mai 1911, au fost adoptate așa-zisele reguli normale ale cinematografiei nr. 688, publicate tot în Buletinul Provincial al Basarabiei nr. 74 din 18 iulie (31) 1912. Teatrul de iluzii al lui Pagis și Gurevich nu a îndeplinit toate standardele noi. În ciuda plângerilor anonime adresate guvernatorului Basarabiei, în mai 1913 s-a deschis la Orhei un nou teatru de iluzii, deținut de Shlema Tomashin. I s-a permis să organizeze seri de teatru și concerte în propriul său cinematograf. Agenția Națională de Arhivă a păstrat proiectele și planurile primelor teatre de iluzie din Orhei.

Cuvinte-cheie: teatrul de iluzii, Orhei, cinematografie, construcții, proiecte, reguli normale, documente de arhivă.

At the beginning of the 20th century, provincial circuses, zoos, illusions, traveling booths, and especially, starting in 1910, skating rings, illusion theaters and other entertainment buildings appeared, which became quite widespread in Bessarabia. In 1910, the Grodno townsman Gersh Polyakov and the Soroka townsman El Levin appealed to the Bessarabian Provincial Government with a request to allow them to build a summer sports pavilion in Chisinau. In 1912–1913, the wooden projection booth of the cinema was replaced with a stone one, and the owner of the skating illusion became the Chisinau townsman Iosif Korinberg. In addition to demonstrating paintings, he proposed holding vocal and musical evenings and dramatic performances there with the invitation of theater troupes, turning it into a real theater, later called Olympus. The Bessarabian Provincial Administration has preserved a file on the approval of the illusion theater in Bender, starting from 1910. The owner was a Bender resident, Klara (Kreintsa) Khatskelevich. The project for the construction of the building was approved according to the Protocol of the Construction Department No. 65 of August 19, 1916 [1, f. 126]. In September 1913, Gitman Freiberg, Yakov Khatskelevich and Iosif Khaimovich, who lived in the city of Izmail, applied for permission to open an illusionist's shop with an electric station in the house of the Tulchiyanov brothers [2, f. 13]. In 1917, Yankel Blumin wrote a petition to the Bessarabian governor to allow him to open an illusion theatre to show films approved by the censors in his own home in the Bricevo colony of the Soroca district [3, f. 1]. The National Archival Agency holds a file on the consideration of the petition of Orhei townspeople Shlema Gurevich and Froim Pagis for permission to open a cinema in Orhei in the period from November 10, 1900 to May 7, 1913 [4]. The plan, section and view of the house of Sh. Livshits in the city of Orhei, from the side of Gogolevskaya Street, adapted for the illusion (Fig. 2), as well as the plan for the installation of electric lighting for the Orhei theater of F. Pagis and Sh. Gurevich are kept in the file [4, f. 55-56]. According to the minutes of

