

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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NOV 05 1979

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JAN 10 1980

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORMSEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME***New Amsterdam Theater Building*

HISTORIC

The New Amsterdam Theater, Rooftop Theater and Aerial Gardens

AND/OR COMMON

The New Amsterdam Building: New Amsterdam Theater, Rooftop Theater

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

214 West 42nd Street

CITY, TOWN

New York City

STATE

New York

VICINITY OF

CODE

10037

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

20

COUNTY

New York

CODE

061

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

___ DISTRICT

☒ BUILDING(S)

___ STRUCTURE

___ SITE

___ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

___ PUBLIC

☒ PRIVATE

___ BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

___ IN PROCESS

___ BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

☒ OCCUPIED

___ UNOCCUPIED

___ WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

☒ YES: RESTRICTED

___ YES: UNRESTRICTED

___ NO

PRESENT USE

___ AGRICULTURE

☒ COMMERCIAL

___ EDUCATIONAL

☒ ENTERTAINMENT

___ GOVERNMENT

___ INDUSTRIAL

___ MILITARY

___ MUSEUM

___ PARK

___ PRIVATE RESIDENCE

___ RELIGIOUS

___ SCIENTIFIC

___ TRANSPORTATION

___ OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Anfour Enterprises; Mark I. Finkelstein, Principal

STREET & NUMBER

214 West 42nd Street

CITY, TOWN

New York City

VICINITY OF

STATE

New York 10037

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONCOURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Surrogate's Court

STREET & NUMBER

31 Chambers Street

CITY, TOWN

New York City

STATE

New York 10037

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

See Continuation Sheet

DATE

___ FEDERAL ___ STATE ___ COUNTY ___ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
☐ EXCELLENT	☐ DETERIORATED	☐ UNALTERED	☒ ORIGINAL SITE
☒ GOOD	☐ RUINS	☒ ALTERED	☐ MOVED DATE _____
☐ FAIR	☐ UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The New Amsterdam Building is located at 214 West 42nd Street, on the south side of the block bounded by Seventh and Eighth Avenues. It was designed in 1903 by Henry B. Herts and Hugh Tallant as a performance showplace for the renowned theatrical production team of Marc Klaw and Abraham Erlanger. Klaw and Erlanger went to the considerable expense of over \$1,500,000 to build the New Amsterdam, excluding the cost of the land. The New Amsterdam Building houses the main theater, whose access is gained through the lobby of an eleven-story office tower, which is surmounted by a second theater on its roof. These features combine to make the New Amsterdam an ingeniously versatile building and an early example of the multiple-use planning concept as applied to the design of theater buildings. The main theater was opened to the public on October 26, 1903, with Klaw and Erlanger's sumptuous production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, starring Nathaniel C. Goodwin. Klaw and Erlanger allowed Herts and Tallant an unusual degree of financial and aesthetic freedom in the design of the New Amsterdam. This enabled the architects to pursue a far-reaching artistic program for the building's interior and 42nd Street facade. The work of over twelve American and European sculptors, painters and craftsmen, working primarily in the then-emerging Art Nouveau idiom, gives the New Amsterdam its elegant and distinctive atmosphere.

The New Amsterdam office tower, which fronts on 42nd Street, is 150 feet high and approximately 20 feet wide. The tower is composed of six floors devoted to office use above an arched theater entrance of three stories. The facade of the building is of grey limestone, and is topped by a steep red tile roof. A large central dormer bears the standing figures which represent Drama and Music; the roof is topped by a cheneau of wrought bronze. The seventh floor level has three large windows, with tympana decorated with terra cotta panels designed by Grendellis and Ricci. These panels depict trios of cupids symbolizing Song, Declamation and Dance.¹

In its original appearance, the theater entrance had a pair of double doors framed by a low segmental arched opening, flanked by two rusticated stone piers. These doors and transoms featured panels of elaborately leaded glass. A large, curved glass panel bearing the name of the theater was located above the door. This entrance configuration was altered c. 1937, when the New Amsterdam was converted from a legitimate theater to use as a motion picture theater. At this time, the original doors and their transoms of leaded glass were removed; above the location of the original doors, a two-story high arch with levels of windows remains. The windows have a bronze framework which is decorated with realistically modelled flower and vine forms. These windows were originally flanked by pairs of Moureale Sicilian marble columns, veined in gray and white and trimmed with ornamental bronze belts. The bronze capitals, the design of which was based on the Composite order, were the work of Enid Yandell.² Between the volutes were heads representing the four ages of drama, and long bronze pendants extended down the column shafts. These columns supported a high-arched entablature with a modillion cornice. A large keystone, carved by Grendellis and Ricci, was draped with a garland of oak, laurel and ivy. Centered above the cornice was a cluster of sculpted figures which were the work of George Gray Barnard. The central

(see continuation sheets 1-6)

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HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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New Amsterdam Theater, Rooftop Theater and Aerial Gardens
New York County

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 6 PAGE 1

1. WPA Files, Artists and Writers Project
Department of Records and Information Services Federal
Municipal Archives, New York, New York
2. "42nd Street Theatre and the City"
Exhibition, Fall 1977, text and booklet by Josephine Dakin,
Megan Lawrence and Ray Ring for The Graduate Center, City
University of New York
33 West 42nd Street, New York, New York Local
3. "Inside 42nd Street" Local
Exhibition, Summer, 1978, text and booklet by May Callas,
sponsored by the 42nd Street Redevelopment Corporation at
the W.R. Grace and Co. Gallery
1114 Avenue of the Americas, New York, New York
4. American Institute of Architects Guide to New York City
Norval White, Elliot Willensky
Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1978 Local
New York, New York
5. Survey of the Times Square Area Local
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission
305 Broadway, New York, New York, 1978

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figure was a woman personifying Drama, holding a mirror in one hand and a mask in the other. Above her head was a draped baldachin representing the stage; from the baldachin, extending down the slope of the arch were garlands of fruit and flowers, and musical instruments. To the left of the central figure was Pierrot, representing musical comedy. The skillfully executed and highly ornamental allegorical scenes, set against a classically-derived facade, communicated a sense of theatrical intrigue.

The original entrance doors of the New Amsterdam opened directly into a small vestibule containing relief panels by St. John Issing. The theme of the panels was folklore; the floor of this area was laid with sage green, square, antique cathedral tiles. When the New Amsterdam Theater began to show movies (c. 1937), this vestibule was altered to its present appearance. It is now open to the air, and an exterior ticket booth was added on the western side of the entrance.

The lobby walls, finished in beige terra cotta, form an enframement for a series of display panels, ticket windows and elevator doors. The walls have foliated marble panels between pilasters of modelled terra cotta by Grendellis and Ricci from designs by Neumark of Bremen. Along the upper portion of each of the walls is a series of twelve relief panels by the sculptor R. Hilton Perry. The panels on the east wall depict five scenes from Shakespeare: Macbeth and the Witches; the Battle of Bosworth Field; Hamlet and his father's ghost; Rosalind watching Orlando in the Forest of Arden; and Titania and Bottom from A Midsummer Night's Dream. On the west wall are five panels from Richard Wagner's dramatic operas: Aldrich's advent in the lair of the Rhine maidens; Siegfried's battle with the Dragon; the awakening of Brunnhilde by Siegfried's kiss; the death of Siegfried; and the fulfillment of the curse. The panel over the entrance depicts a scene from Faust. Over the auditorium doors is a panel representing Greek drama. The lobby was originally lit by a series of plaster and leaded glass chandeliers, suspended from a coffered ceiling. These chandeliers have been replaced by unobtrusive, modern fixtures. The lighting served to cast highlights on the panels, which are ivory colored and in high relief.

