

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 Carver Theater

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 2101 Orleans Avenue NA not for publication

city or town New Orleans NA vicinity

state Louisiana code LA county Orleans code 071 zip code 70116

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Geri Hobdy
Signature of certifying official/Title Geri Hobdy
LA SHPO, Department of Culture, Recreation & Tourism

July 14, 1998
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- ☒ entered in the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
☐ determined eligible for the
National Register
 See continuation sheet.
☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register
☐ removed from the National
Register
☐ other (explain):

Edson H. Beall
Signature of Keeper

8-20-98
Date of Action

Carver Theater

Name of property

Orleans Parish, LA

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

☒ private
☐ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

☒ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

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

NA

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat. Recreation and Culture

Sub. Theater

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Cat. Health Care

Sub. Medical Offices

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Moderne

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Brick (veneer)

roof Metal

other

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

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CONTINUATION SHEET**Section 7 Page 1

The Carver Theater is a large brick veneer over concrete block cinema which opened in September 1950 as "an exclusively Negro" theater. It is located in a late nineteenth-early twentieth century neighborhood which was and is predominantly African-American. Directly across the street from the Carver is the Lafitte Housing Project (1941). The theater is a late but still convincing example of the Moderne style. Alterations have been confined principally to the interior. And, in any event, the Carver still easily conveys enough of its original appearance.

The building design has a very strong orientation to its prominent corner entrance at the intersection of Orleans Avenue and Johnson. The exterior uses superimposed masses and contrasting brick patterns to produce an energetic effect. The main side walls feature reddish brown brick laid with pronounced vertical grooves. These walls are partially superimposed on a taller corner section which features square beige brick panels on a brick background of the same color. The exterior culminates at the corner with a strongly vertical neon sign that extends well above the building. Originally crowned with a neon finial, the curving sign proclaims the theater's name. Immediately beneath the sign is a three-part faceted window that cuts the corner of the building. The corner entrance also retains its original marquee which has a slight geometrical build-up at the center. The roof is rather unusual, taking the form of a shallow vault.

Originally the theater had a free-standing ticket booth located on the exterior immediately below the middle of the marquee. Behind this were steps set at an angle leading to entrance doors (see attached diagram). The ticket booth has been incorporated into an enclosure which encompasses the stairs. (The stairs are still there; they are just no longer on the exterior.) A large "confectionary" was located on the Orleans Avenue elevation with its own door and a large window. The window has been covered and the door replaced. Above the confectionary are three relatively small windows which are original. Also surviving are a three-part window on the Orleans Avenue facade to display movie posters and a three-part corner display window below one end of the marquee. (Part of it is within the previously mentioned enclosure.)

The Carver closed circa 1980 and since that time some of the interior has been converted to offices. The back one-third to one-half of the lobby has been subdivided for offices, and offices occupy about the first third of the 1,050 seat auditorium. As can be seen from the accompanying photo taken from the stage, the offices are quite small in comparison to the height of the auditorium. Also, almost all of the theater

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chairs have been removed. Despite these changes to the auditorium, it retains the bulk of its original character -- i.e., a large rectangular space with a stage on one end and a high vaulted ceiling. Surviving features on or off the lobby include the men's bathroom, the ladies' bathroom with an adjacent "powder room," a staircase with an adjacent curving wall, and the previously mentioned set of entrance steps set at an angle. As one walks down the steps to exit the theater, the terrazzo floor has a geometrical design that leads one away from the building.

Assessment of Integrity:

While there have been various changes, as noted above, the Carver easily retains enough of its original character-defining features for someone who attended the grand opening to recognize the theater today. On the interior, the office partitions can be easily knocked down, which is the intention of the current owner.

Carver Theater

Name of property

Orleans Parish, LA

County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" next to the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ **B** Property is 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" next to all that apply.)

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or a 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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Entertainment/Recreation

Ethnic Heritage/Black

Period of Significance

1950

Significant Dates

1950

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

NA

Cultural Affiliation

NA

Architect/Builder

Architect: Jack Corgan (Dallas)

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

NA

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository: _____

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CONTINUATION SHEET**Section 8 Page 1

The Carver Theater is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A because it represents an important phenomenon in the entertainment history of New Orleans' large African-American population -- the development of theaters in the city's black neighborhoods. These entertainment meccas were of real and symbolic value in the segregated world of separate but typically unequal. Named for the famed black scientist and educator, George Washington Carver, the theater meets the Register's "exceptional significance" requirement for less than fifty year old properties because its construction in 1950 was a watershed in the development of first-rate, state-of-the-art theaters for blacks in New Orleans. (Note: Much of the information for this statement of significance came from an interview with long-time New Orleans theater owner and operator, Rene Brunet. Born in 1921, Mr. Brunet has been actively involved in the movie theater business in New Orleans from the 1930s through today.)