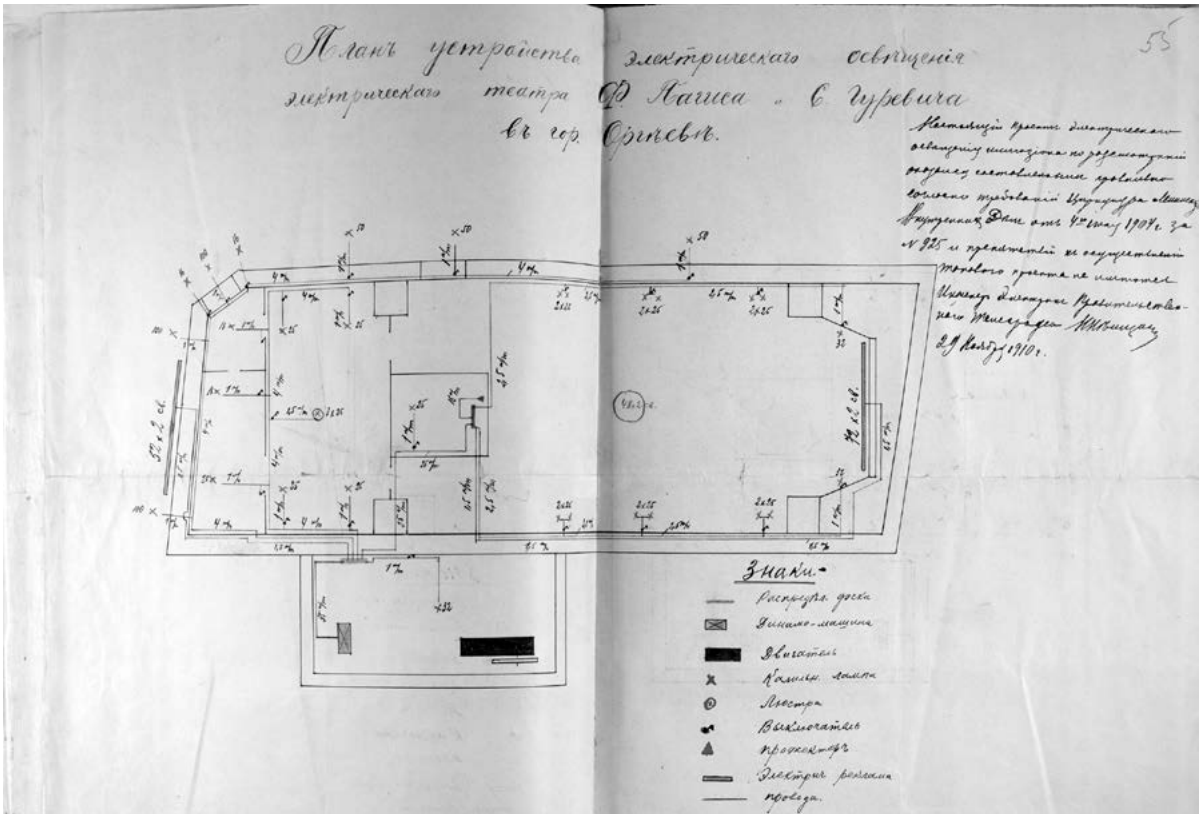


Fig. 1. Plan of the building of the electric illusion of F. Pagis and Sh. Gurevich in Orhei (ANA).

the Construction Department of the Bessarabian Provincial Government No. 127 of December 13, 1910 [4, f. 13], Orhei residents Froim Pagis and Shlema Gurevich filed a petition for approval of the presented plan of the building of the electric illusion (Fig. 1) on the corner of Gogolevskaya Street and Police Lane along with explanatory note.

In the explanatory note, [4, f. 1] to the plan of the main building with a diagram of the electric lighting wires and the extension of the engine room signed by F. Pagis and Sh. Gurevich, the entrepreneurs indicated that the main building was built of rubble stone, the thickness of the walls was 12 vershoks*, the ceiling beam was 6 vershoks. The room for the picture apparatus was made of boards, the height of which was 5 arshins** 12 vershoks. The roof was made of shingles. The sidewalk on the side of Gogolevskaya Street was 22 sazhens*** long, on the side of Police Lane 2 arshins.

On the southern side it borders on the stone barn of Srul Krasny. The Electric theater of F. Pagis and S. Gurevich was planned to be 135 fathoms from the nearest Armenian-Gregorian church and 56 fathoms from the building of the Orhei prison. At the same time, Gogolevskaya Street is 7 fathoms wide, Police Lane is 6 fathoms, Nikolaevskaya Street is 10 fathoms wide. The extension for the engine room is made of rubble stone with walls 8 vershoks thick, height – 4.5 arshins, the roof is iron. In general, the Construction Department decided to approve this plan and explanatory note, with the exception of the need to add two doors to the building. In December 1910, the Ogeevsky district police officer presented an inspection report on this illusion, according to which "in terms of fire, the building does not pose a danger, and its location near the Police Department, where the fire brigade is located, guarantees the safety of the building and the public from danger" [4, f. 14], in case of a possible fire. Orhei City Simplified Administration in report No. 2477 of December 3, 1910, notified that there were no obstacles to issuing a permit to open an