Beyond the lobby is a small foyer which originally featured a ceiling of stained glass and represented "A Song of Flowers." The side walls bore panels by R. Hilton Perry depicting the New Amsterdam of the 17th century and the New York of the 19th century. These have been obliterated by a refreshment stand and vending machines. Surmounting the lobby doors is an elaborate plaster relief panel by the architect, Hugh Tallant. It occupies a semicircular space above the door enframement, and has "Progress" as its theme.

This foyer adjoins the promenade foyer, which extends across the full width of the auditorium. At the rear of the auditorium, on either end of the promenade foyer, are stairways ascending to the balconies and descending to the men's and

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women's lounges. The stairs are of Cremona marble from Maryland, and have thick railings of cast terracotta in a green faience glaze. These railings, designed by Bassoe, are textured with a sandblast finish. The theme of the railings is naturalistic: they are molded with masses of flowers and vines, with small animals passing through them. The newel posts were inspired by characters from Shakespearian comedies, such as As You Like It, A Midsummer Night's Dream, and The Tempest. The resurgent images of such designs enhance the whimsical and fantastic atmosphere of the interior. At the southern end of the promenade foyer, over the exit doors to 41st Street, is the "Sylvan Panel," a naturalistic relief sculpture by St. John Issing.

The general reception room and lounge is visible through a wide arch between the stairways at the rear of the promenade. This room is extensively panelled and is decorated in gold and green. At either end are lunettes with murals by George Peixotto of "Inspiration" and "Creation." In the center of the rear wall is a large fireplace of Caen stone and Irish marble, carved in realistic floral patterns. Above the fireplace, in framed niches, are the busts of Shakespeare, Virgil and Homer. The panels lining the lower walls originally contained 38 heads by Strunz representing famous "Lovers of Historical Drama." The walls have built-in seating which originally was covered with needlepoint cushions and backs. The reception room is still illuminated by soft and indirect cove lighting. Originally, each side of the entry to this room was flanked by a marble fountain, surmounted by a tablet of rich green and turquoise mosaic.

From the south end of the reception room, a stairway leads down to the ladies' retiring room. Now modernized and simplified, its original decor was derived from the rose--colors were shades of tea rose, walls had carvings in low relief of roses with intertwined stems and leaves. The all-encompassing theme was carried to the ceiling, which was treated as a single, large rose, whose petals bore painted representations of the five senses, as well as representations of Jupiter, Eros and Ganymede.

At the north end of the promenade foyer, downstairs, is the men's lounge. Placed between the men's and ladies' lounges is the New Amsterdam Room, or the Smoking Room. The room is sunken by about three feet below grade, and is reached by two separate stairs leading from each of the lounges. The New Amsterdam Room is a rectangular space, with an oval colonnade supporting a segmental dome. The columns are of Caen stone, with unornamented round shafts surmounted by an undulating, ribbon-like column capital configuration. The walls are panelled in brown Flemish oak and lined with upholstered seating. The floor is of brown Welsh quarry tile. The innermost corner of the room contains a Caen stone fireplace and gray washed bricks, with a hood decorated in sinuous Art Nouveau inscriptions by Henry Mercer. Eight allegorical panels by George Peixotto line the dome.

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Upper portions of the Flemish oak-panelled outer walls feature murals by Edward Simmons and R. W. Finn; there are 16 in all. Seven of the scenes are as follows: Eric the Icелander discovering Vineland; Henry Hudson entering the North River; Stuyvesant reaching his post; the British fleet taking New Amsterdam; the Dutch recapture of New Amsterdam; Bradford setting up his press; and the British army sailing from New York.

To the right of the Grand Promenade is the oval-shaped auditorium of the New Amsterdam, framed by seven wood-panelled arches. The auditorium is 86 feet wide by 90 feet long, measured from stage apron to the wall of the General Reception Room. The distance between its arched dome and the orchestra floor below measures 80 feet. The effect of the height of the dome is accentuated by the proscenium arch, which is 40 feet wide and 36 feet high. An elliptical arch rises from the stage and extends to the ring of the dome, thereby framing the upper part of a 45 foot by 18 foot mural, located over the proscenium. Two smaller arches rise inside this arch to form the frame of the proscenium and the lower part of the frame of the mural. The mural was designed by Robert Blum, and executed by A. B. Wenzel following Mr. Blum's death. Its theme is the Drama, and it bears personifications of Poetry, Truth, Love, Melancholy, Death and Chivalry. Two additional murals depicting Virtue and Courage flank the central mural. The proscenium is also embellished by sixteen figures of peacocks and vines in a dark green tint, all modelled by St. John Issing.

The delicate color scheme of the New Amsterdam Theater's interior, included in a critical commentary in The New York Times, 1903, is still applicable today:

It is a silvery green ground with tender pinks, mauves, lilacs, red and gold produced by flowers either woven into the green stuffs of carpets, fauteuils, and curtains,...or molded on the walls. The result is a subdued yet gay effect like a meadow in Springtime sowed with daisies, violets, and flowers of slightly stronger hues. There is a sense of fragility, a Botticelli feeling of flowers, and something delicate one may call virginal, as if it were an assembly place for children and maidens.³

The color scheme is further enhanced by the lighting, which highlights the ornamented surfaces. Only reflected light is used in the lobby, the light source positioned behind coves and cornices. Dispersed throughout the auditorium promenade and stairways were bronze heads (since removed) bearing small electrical lights in their crowns, thus providing gentle illumination.

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The stage, which measures 100 feet by 60 feet, is equipped with a remarkable range of technical facilities. The area below it was excavated to a depth of two stories, to accommodate a series of bridges which are raised and lowered by means of twelve electric motors. The entire stage can be lowered to a total depth of 33 feet. A large capacity elevator, used for raising and lowering sets to below-stage storage rooms, in addition to two elevators leading to dressing rooms and a large carpentry shop, are located at stage level. The dressing rooms for both the New Amsterdam auditorium and the Rooftop Theater are on the 41st Street side of the building, and have a combined capacity of 500 persons.⁴

In addition to the stage's superb technical facilities, the auditorium features an early use of cantilevered balcony construction. The proscenium opening is clearly visible from the rear seats, without columns to obstruct the view to the stage. The second balcony is set back from the line of the first. In front of it, an additional pair of boxes was cantilevered from the auditorium wall. (These have been removed) The upper balcony is suspended from the ceiling with tension rods. The theater also features double-wall construction, with fifteen-foot wide interior fire galleries between the auditorium walls and the outer walls of the building to facilitate exit in case of fire. The auditorium originally featured twelve oval-shaped boxes which were projected in two staggered pairs from the arches in the side walls immediately flanking the stage. The upper area of each arch was filled with a grille of polychromed floral tracery. The furnishings and ornamentation of each box represented a different flower. As such, these were referred to by name, such as the buttercup box, the violet box, etc., instead of by number. Each of the boxes was additionally ornamented on the front with a decorative motif corresponding to the box's individual floral theme. The removal of these boxes represents one of the few major alterations to this theater since its opening.