When the Carver opened on September 29, 1950, it was one of several black neighborhood theaters in New Orleans. Virtually all were built by white businessmen who saw an economic opportunity. In short, wherever there was a black neighborhood in the city, some enterprising businessman built a theater. This was part of the overall phenomenon of neighborhood theaters, whether black or white. In addition to neighborhood cinemas, there were a handful of "first-run" major movie houses in the CBD. But obviously, an African-American would have preferred his welcoming neighborhood theater over the "colored" balcony of Loew's State on Canal Street, for example. As historians of segregation have observed, blacks daily had to deal with various indignities and humiliation -- from seats at the back of the bus, to separate drinking fountains, to separate theater entrances and seats in the balcony. By its very nature, segregation implied inferiority.

Particularly helpful in placing the Carver in its historic context is the reaction of New Orleans' black newspaper, *The Louisiana Weekly*, to the permanent closure of the Loew's State balcony to blacks in September 1950 (almost the same day the Carver opened). The headline of the September 30 issue reads "Loew's New Policy Closes Balcony to Negro Patrons." The article began: "Negro patrons won't have to bother about climbing three flights of stairs any more at the Loew's State Theater." The reporter went on to note that the theater in the past had been picketed in an effort to force management to hire "a Negro ticket taker at the Rampart street entrance to the colored balcony" and that the balcony's patrons had complained of "rickety stairways" and mice. Then in an October 7 editorial the paper observed that

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the theater management had "so long insulted our group with inferior accommodations and general indifference to the patron's comfort."

Imagine how those same patrons would have felt about New Orleans' new state-of-the-art theater, the Carver, built "exclusively for Negroes" at a cost of \$300,000, and opening the same week the Loew's balcony closure made front page news. When the Carver opened, it was one of several black neighborhood theaters scattered across the city. When asked if it was any different from the others, Rene Brunet responded with a resounding yes. To quote him, the Carver was "head and shoulders" above the rest. Quite simply, it was the "best 'colored' theater in New Orleans and perhaps the entire South" -- "as good or better than any white theater in town." In contrast to the older black theaters which had "tired" seats and out-of-date equipment, the Carver had the latest in everything -- state-of-the-art projection and sound equipment, air-conditioning, concessions, etc.

The Carver's early ads emphasized this theme as well as certain amenities offered at the theater. A large ad announcing the grand opening featured a picture of the theater with the claim "America's finest theater for colored patrons only." Amenities included a "beautiful concession stand" and "a spacious powder room and lounge with a maid in attendance at all times for the comfort of the ladies." Another grand opening ad proclaimed that "this new super de luxe theater will offer to its patrons," among other items, "100% protection in its modern completely fireproof building," "the latest in architectural designs and comfort," and "the finest and newest projection and sound equipment available."

The theater became known to a wider audience with its inclusion in a nationally distributed trade publication, *1950-51 Theatre Catalog*. In a three-page illustrated article titled "A Modern All-Negro Theatre," the Carver was held up as an example to emulate in what the author considered an underdeveloped field -- providing first-class movie theaters for blacks. Beginning with the premise that the theater industry "has until recently failed to recognize the prominent position of this group [blacks] from a potential patronage viewpoint," the author encouraged theater entrepreneurs to "make a more concentrated effort to attract a greater portion of these amusement funds." "They can do so by convincing the Negro that his patronage is as welcome as anyone else's and by seeing to it that houses in colored neighborhoods are just as finely appointed as other surrounding modern houses. The Negro patron, too, is entitled to as much for the ticket he buys."

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The remainder of the article described the Carver in considerable detail to show that it was "a noteworthy and commendable effort" in this regard. As the article subtitle noted, the Carver provided facilities of the "highest order." In addition to commenting upon its modernity and equipment, the article emphasized the overall quality of the theater's appointments and amenities: "A visitor entering the Carver can readily perceive how nearly \$300,000 was spent to construct and equip the building, for there is a note of luxurious elegance wherever one looks." "Marble partitions are to be found in each [bathroom], and a maid is always in attendance in the powder room." This "luxury" was contrasted with the "shabby and ill-kempt structures with poor pictures" one encountered too often in black theaters.

As the foregoing information amply demonstrates, when the Carver opened in September 1950, it was the "ultimate" all-black movie house. The neighborhood did not have a cinema at the time, and theater entrepreneur Jack A. Dicharry (who also owned the Lincoln) saw a good business opportunity. As the article in the *1950-51 Theatre Bulletin* observed, many of the theater's patrons were inhabitants of "an all-negro government housing project" located directly across the street. The project in question (Lafitte) contained about 1,000 units.