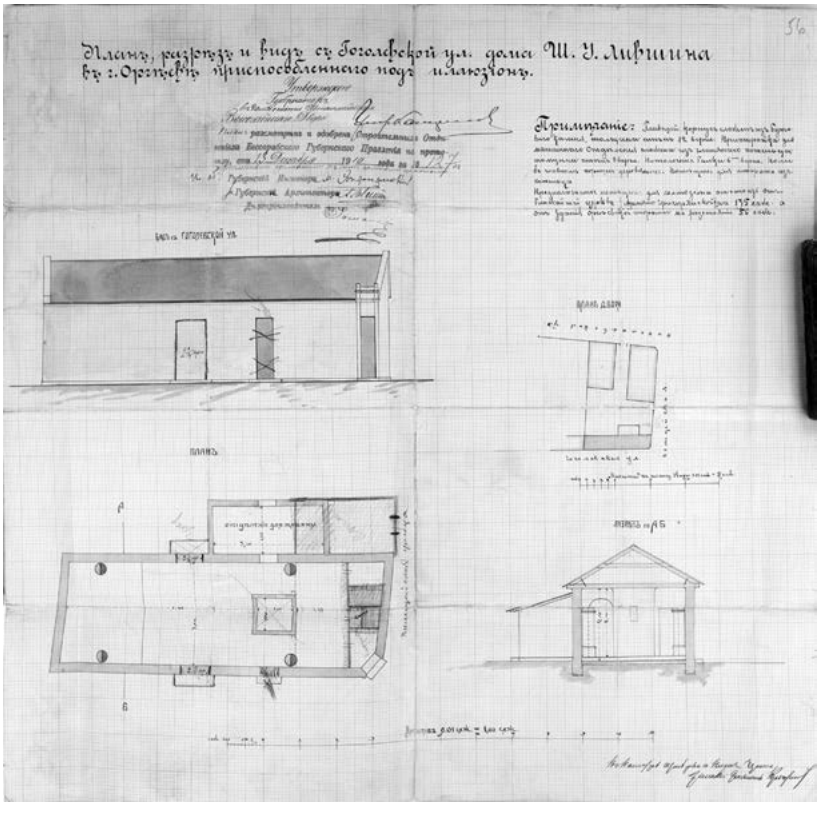


Fig. 2. Plan, section and view of the house of Sh. Livshits in the town of Orhei, from the side of Gogolevskaya Street, adapted for the illusion (ANA).

illusion theater to Froim Pagis and Shlema Gurevich in a building that, according to documents, belonged to Shmul Livshin. A stone building, covered with iron for an illusion theater in the city of Orhei on a square was owned by Yakov Borisovich Blushtein. On December 18, 1910, a resolution was adopted by the Construction Department, signed by the acting provincial engineer Mikhail Serotsinsky on permission to open an illusion theater after the entrepreneurs make 2 new doors, 2 arshins each, and close the old door located opposite the equipment room. According to the minutes of the Construction Department No. 38 of March 4, 1912, the owners of the illusion theater applied "for permission to build a stone building covered with iron for the illusion theater in the city of Orhei, on Gogolevskaya Street, on the square belonging to Yakov Borisovich Blushtein, and presented two copies of the construction project and the plan of the estate" [4, f. 27]. But according to the so-called "normal" rules for opening a cinema, around the illusion theaters to the neighboring buildings, and on four sides, there must be at least 5 sazhens, the submitted project for the construction of the illusion theater of Pagis and Gurevich was left without approval, since it did not comply with these standards. At the same time, the Orhei merchant Shmul Livshits, in whose house the first theater-illusion of Pagis and Gurevich was located, himself wrote a letter to the Provincial Board with a request to allow him to become the owner of the theater, due to the fact that the lease term of the former entrepreneurs was ending and he no longer wanted to rent them his house for the work of the cinema. But Pagis and Gurevich had received permission to open the illusion theater at the end of 1910 before the normal rules on cinematography No. 688 of May 12, 1911, were adopted. And the illusion theater that belonged to them did not have a 5-fathom distance between the neighboring buildings surrounding it and was adjacent to a shingled shed on one side, and on the other side it was adjacent to an electric station, which was located in a yard littered with boxes and barrels, which, of course, was a fire hazard. In addition, the cinema hall had a 1.5-arshin step. There were no windows, and the building lacked the required 4 doors, 2 of which were tightly closed. The chairs were not attached to the floor, and there were not enough passages at the exit. The equipment room was behind a wooden partition and other violations were evident, which after the publication of the rules on the maintenance of cinematography were already the basic documents for issuing permission did not meet the current standards. Pagis and Gurevich, when they were questioned by the police chief, answered that they were given permission before the so-called "normal" rules on cinematography were published, so they could not be applied to them then, namely in December 1910. In another archival case on the development of a draft resolution on the arrangement and maintenance of cinemas in the city of Orhei, from March 29, 1912 to August 8, 1913, the draft rules are attached [5]. At the meeting of Orhei city commissioners, a draft of mandatory regulations on the construction and maintenance of theaters and cinemas in Orhei was adopted, drawn up in accordance with the requirement of the Bessarabian Provincial Government of June 21, 1911, No. 109. In accordance with these standards and the Construction Regulations, cinema theaters could only be built in stone buildings on the first floor, and this was a room that was not suitable for trade or housing. It was forbidden to build cinemas in basements, in which the floor level was lower than the surface of the adjacent street or yard. And one more important condition, which we have already discussed, the cinema building had to have a free distance of at least 5 sazhens on all sides, a yard area of about 20 sazhens and firewalls from the side of neighboring buildings. As for the arrangement of entrances and exits, the staircases leading to cinema theaters had to be made of fireproof material, have flights of double arrangement with handrails on both sides and be illuminated by windows facing the outside of the building. The width of the flight and the turning platforms had to be "not less than 1 arshin 12 vershoks" [5, f. 2].