Above the auditorium is the Rooftop Theater, reached by the two elevators in the lobby, which, like the others which service the office tower, are of cast metal,⁵ with a floral and vine motif in the Art Nouveau style. Unlike the rooftop theaters of previously constructed urban theaters, the New Amsterdam's was permanently roofed and had a fully equipped stage and outdoor "Aerial Gardens." The Rooftop Theater was designed as a supper club, and opened on June 6, 1904 with a musical vaudeville production entitled A Little of Everything, starring Fay Templeton. It was furnished with tables and serviced by a large kitchen in the building.

The Rooftop Theater was positioned above the auditorium of the New Amsterdam. To comply with building codes forbidding construction above a theater stage, the roof theater's length was curtailed--its rear stage wall is an upward extension from the proscenium wall below. The proscenium is framed to bear the tremendous weight with a 10-ton plate girder, which was the largest built to

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date in New York. It measures 90 feet in length and 14 feet in depth. The Rooftop Theater originally had no balcony, but was encircled by a ring of boxes with a promenade behind.⁶

Florenz Ziegfeld was a part owner of the New Amsterdam, with Klaw and Erlanger. From 1913 until 1927, when he constructed his own theater, Ziegfeld produced the Ziegfeld Follies at the New Amsterdam. The atmosphere was elegant and the technical facilities afforded by the New Amsterdam stage allowed the creative genius of stage designer Joseph Urban to flourish.

In 1915, Ziegfeld commissioned Urban to convert the Rooftop Theater into a nightclub to house the Midnight Frolic. It thus acquired a moveable stage, glass balconies and cross lighting to create rainbow effects. In 1922, the Rooftop Theater's supper tables were replaced by seats and it became a broadcasting studio for the Columbia Broadcasting System. The following year, the Rooftop Theater was converted to the 700-seat Dresden. It has since been used for radio, most recently for television productions, and as a studio rehearsal hall for Broadway shows, among them: Death of a Salesman, A View from the Bridge, and My Fair Lady. The theater, nonetheless, has retained its proscenium arch, whose motif matches that of the main auditorium. The theater acquired a central balcony at some point coincident with its conversion to use as a movie theater. The ornamentation of the theater's side boxes provides important stylistic links to the auditorium below, as their panels bear polychromed Art Nouveau motifs.

By the time the economic depression of the 1930's occurred, Ziegfeld had built his own theater, and Klaw had relinquished ties with Erlanger to become a partner with Dillingham in the management of other theaters in New York. In 1936, the New Amsterdam was acquired by the Dry Dock Savings Bank at a foreclosure auction. The New Amsterdam main theater was in legitimate use until 1937, when Alfin Enterprises converted it to use as a motion picture theater. Such economic consequences have affected the lobby areas and lower exterior facade in the conversion of the theaters to other uses. However, with the exception of the removal of the balconies and the repeated remodelling of the Rooftop Theater seating, the design of the interior and the upper facade have remained intact. The integrity of the architectural program--the massing and interrelation of forms and passages--together with the artistic works which enliven every aspect of the New Amsterdam and the exceptional technical features of the theaters, attest to the genius of the architects Henry B. Herts and Hugh Tallant.

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NOTES TO ITEM 7

1. William Bates, The New Amsterdam, November 1, 1903.
2. Andrew Craig Morrison, "Theaters of 42nd Street," (graduate research paper), 1968.
3. Charles DeKay, New York Times, November 1, 1903, p. 21.
4. William Bates, The New Amsterdam, November 1, 1903.
5. Iron and bronze ornament by the Winslow Bros. Co.
6. New York Commercial Advertiser, July 11, 1903, reported that:
more than 2,000 tons of steel have been utilized in the building.
The unusually elaborate system of construction employed in this building is well exemplified by one fact--that the main girder supporting the roof theater is the largest single piece of iron-work ever put into any building in the world.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
☐ PREHISTORIC	☐ ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	☐ COMMUNITY PLANNING	☐ LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	☐ RELIGION
☐ 1400-1499	☐ ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	☐ CONSERVATION	☐ LAW	☐ SCIENCE
☐ 1500-1599	☐ AGRICULTURE	☐ ECONOMICS	☐ LITERATURE	☒ SCULPTURE
☐ 1600-1699	☒ ARCHITECTURE	☐ EDUCATION	☐ MILITARY	☐ SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
☐ 1700-1799	☒ ART	☒ ENGINEERING	☒ MUSIC	☒ THEATER
☐ 1800-1899	☐ COMMERCE	☐ EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	☐ PHILOSOPHY	☐ TRANSPORTATION
☒ 1900-	☒ COMMUNICATIONS	☐ INDUSTRY	☐ POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	☐ OTHER (SPECIFY)
		☐ INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1903

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Henry B. Herts
Hugh Tallant

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The New Amsterdam Building, constructed in 1903 by Henry B. Herts and Hugh Tallant, consists of an eleven-story office tower and main auditorium behind it, surmounted by a smaller but equally complete theater on its roof. It is of major significance to the history of architecture and the fine arts, as it is a superb example of the rare use of the Art Nouveau style as applied to architecture in New York. The building is also architecturally noteworthy for its skeleton steel construction and the architects' use of cantilevers for balconies in the theaters. As a theater complex encompassing a main auditorium and the smaller Rooftop Theater, the New Amsterdam is widely considered integral to Broadway entertainment history. It has played host to many important New York State productions, and has launched the careers of many figures who went on to attain national fame. Furthermore, the idea of clustering together a ground floor auditorium, an office tower, and a roof theater in one complex is unique from a planning point of view, considering its year of construction. As such, the New Amsterdam represents an early example of mixed use concept as applied to theater construction.

The New Amsterdam represented a departure for the architects, and was described by one reviewer as an "experiment...a break from historic styles..."¹ The architects, then both in their 30's, had already established a reputation through the design of the Lyceum and the Liberty Theaters, and went on to design the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1908. In contrast to their other works, the New Amsterdam was designed for multiple-use with its eleven-story office tower and two theaters. Another striking feature is the use of the then-emerging Art Nouveau style throughout the interior of the building. Derived from forms in nature, Art Nouveau treatment is characterized by the use of flowing lines and sensitive color treatment through the use of secondary tones. This style was to have considerable impact on the history of 20th-century architecture and decorative arts.² The interior displays the work of muralists, ceramicists, and sculptors whose creations are rich in allegorical meaning. The art follows the contours of the interior's construction lines. A sense of discovery was created by offsetting the architectural mass with an elaborate treatment of surfaces. A contemporary reviewer observed that Herts and Tallant insisted upon:

The truthful expression in design of structural requirement, the conformity of the raiment to the skeleton, the demands that all ornament shall form an integral and even necessary part of the design adopted...new constructural methods and new practical requirements cry out for a new artistic expression.³

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

"Individualism in Architecture." Architectural Record, June-January, 1904.

"The New Theaters of New York." Architectural Record, June-January, 1904.

Bates, William. The New Amsterdam, November 1, 1903.