Today, the Carver is one of about six surviving black theaters in New Orleans. Regrettably, the Lincoln, the father of them all, has been demolished. None of the survivors are being used as cinemas. Two are churches and one is a pawn shop. While a portion of the Carver is currently being used for medical offices, plans are being formulated by the new owner, the UMOJA Institute of African-American Culture, Trade and Economic Development, Inc., to restore the building to its former glory and open it as a cultural/entertainment center.

Carver Theater

Name of property

Orleans Parish, LA

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than an acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

1 15 782100 3318520

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

___ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title National Register Staff

organization Division of Historic Preservation

date June 1998

street & number P.O. Box 44247

telephone (504) 342-8160

city or town Baton Rouge

state LA

zip code 70804

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name UMOJA Institute of African-American Culture, Trade and Economic Development, Inc.

street & number P. O. Box 770237

telephone (504) 821-5004

city or town New Orleans

state LA zip code 70116

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

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

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National Park Service

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CONTINUATION SHEET

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10 1

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Brunet, Rene. Phone interview on June 1, 1998. As noted in Part 8, Mr. Brunet is an authority on the old movie theaters of New Orleans, having been involved in the business since the 1930s.

"A Modern All-Negro Theatre." *1950-51 Theatre Catalog*. Copy in National Register file, Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation.

The Louisiana Weekly. September 23, September 30, October 7, 1950.

The Times Picayune, September 29, 1950.

Legal Property Description:

Square 268, Lots 1, 2, 10 (A & B), City of New Orleans, said parcel of land measuring 78 feet wide (along Orleans Ave.) by a depth of 155 feet along Johnston St.

Justification:

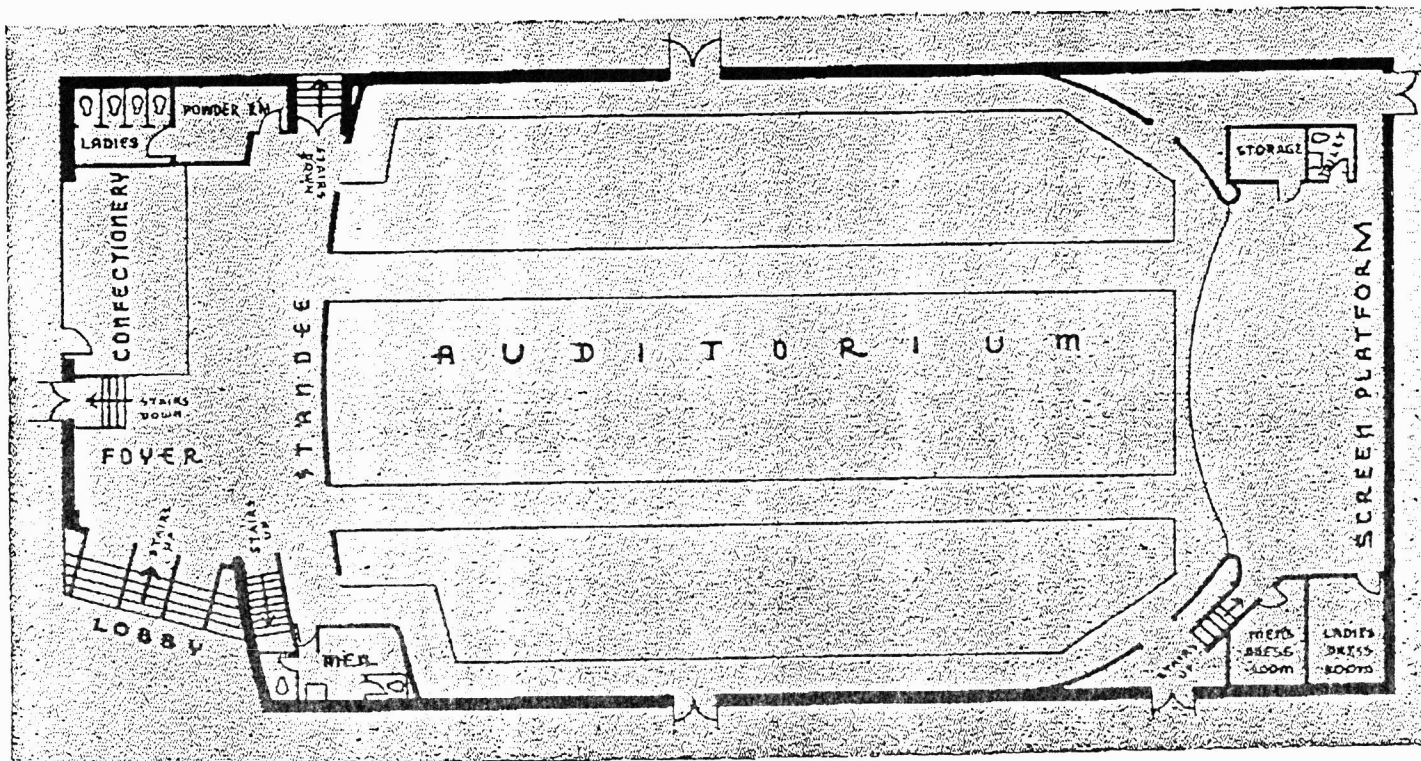
Boundaries follow property lines.