Any staircase of this size is sufficient for a capacity of 150 spectators. Each theater must have at least 2 exits and the doors must open in the direction of the exits. No thresholds or adjacent steps were allowed in the aisles and at the exits.

With regard to the arrangement of the hall and other rooms, it was not allowed to board up the windows with shields, shutters and bars. Doors could not be hung with anything, except for the use of curtains to darken the hall. Rows of chairs or spectator seats had to be screwed to the floor and connected to each other, between two aisles in a row there had to be 12 seats and no more than 6 seats – between the side wall and the nearest aisle. The distances between the aisles, the distance between the rows were important, the vestibules in stone buildings had to be "covered with vaults and have fireproof floors" [2, f. 13]. Separately, the rules were considered regarding heating; ventilation; fire safety, when "fire hydrants in such a number and location that each place in the room could be flooded with a stream of water"; the capacity of theaters for the public at the rate of 8 people per square fathom, a separate room was supposed for outerwear. The lighting of the cinema hall should be electric or candles in lanterns were used, and the lighting devices had to be above the floor at a distance of 3 arshins, etc. All exits to the hall had to have "prominently visible signs with the inscription in large letters «exit» and lanterns to illuminate the exits along their entire length" [5, f. 3 v.]. Separate mandatory standards concerned the design and maintenance of the camera apparatus, the use of film projection equipment, and the storage of celluloid film used for cinematography. All these rules were published in the Bessarabian Provincial Gazette No. 74 of July 18 (31), 1912. From correspondence with the Orhei County Police Department regarding the issuance of a permit to Orhei resident Sh. F. Tomashin for the construction of an urban illusion in the period from November 28, 1911 to May 24, 1914 [6]. We learn that on November 26, 1911, Orhei resident Shlema Tomashin appeals to the Bessarabian Provincial Government with a request to build a stone theater and illusion building, covered with iron, on his own yard in the city of Orhei, on Gogolevskaya Street, enclosing a schematic plan of the proposed building and to allow him to "begin drawing up a detailed project necessary for permission to open an illusion theater" [6, f. 1], which was supposed to be built, according to the attached schematic plan [6, f. 22].