(see continuation sheet)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

UTM NOT VERIFIED

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1 acre

QUADRANGLE NAME Central Park

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24,000

UTM REFERENCES

A 18 58 54 00 45 11 93 0

ZONE EASTING

NORTHING

B

ZONE

EASTING

NORTHING

C

D

E

F

G

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The New Amsterdam Building is located at #214, on the south side of West 42nd Street,
(see continuation sheet)

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE None CODE COUNTY CODE

STATE CODE COUNTY CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

Contact: Elizabeth Spencer-Ralph, 518-474-0479
Division for Historic Preservation

NAME / TITLE

Patricia Florio, Research Associate

ORGANIZATION

New York Landmarks Conservancy

DATE

March 1979

STREET & NUMBER

17 Battery Place

TELEPHONE

212-425-4085

CITY OR TOWN

New York

STATE

New York 10004

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL X

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE Director, Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau DATE 10/29/79

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE 1/40-80

ATTEST:

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE Jan 10, 1980

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The effect is both lush and playful, and, most importantly, each vista looking toward the stage is framed by an ornamental form in the Art Nouveau style. In this way, the separate elements of the interior interact to produce a cohesiveness that transcends the individuality of the separate works. One such area, exemplary of the collaboration of many artisans, is the Smoking Room, or the Amsterdam Room, with its murals by George Peixotto, Henry Mercer, Edward Simmons, and R. W. Finn. A polychromed smoke grille believed to be the work of Hugh Tallant is in the central dome area. A reviewer, writing in the Architectural Record in 1904, noted the attention to detail evident in the New Amsterdam:

The architects have made a careful, laborious and intelligent attempt to design a building that is finished in every detail, and its excellence of much of this detail, particularly in the Smoking Room, and other subordinate rooms of the theater...(is) the best achievement of the architects. These gentlemen stand for a very high standard, and their work is never merely bizarre and crude.⁴

In addition to its artistic features, the New Amsterdam's technical aspects won it high regard as the "best constructed and most handsomely decorated theater in the world,"⁵ and as "the brightest among all of 42nd Street's treasures."⁶

Both theaters and the office structure are of skeleton steel construction throughout. The use of such a method of construction, whereby the building is supported by steel instead of masonry supports, had previously been confined to applications in office buildings. It has the distinct advantage of providing a maximum amount of usable interior space and it permits a clear and unobstructed view from each seat and box in the house. Both the main auditorium and the Rooftop Theater have balconies on the suspension and cantilever principle, which eliminates all support posts in the line of sight. A contemporary journal noted that:

This is the first instance that this has been accomplished without the use of girders crossing from one side of the theater to the other.⁷

The New Amsterdam was included in the 1926 edition of The American Spirit in Architecture for this noteworthy feature.

The abandonment of the horseshoe gallery in favor of the gallery stretching from side to side has made necessary the development of the proscenium boxes. These are often combined with the proscenium arch into one composition. In the New Amsterdam Theater, New York, the curving forms necessary in a large theater are treated

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in a manner delightfully playful, free and original.⁸

The positioning of the Rooftop Theater directly above the main auditorium was another technical achievement of the New Amsterdam. The Rooftop Theater, which has an orchestra, originally had only its two balconies and twelve boxes, a large rear promenade, and an open air garden situated directly over the stage house of the main theater. Herts and Tallant named the upper roof area the "Aerial Gardens" for the fine view of New York afforded when the New Amsterdam was among the taller buildings on 42nd Street. This was the first time that a theater complete in every detail had ever been superimposed upon a similar structure. A 1903 source reported that:

Employed in the main theater and in the stage house, there are approximately 270,000 separate pieces of steel which occupy about one-fifth the space ordinarily allotted to masonry and wood. There are approximately 2,000 tons of wrought steel in the buildings, 57 cantilevers, and 38 counterweighted electric elevator machines back of the curtain line. The magnitude of this undertaking can be appreciated, perhaps, from the statement that 7,500 architects and engineers' plans were required for the guidance of the artisans in building.⁹

The fact that both theaters are surrounded by exterior fire escapes, in addition to twelve-foot wide galleries and staircases, completely isolated by fire walls, gave the patron an added sense of security. In addition, the office and theater structures were treated with a patented process to make them totally fireproof.

The original heating and ventilation system devised by Herts and Tallant for the New Amsterdam (although replaced by modern air conditioning system with aluminum ducts) is of as much interest today as it was at the time of its completion. The theater, whose cubic volume measures approximately 400,000 cubic feet, excluding the space represented by the Smoking Room, the separate retiring rooms, general waiting room, grand foyer, vestibule and lobby, was heated by indirect radiation distributed by four-foot and ten-foot blower fans located in the sub-basement. Air for ventilation of the theater was brought in through louvers in the porte cochere on 41st Street, then drawn by a 10-foot blower fan through silk filters in the main air chamber, and finally, was forced over a heater which contained 4,300 square feet of radiating surface. The air was then moistened to natural humidity and forced into the main plenum chamber under the main auditorium. It was admitted to the auditorium through special openings in the floor beneath the seats. The 10-foot fan was designed to completely change the air of the auditorium in approximately 10 minutes. All dirt and dust was expelled by

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CONTINUATION SHEET 3

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 4

72 degree exhaust disc fans installed in the exhaust chamber over the theater. Uniform temperature was maintained by automatically-controlled temperature regulators.

At the time of its construction, the stage of the New Amsterdam Theater auditorium represented the most complete assemblage of stage mechanisms of any theater in the world. A multitude of mechanical devices was provided in such a manner as to avoid any interference with the performers. This innovation is best exemplified by the two-story stage elevator mechanism which, although not currently in use, is still preserved intact. It raised and lowered the sets, and was equipped with an efficient trap door which instantly closed when scenery was lowered onto the stage. These facilities allowed Klaw and Erlanger to mount beautiful scenic productions in what one reviewer claimed was "by all odds the handsomest theater in this country to-day."¹⁰

For 30 years subsequent to its 1903 opening, the New Amsterdam Theater was regarded as the premier musical-comedy theater in New York.¹¹ Prior to the arrival of Florenz Ziegfeld at the New Amsterdam in 1913, the theater's productions included: George M. Cohan's Forty-five Minutes from Broadway, with Fay Templeton and Victor Moore; Richard III, starring Richard Mansfield; the 1907 premier of Lehar's The Merry Widow; the 1911 production of The Pink Lady, with Hope Dawn. In 1914, Irving Berlin's first musical, entitled Watch Your Step, starring Vernon and Irene Castle, was staged at the New Amsterdam. Ziegfeld came to the New Amsterdam in 1913, and presented the Ziegfeld Follies revues from that year until 1920, from 1922 to 1925, and, lastly, in 1927. During this period, his business offices were housed in the office tower of the New Amsterdam. Ziegfeld's productions were famous for the array of beautiful and original scenery, costumes and stage effects, as well as for the combined talents of leading composers, writers, performers and glamorous "Ziegfeld Girls."

In 1913, the dancer Ann Pennington first appeared in the Follies, where she gained fame as the originator of the Black Bottom Dance. The famous comedienne Fanny Brice, who was discovered by Ziegfeld in 1909, starred in the New Amsterdam Follies of 1916, 1917, 1920, and 1923. In 1914, Ina Claire saluted the opening of transcontinental telephone service in the United States with the song "Hello, Frisco, Hello," and soon rose to fame as a comedienne. Another star to make his debut in the Follies was Ed Wynn, in 1914. In the following year, W. C. Fields made his debut in the Follies. 1915 marked the year when Ziegfeld staged a show in the New Amsterdam Rooftop Theater. The show was originally called Danse de Follies, and was later renamed the Midnight Frolic.¹² Working within the existing sumptuous setting provided by the Rooftop Theater and its Aerial Gardens, Ziegfeld created a legendary and exotic nightclub. Many performers featured in the Follies appeared in Midnight Frolic performances the same evening. Ziegfeld used the Rooftop Theater as a testing ground for new talent;

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CONTINUATION SHEET 4 ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 5

it was there that Eddie Cantor, Norma Jeires and Will Rogers began their entertainment careers. Some highlights of the Rooftop Theater entertainments were Fanny Brice's first presentations of the "Rose of Washington Square" and "Secondhand Rose." Eddie Cantor and Will Rogers also attained prominence there.