CARVER THEATER
ORLEANS PARISH, LA



FIRST LEVEL PLAN (below) shows the simplicity and the directness of the crowd controls. Taking full advantage of corner location for boxoffice and lobby, the foyer provides access to a large lobby shop that also serves passersby through its street entrance. There are dressing rooms for staff.

THE EXTERIOR (above) combines several shades of buff face brick, common brick and glazed tile laid in interesting panels and sections. The entrance steps are unfortunate but were necessary to gain elevation in a low area. Location of the extra profit lobby shop is an interesting feature.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Carver Theater
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: LOUISIANA, Orleans

DATE RECEIVED: 7/24/98 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 8/03/98
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 8/19/98 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 9/07/98
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 98001078

NOMINATOR: STATE

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

☒ ACCEPT ☐ RETURN ☐ REJECT 8-20-98 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in the
National Register

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N



Carver Theater
Orleans Parish, LA

Donna Fricker

May 1998

LA SHPO

Photo 1 of 5

North/NE




Carter Theater
Orleans Parish, LA
Donna Fricker

May 1998
LA SHPO

Photo 2 of 5
^{EAST}
Northeast



Carver Theater
Orleans Parish, LA
Donna Fricker
May 1998
LA SHPO
Photo 3 of 5
Steps leading into lobby

A black and white photograph of a clinic entrance. On the left, a reception counter with a glass window displays various items. The wall below the counter has text. To the right, a staircase with a white railing leads up. Further right, a series of white doors with glass panels lead outside, with exit signs above them. A person is partially visible on the far right. The floor is polished and reflective.