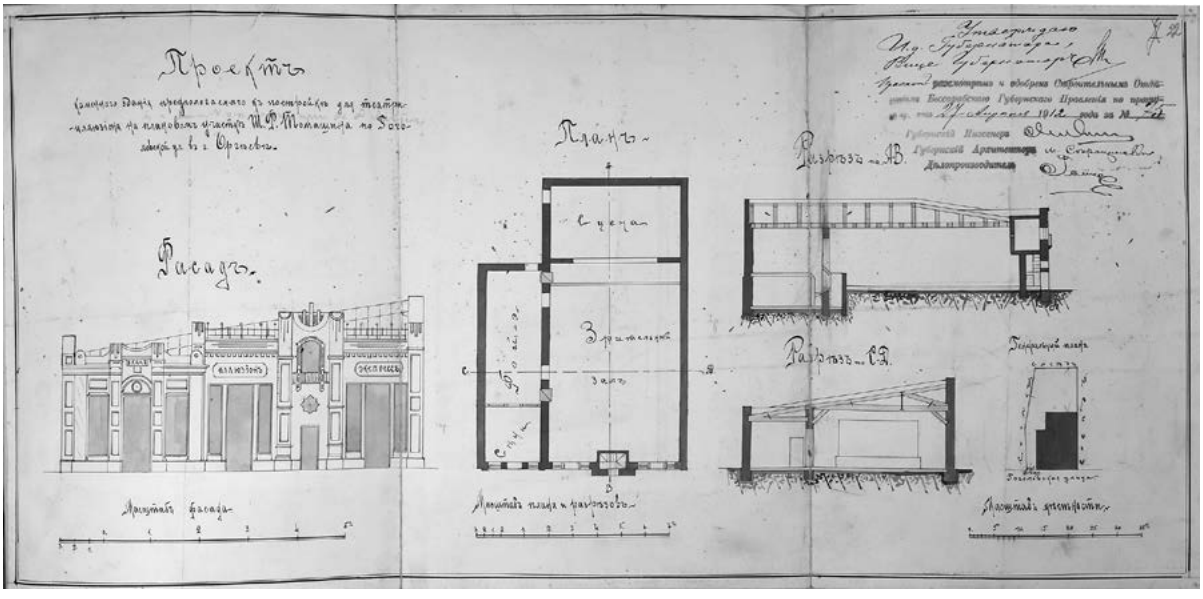
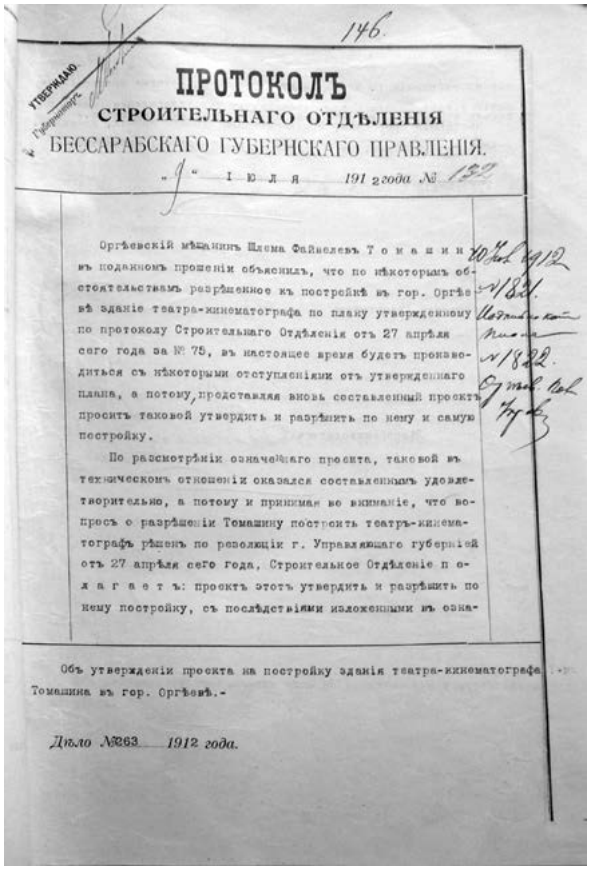


Fig. 3. Project for the construction of a stone building for an illusion theater (ANA) in the courtyard of Shlema Tomashin in Orhei.