Ziegfeld introduced Marilyn Miller, who became famous as a dancer and actress, in P. G. Wodehouse's 1920 production of Sally. In 1921, Ed Wynn starred in the revue Ed Wynn's Carnival. Marilyn Miller went on to star in Sunny in 1925 and Rosalie in 1928, playing opposite Jack Donahue, the comedian and actor in both productions. Among other landmark productions which increased the New Amsterdam Theater's fame were: Whoopee, starring Eddie Cantor and Ruth Etting, and George Tyler's 1927 revival of Trelawney of the Wells, with John Drew, Pauline Lord, Helen Gahagan, Estelle Winwood, and Peggy Wood.

The year 1931 saw the revue entitled The Band Wagon, with Fred and Adele Astaire in their last appearance together, and Frank Morgan, Helen Broderick and Tilly Losch. Also in 1931, the Players Club revival of J. M. Barrie's The Admirable Crichton featured Walter Hampden, Fay Bainter and Estelle Winwood. The following year, Mary Boland starred in Irving Berlin's Face the Music. In the same year, Eva Le Gallienne's Civic Repertory staged productions of The Cherry Orchard with Nazimova, and Alice in Wonderland.

Fay Templeton starred in the 1933 production of Jerome Kern's Roberta, which also starred Bob Hope. The following year Revenge with Music was featured, with Libby Holmen. Bert Lahr, Eugene and Willie Howard, and Rudy Vallee starred in George Waite's Scandals of 1936. Walter Huston portrayed Othello in 1937. This marked the last legitimate theater production of the New Amsterdam.

In the summer of 1937, the New Amsterdam's auditorium was used for the showing of movies. Ironically, the first movie offering was a version of A Midsummer Night's Dream, the very play the theater featured at its 1903 opening.

The New Amsterdam Building is well represented in published sources. In 1908, five years after its opening, New York Plaisance, a journal devoted to reviewing entertainment sites in New York City, featured the New Amsterdam in its first issue, noting its excellent decor and exceptional atmosphere. A model of the facade of the theater/office complex is said to have been featured in the St. Louis Exposition of 1904. As previously noted, the use of cantilevers and the effect of their usage on the morphology of theaters, earned the New Amsterdam mention in the 1926 edition of The American Spirit in Architecture, published by the Yale University Press as a photographic survey and series of essays on architecture. More recently, the New Amsterdam Building was included in the 1978 exhibition entitled "Inside 42nd Street," held by the Cultural Council Foundation at the

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CONTINUATION SHEET 5

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G. W. Grace Building. At this writing, the Theater Historical Society is honoring the New Amsterdam by devoting its special Annual edition to the historical significance of the New Amsterdam Theater and its Rooftop Theater.

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CONTINUATION SHEET 6 ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 7

NOTES TO ITEM 8

1. "The New Theaters of New York," Architectural Record, June-January, 1904, p. 56.
2. Maurice Rheims, author of The Flowering of Art Nouveau, (Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York) states that:
Art Nouveau...sought unusual, original effects, and was colorful, consistent, harmonious, and functional, prefiguring the shape of things to come--the Bauhaus, Surrealism, and abstract art.
3. "Individualism in Architecture," Architectural Record, June-January, 1904, p. 68.
4. "The New Theaters of New York," Architectural Record, June-January, 1904, p. 57.
5. William Bates, The New Amsterdam, November 1, 1903.
6. J. Dakin, M. Lawrence, R. Ring, 42nd Street Theatre and the City, The Graduate Center, City University of New York, 1977, p. 8.
7. William Bates, The New Amsterdam, November 1, 1903.
8. Talbot Faulkner Hamlin, The American Spirit in Architecture, (Yale University Press, New Haven), 1926, p. 301.
9. November 8, 1908 review from the Erlanger Collection Scrapbooks, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts Theater Collection Library.
10. Ibid.
11. Joel Lobenthal, "Miracle on 42nd St.: The New Amsterdam Theater," 1976, pp. 20-36.
12. April 26, 1939 entry in WPA Files, collection of the Department of Records and Information Services, Municipal Archives of the City of New York.

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The New Amsterdam Theater, Rooftop Theater and Aerial Gardens
New York County

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 2

Dakin, J.; Lawrence, M.; and Ring, R. 42nd Street Theatre and
the City. New York: City University of New York, 1977.

Hamlin, Talbot Faulkner. The American Spirit in Architecture.
New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

1

ITEM NUMBER

10

PAGE

2

on the block bounded by Seventh Avenue to the east and Eighth Avenue to the west. Access to the building is gained through a rectangular lobby with elevators that run to the offices and Rooftop Theater above. The New Amsterdam Theater is on the ground floor, beyond this lobby. It occupies a rectangular space almost one half a block in width reaching to 41st Street. The Rooftop Theater, located on the seventh floor, was built on top of the New Amsterdam Theater's roof.

PART OF SECTIONS 3 & 4

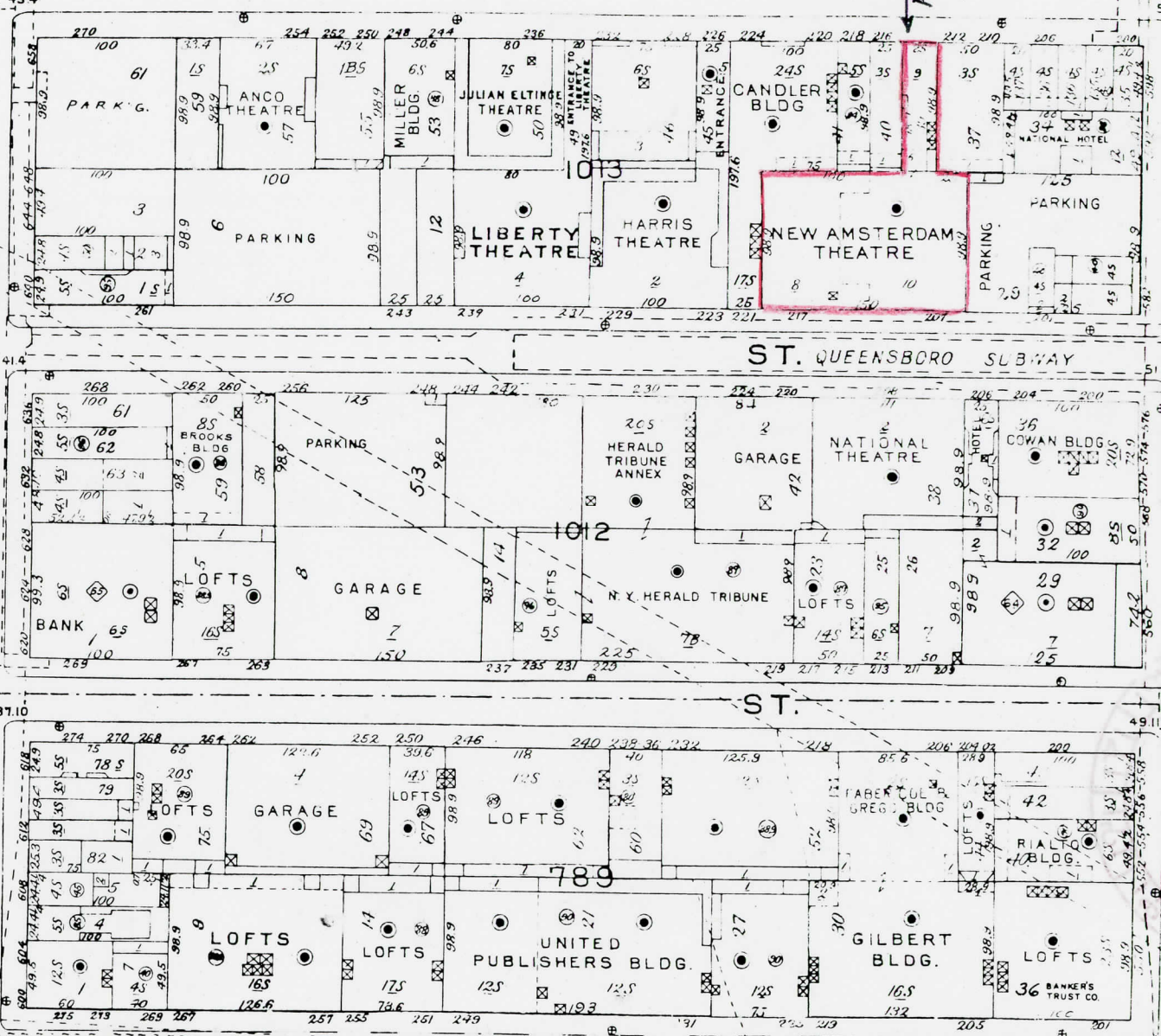
New Amsterdam Theater,
Rooftop Theater and Aerial
Gardens
214 West 42nd Street
New York, New York County