General Practice
Clinic
Family Medicine

Carver Theater
Orleans Parish, LA

Donna Fricker

May 1998

LA SHPO

Photo 4 of 5

lobby



Carver Theater

Orleans Parish, LA

~~Donna F. Cyres~~ Tyrone Cyres

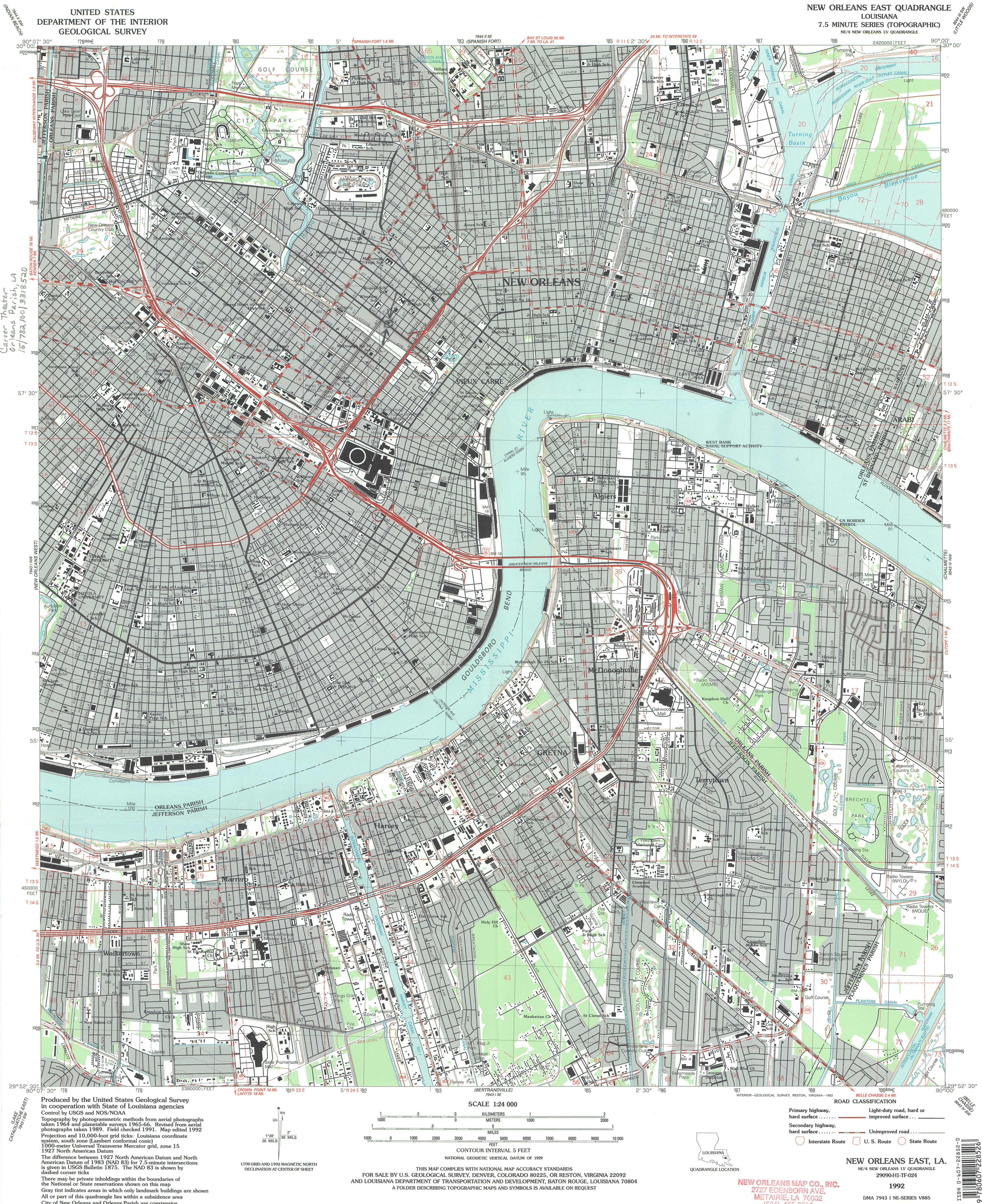
April 1998

POB 770237, New Orleans 70117

Photo 5 of 5

Auditorium - as seen from stage - looking
at medical office partitions

Note: This is a b+w copy of a color
photo taken using professional
lighting. A b+w original was
impossible given the darkness
of the space.



Carver Theater
Orleans Parish, LA
15/782,100/3318,520

Produced by the United States Geological Survey
in cooperation with State of Louisiana agencies
Control by USGS and NOS/NOAA
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs
taken 1964 and planetable surveys 1965-66. Revised from aerial
photographs taken 1989. Field checked 1991. Map edited 1992
Projection and 10,000-foot grid ticks: Louisiana coordinate
system, south zone (Lambert conformal conic)
1927 North American Datum
The difference between 1927 North American Datum and North
American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83) for 7.5-minute intersections
is given in USGS Bulletin 1875. The NAD 83 is shown by
dashed corner ticks
There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of
the National or State reservations shown on this map
Gray tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown
All or part of this quadrangle lies within a subsidence area
City of New Orleans and Orleans Parish are coextensive

Produced by the United States Geological Survey
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UTM GRID AND 1992 MAGNETIC NORTH
DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET

SCALE 1:24 000
1 000 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 5000 6000 7000 8000 9000 10 000
KILOMETERS
1 000 0 1000 2000 3000 4000 5000 6000 7000 8000 9000 10 000
MILES
CONTOUR INTERVAL 5 FEET
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
AND LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION AND DEVELOPMENT, BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA 70804
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

LOUISIANA
QUADRANGLE LOCATION

ROAD CLASSIFICATION
Primary highway, hard surface Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
Secondary highway, hard surface Unimproved road
Interstate Route U. S. Route State Route
NEW ORLEANS EAST, LA.
NE/4 NEW ORLEANS 15' QUADRANGLE
29090-HI-TF-024
1992
DMA 7943 1 NE-SERIES V885
ISBN 0-607-28452-0
9 780607 228520



KATHLEEN BABINEAUX BLANCO
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

STATE OF LOUISIANA
OFFICE OF THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR
Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism
OFFICE OF CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT
DIVISION OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION

PHILLIP J. JONES
SECRETARY

GERRI HOBODY
ASSISTANT SECRETARY

July 14, 1998

National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
Mail Stop 2280, Suite 400
1849 C Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Re: Carver Theater, Orleans Parish, Louisiana

To Whom It May Concern:

Enclosed please find a National Register form with supporting materials for the above referenced property. If there are any questions, please call me at 504-342-8160.

Sincerely,

Donna Fricker

Donna Fricker
National Register Coordinator

DF/df

Enclosure