A year later, an anonymous, unsigned statement was sent to the Governor of the Bessarabian province, stating that the Jew Tomashin was building a cinema building in Orhei among residential buildings and that it would pose a fire hazard to their homes. In report No. 1554 of May 13, 1912, the Orhei district police officer, carrying out the assignment on this statement, inspected the site designated for the construction of the illusion theater and found nothing special that would impede this construction. Shops, workshops, and sheds were located at a distance of 12 sazhens. The only obstacle could have been the Sherman building, bordering on his courtyard, but next to it there was a passage from Gogolevskaya Street, 6 arshins wide. Therefore, the Orhei police chief wrote in his report that "the circumstances stated in the denunciation do not correspond to reality. For example, although there is a corn storage shed in Tomashin's yard, firstly, it is located 4-5 sazhens away from the proposed building of the illusionist, and secondly, according to Tomashin's statement, this shed will be immediately demolished by him as soon as he is allowed to build the building of the illusionist". The police officer also confirmed that Tomashin's firewood storage shed is located at a distance of more than 10 sazhens, and the furniture storage shed and other buildings are not on Gogolevskaya Street, but on the opposite Bessarabskaya Street. The policeman could not find the author of the anonymous message, but assumed that "this could have been written by the owners of the existing illusionist in Orhei, Pagis or Gurevich, for whom the new competitor is undesirable" [6, f. 25]. It is known that according to the permission of the Governor of the Province dated April 27, 1912, a resident of the city of Orhei, Shlema Tomashin, was "permitted to build in the city of Orhei, on the site indicated on the approved project, a building for an illusion theater", but in order for this building not to be opened for operation until receiving special permission, Tomashin had to provide: "a police certificate that the building was built according to the approved plan and the entrance to the courtyard will be no less than 6 ½ arshins and 2) if the illusion theater will be illuminated by electric light, then also present a technical wiring plan with an explanatory note to it" [6, f. 26]. From the resolution on the construction of this building we learn that the construction of the illusion theater will not pose a danger to neighbor Sherman, since on the side of his property there will be a firewall, which is allowed in place of the distance of 5 fathoms required by the standards, "and that in all other respects the building of the illusion theater of Tomashin will meet its purpose, and that the construction of this building is permitted in accordance with the law by the resolution of the gentleman governor of the province dated April 27, 1912" [6, f. 26]. Thus, the anonymous author's letter about the alleged non-compliance with the



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УТВЕРЖДАЮ

ПРОТОКОЛЪ
СТРОИТЕЛЬНАГО ОТДѢЛЕНІЯ
БЕССАРАБСКАГО ГУБЕРНСКАГО ПРАВЛЕНІЯ.
«9» ІЮЛЯ 1912 года № 132

Оргѣевскій мѣщанинъ Шлема Файвелевъ Томашинъ въ поданномъ прошеніи объяснилъ, что по нѣкоторымъ обстоятельствамъ разрѣшенное къ постройкѣ въ гор. Оргѣевѣ зданіе театра-кинематографа по плану утвержденному по протоколу Строительнаго Отдѣленія отъ 27 апрѣля сего года за № 75, въ настоящее время будетъ производиться съ нѣкоторыми отступленіями отъ утвержденнаго плана, а потому, представляя вновь составленный проектъ проситъ таковой утвердить и разрѣшить по нему и самую постройку.

По разсмотрѣніи означеннаго проекта, таковой въ техническомъ отношеніи оказался составленнымъ удовлетворительно, а потому и принимая во вниманіе, что вопросъ о разрѣшеніи Томашину построить театръ-кинематографъ рѣшенъ по резолюціи г. Управляющаго губерніей отъ 27 апрѣля сего года, Строительное Отдѣленіе полагаетъ: проектъ этотъ утвердить и разрѣшить по нему постройку, съ послѣдствіями изложенными въ озна-

Объ утвержденіи проекта на постройку зданія театра-кинематографа Томашина въ гор. Оргѣевѣ.-

Дѣло №263 1912 года.

Fig. 4. Protocol of the Construction Department of the Bessarabian Provincial Government No. 75 of April 24, 1912 on the approval of the project for the construction of the building of the theater-illusion of Sh. Tomashin in Orhei (ANA).

norms and rules during the construction of the Tomashin illusion theatre was found to be unfounded. According to the Protocol of the Construction Department of the Bessarabian Provincial Government No. 75 of April 24, 1912 [6, f. 26] (Fig. 4), Shlema Tomashin presented to the Construction Department for approval a project with a copy for the construction of a stone building for an illusion theatre in the city of Orhei in his courtyard (Fig. 3).

"Upon examination of the said project, it turned out to be technically satisfactory" [6, f. 26], and therefore it was decided to approve it. On May 8, 1913, the Construction Department of the Bessarabian Provincial Government presented Shlema Tomashin with a certificate "on permission to open theater and concert evenings in his illusion in the city of Orhei" [7, f. 87].

References:

1. ANA, F. 6, inv.4, d. 1644, p. 126.
2. ANA, F. 6, inv.4, d. 1930, f. 13.
3. ANA, F. 6, inv.4, d. 2131, f. 1.
4. ANA, F. 6, inv.4, d.762.
5. ANA, F. 9. inv. 1, d. 2578.
6. ANA, F. 6. inv. 4, d. 1718.
7. ANA, f. 6. inv. 4, d. 1884, f. 87.

* 1 vershok = 0.044 m
** 1 arshin = 0.7 m
*** 1 fathom = 2.13 m