Lib. 41 of Wills P. 18 Map No. 24

42nd ST.

BOUNDARY

HERMITAGE FARM
SUBWAY STATION
AVE.



SEC. 4

SEC. 3
66

Sam R B. Norton Lib. 31, P 484

ST.

Mary F. Spencer Lib. 232 P. 34

JAN 10 1980



Property

New Amsterdam Theater

State

NYC New York

Working Number

*11-5-79 2665**80002664*

TECHNICAL

Photos

Maps

18
11

CONTROL

built in 1903, this is one of the most famous of N.Y.'s theaters. the building is important archi- **HISTORIAN**
 tecturally for its lavish beaux arts interior, and for its innovative design (a large theater, topped
 with seven stories of office space, and crowned with a smaller theater & roof garden at the top floor level)
 for its engineering design (skeleton steel construction, cantilevered balconies, fire halls, and its wealth
 of intricate stage machinery). the theater was also used for performances by many of the leading
 figures in American entertainment - Florenz Ziegfeld, Irving Berlin **ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN**
 George M. Cohan, Fanny Brice, Ed Wynn, W.C. Fields, Will Rogers, Eddie Cantor, etc. there have been only minor changes
 to the interior.

accept
Patrick Ardus
1/2/80

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Review _____

Interiors are notable for Art Nouveau
 style decoration — an unusual use of
 that style for an architectural purpose —

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THEATRE
The New Amsterdam Building
New York, New York Co.

NOV 05 1979

photo Mark Sick, 1976

neg: Mark 6, 7 Mercer St., N.Y., N.Y. 10013
View of 42nd St. facade. Note 7th floor
windows, with tympana decorated with
terracotta panels designed by Grendellis
and Ricci.

Photograph # 1

JAN 10 1980



~~The New Amsterdam Building~~ *THEATER*

New York, New York *County*

NOV 05 1979

photo: Armen Kachaturian, 1977

neg: 10 East 23rd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10010

View facing towards the 42nd St. entry
of the main lobby. Note art nouveau
elevator doors and modeled terracotta
panels by Grendellis and Ricci. The
east wall friezes depict five scenes
from Shakespeare by R. Hilton Perry.

Photograph # 2

JAN 10 1980

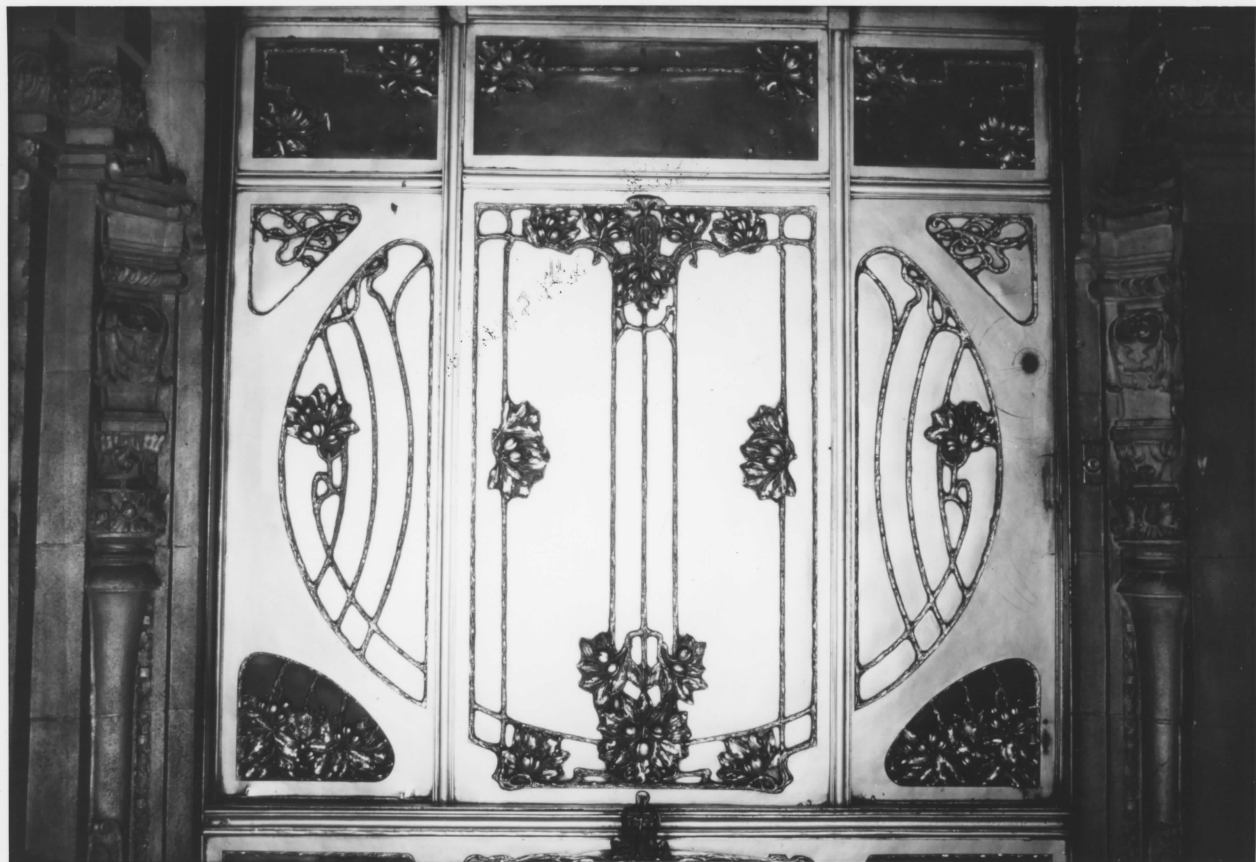


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THEATER NOV 05 1979

photo: The New Amsterdam Building
New York, New York County
Armen Kachaturian, 1977

neg: 10 East 23rd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10010
Detail of lobby scene by R. Hilton Perry
of Titania and Bottom from A Midsummer
Night's Dream, the first production of
the New Amsterdam Theater.
Photograph # 3



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A
JAN 10 1980

photo:
neg:

THEATER
The New Amsterdam Theater

New York, New York County

Armen Kachaturian, 1977

10 East 23rd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10010

Detail view of one of ground floor
lobby elevator doors.

Photograph # 4

NOV 05 1979



NAI'L REB

The New Amsterdam Theater
New York, New York *county*

photo: Armen Kachaturian, 1977

neg: 10 East 23rd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10010

"Progress" plaster relief panel by
architect Hugh Tallant above doors
between lobby and foyer.

Photograph # 5

JAN 10 1980

NOV 05 1979



NAT'L REG

THEATER

The New Amsterdam Building

New York, New York

NOV 05 1979

photo: Armen Kachaturian. 1977

neg: 10 East 23rd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10010

Lunette mural of "Creation" in the
general reception room, by George
Peixotto.

Photograph # 6

JAN 10 1980



NAT'L REG

JAN 10 1980

THEATER

NOV 05 1979

The New Amsterdam Building
New York, New York *County*

photo: Armen Kachaturian, 1977

neg: 10 East 23rd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10010

Newel post and naturalistic stair railing, designed by Bassoe, are of cast terracotta in a green faience glaze and sandblast finish.

Photograph # 7



THEATER
The New Amsterdam Building

New York, New York County

NOV 05 1979

photo: Armen Kachaturian, 1977

neg: 10 East 23rd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10010

Detail of naturalistic stair railing,
designed by Bassoe, is of cast
terracotta in a green faience glaze and
sandblast finish.

Photograph # 8

JAN 10 1980



NAT'L REG

119



The New Amsterdam ~~Building~~

New York, New York ~~County~~

NOV 05 1979

photo: Armen Kachaturian, 1977

no. 10 East 23rd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10010

The Smoking Room: Caen stone columns
form an oval colonnade, supporting a
segmental dome.

Photograph # 9

JAN 10 1980



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NATL REG

THEATER

JAN 10 1980

The New Amsterdam Building

New York, New York County

photo: Armen Kachaturian, 1977

neg: 10 East 23rd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10010

The Smoking Room: Eight allegorical panels
by George Peixotto line the oval dome.

Photograph # 10

NOV 05 1979

2



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NOV 05 1979

The New Amsterdam ~~Building~~ **THEATER**
New York, New York ~~county~~

photo: Armen Kachaturian, 1977

neg: 10 East 23rd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10010

The Smoking Room: detail, smoke grille.

Photograph # 11

JAN 10 1980



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The New Amsterdam ~~Building~~ *THEATER*
New York, New York *County*

photo: Armen Kachaturian, 1977 *NOV 05 1979*

neg: 10 East 23rd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10010
Promenade foyer, south end: above
the exit doors to 41st St., the
"Sylvan Panel" by St. John Issing.
Photograph # 12

JAN 10 1980



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NOV 05 1979

The New Amsterdam ~~Building~~

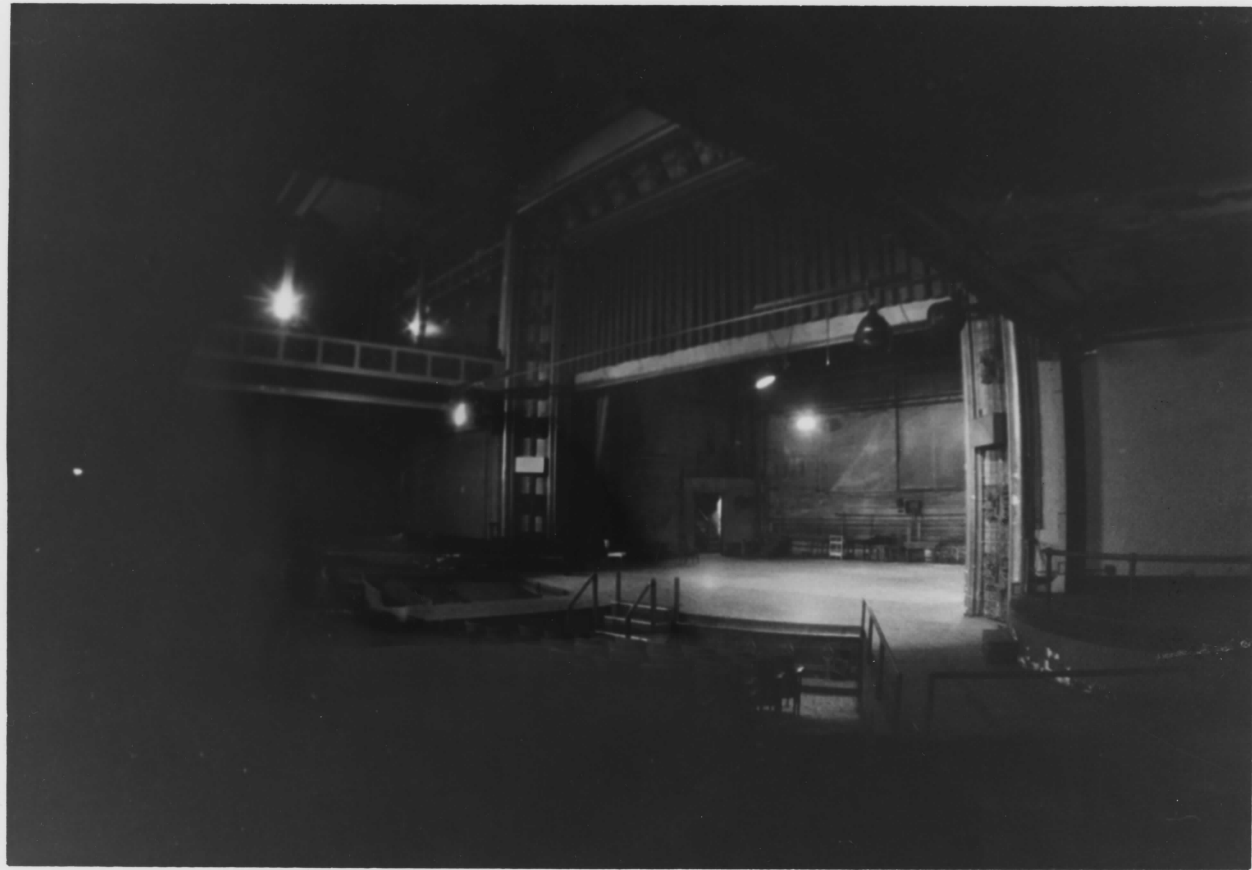
New York, New York

photo: Armen Kachaturian, 1977

neg: 10 East 23rd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10010

Interior of the New Amsterdam Theater:
view looking into dome and back to
balconies.

Photograph # 13



JAN 10 1980

The New Amsterdam ~~Building~~
New York, New York *county*

photo: Mark Sick, 1976

neg: Mark 6, 7 Mercer St., N.Y., N.Y. 10013
Proscenium and stage of the
Rooftop Theater.
Photograph # 14

NOV 05 1979



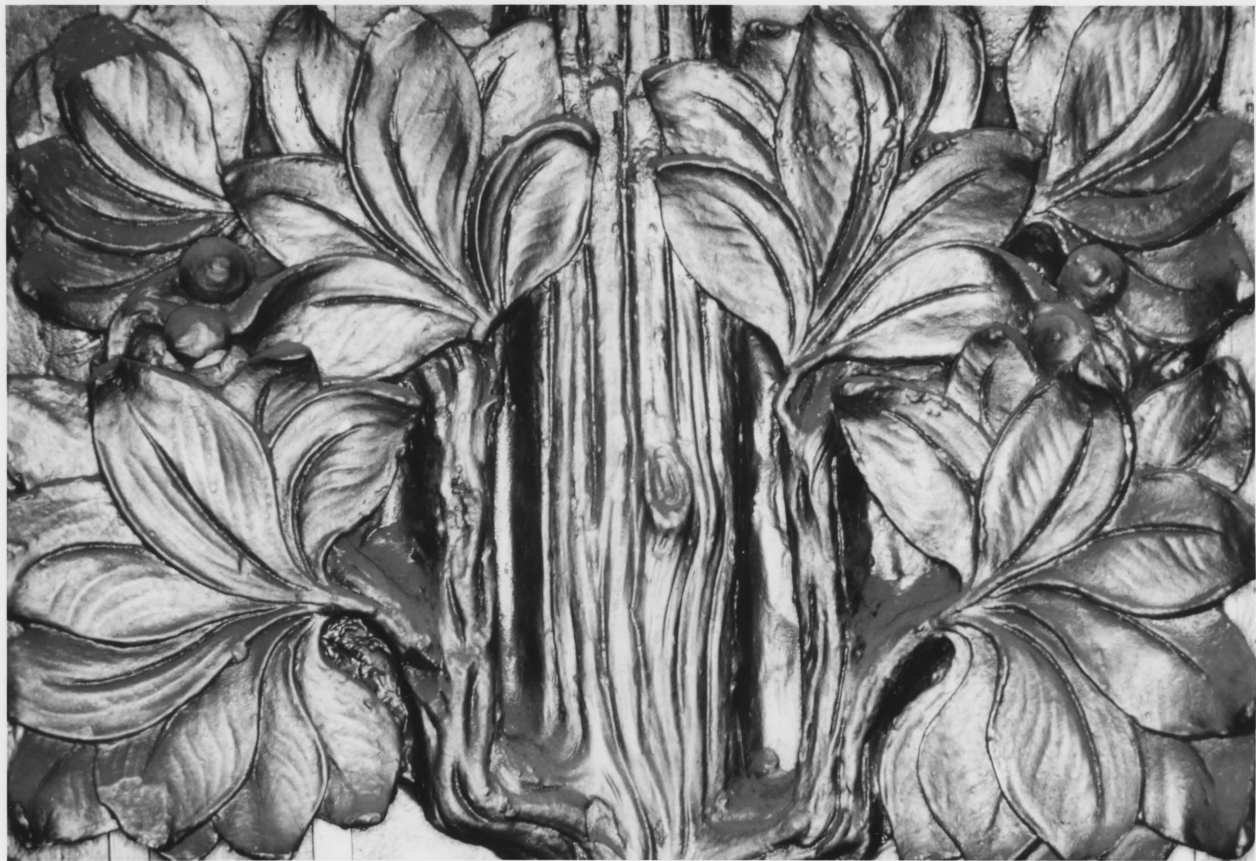
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The New Amsterdam Theater
New York, New York *County*

photo: Armen Kachaturian, 1977
ref: 10 East 23rd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10010
Rooftop Theater: ornament framing
the proscenium.
Photograph # 15

NOV 05 1979

JAN 10 1980



NAT'L RES

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NOV 05 1979
THEATER

The New Amsterdam Building

New York, New York *County*

photo: Armen Kachaturian, 1977

neg. 10 East 23rd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10010

Rooftop Theater: proscenium detail

Photograph # 16



THEATER
The New Amsterdam Building

New York, New York

County NOV 05 1979

orig. photo:
Mark Sick, 1976

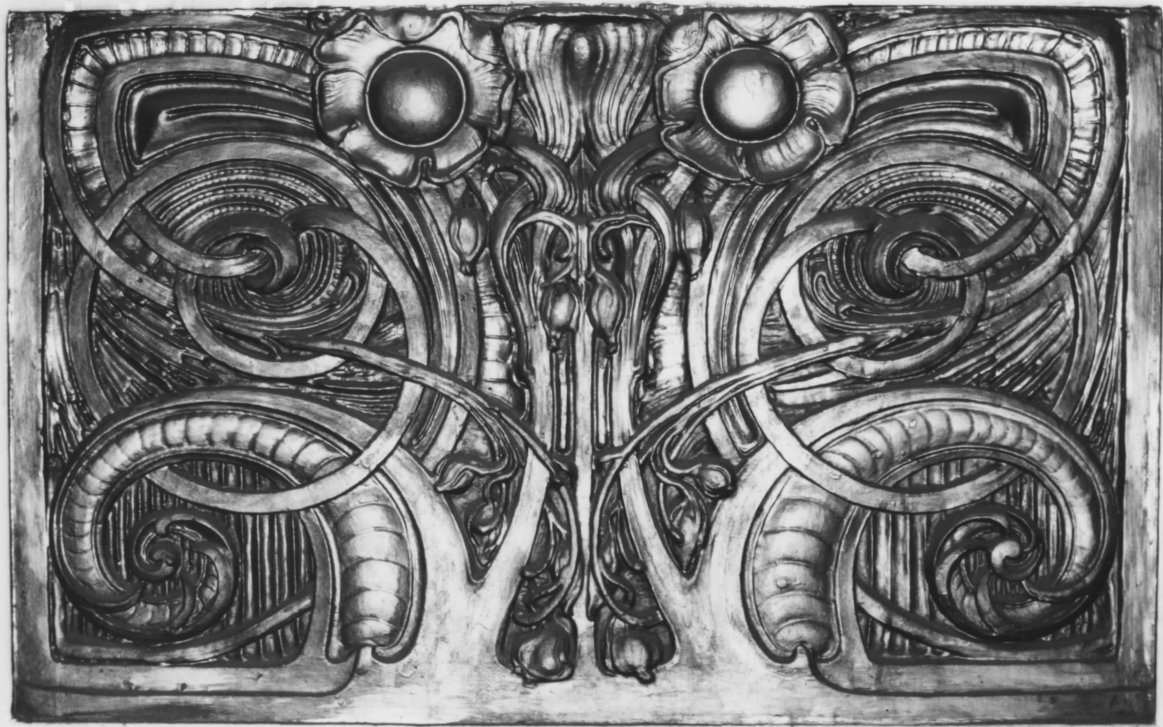
ref: Mark 6, 7 Mercer St., N.Y., N.Y. 10013

Rooftop Theater, view from stage

toward entry; note original boxes to
the left, above entry, with art nouveau
panels.

Photograph # 17

JAN 10 1980



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The New Amsterdam Building
New York, New York County

THEATER

photo: Armen Kachaturian, 1977
neg: 10 East 23rd St., N.Y., N.Y. 10010
Rooftop Theater: art nouveau detail
along side balcony (see photograph # 17
for context).
Photograph # 18



1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 18, show
Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown

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Ansonia Hotel	New York New York County
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Gifford-Walker Farm	North Bergen Genesee County
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