United States Department of the Interior Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

# National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For HCRS use only received 0 CT 5 1982 date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*Type all entries—complete applicable sections

Type all entries—complete applicable sections	
1. Name	
historic Beacon Theater and Hotel	
and/or common	
2. Location	
street & number 2124 Broadway	not for publication
city, town New York vicinity of	congressional district 20
state New York code 036 count	y New York code 061
3. Classification	
Category  — district — public — building(s) — structure — site — object — NA in process — NA being considered — vest unoccupied — work in progress — Accessible — yes: restricted — yes: unrestricted — no	entertainment religious scientific
4. Owner of Property	
name Beacon Broadway Corporation  street & number 2130 Broadway	
city, town New York vicinity of	state New York 10023
5. Location of Legal Descript	ion
courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. New York County Regis	ter's Office
street & number 31 Chambers Street	
city, town New York	state New York 10007
6. Representation in Existing	Surveys
Landmarks Preservation Commission has this p	property been determined elegible? yes _X_ no
December 11, 1979	federal state countyX local
depository for survey records Landmarks Preservation Co	ommission, 20 Vesey Street
city, town New York	state New York 10007

### 7. Description

Condition         ✓ excellent         ✓ deteriorated           good         ruins           fair         unexposed	Check one unaltered X altered	Check one X original site moved date	NA	
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#### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Beacon Theater and Hotel is a large, brick and stone structure facing three streets and composed of three masses of differing size. The tallest block, with 24 stories and a small tower faces Broadway. This section, plus the 15-story block facing West 75th Street house hotel rooms. The three-story auditorium of the theater faces Amsterdam Avenue, with a facade on West 75th Street as well. The theater-hotel building fills most of the trapezoidal block on which it is located. The remainder of the block is occupied by another small hotel to the south.

The facades of this building are fairly plain, belying the ornateness of the theater which lies within it (Photo 1). The first floor of the hotel section has been modernized, with stores and entrances with marquees, on both Broadway and West 75th Street. (The entrance on West 75th Street is no longer used.) The entrance to the theater is also on Broadway at the southern end of the building. Above this floor, tall windows set within blind arches arches are the only decorative features of the stone-faced second floor. Above the second story, the building is faced with brick, although stone quoins highlight the corners of the hotel block on the third through fifth floors and a projecting band course of stone caps this section. At the third floor, stone enframements and pediments set off three of the windows on both the Broadway and West 75th Street facades. Small balconies are found on some windows at the fifth, seventh, eighth, fifteenth and twenty-second floors. The small tower set above the twenty-fourth floor has tall, round-arched windows trimmed with stone. Blind arches cap these windows and project above the roofline, which is also finished with brick and terra-cotta corbelling.

The auditorium elevations on 75th Street and Amsterdam Avenue are brick over a stone base (Photos 3 and 4). Stone band courses continue around these two sides at the same height as those on the hotel portion. On the 75th Street facade a large, central blind arch is trimmed with stone and flanked by vertical stone blocks. Centered above this arch and resting on the main band course, is a three-bay wide blind arcade. Another small scale blind arcade caps this entire facade of the auditorium and continues on the Amsterdam Avenue side as a finishing element to five flat pilasters which are located here. There is also a large, stone-trimmed blind ogee arch near the center of this facade with four smaller blind arches resting on the band course on either side of it. The roofline of this facade is a stepped gable with a large stone cartouche topped by a head at the high point.

The entrance to this residential hotel is on Broadway, through a small lobby which is

its main public space. This lobby has a reception desk and has been modernized.

One enters the theater from Broadway through an open outer ticket lobby set back from the line of the building. (The lobby is actually within the hotel building; the auditorium is in a separate structure.) Semi-circular in plan, it features a freestanding gilded and decorated ticket booth (see site map, Photo 2). From the outer ticket lobby gilded metal and glass doors with leaded-glass transoms provide access to the inner ticket lobby. Within the marble-walled inner ticket lobby are a ticket booth and office on the south wall and sign boards and mirrors on the north wall (Photo 5). These walls contrast with the longer inward curving convex walls containing the entrance doors. The doors in the eastern wall are similar to those leading to the outer ticket lobby, but these doors have stained-glass transoms. The low ceilings of both ticket lobbies are adorned with multi-colored Renaissance-inspired moldings and ornate light fixtures.

From the low-ceilinged ticket lobbies one passes into the dramatic space of the rotunda lobby (Photo 6). Inspired by Rococo design, the rotunda extends upward to the height of the theater auditorium. Opposite the entrance is an arched opening (Photo 7) framed by Ionic pilasters, with screens of colonnettes at the levels of the promenades of the loge and the

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The Beacon Theater and Hotel

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balcony. Richly ornamented panels are set below the screens. The entrance itself is framed by fluted pilasters. Above the doors, set behind a balustrade, is a mural painted by Valdemar Kjoldgaard depicting a mythical landscape scene. Two doorways framed in a Rococo manner, flanking the large arched opening, lead to staircases. Just below ceiling level is a swag-adorned frieze encircling most of the rotunda. The ceiling itself is adorned with rosettes and coffers. Suspended from the center of the ceiling is a massive gilt chandelier lit by electric candles.

Beyond the rotunda the lobby continues in a wide hallway which provides access to the auditorium through three levels: orchestra, loge, and balcony. Within the auditorium many ornate features help create an exotic effect (Photo 8). The proscenium, opening onto the stage above the orcestra pit and the Wurlitzer organ, is framed by fluted columns. Above the proscenium is a plaster drape in green and gold decorated with sunburst effects and supported on slender decorated poles. Flanking the proscenium are 30-foot-high gilded statues of Greek martial women with bases depicting classical figures. The ceiling above the main portion of the auditorium is executed in such a way as to simulate a draped tent and is richly decorated in patterns of red, blue, green and gold (Photo 11). An enormous chandelier of Venetian-inspired design is suspended from the center. The fronts of the loge and the balcony also have rich, multi-colored decoration inspired by Renaissance sources. At either side of the auditorium are exits framed by arched openings incorporated into bold architectural enframements (Photo 9). Not only adorned with cartouches, swags, medallions, and theatrical masks and topped by urns, they also hold sculptured figures of seated women. Rising above these exits on the side walls are vast murals framed by fluted pilasters with crouching lions placed in front of them. Painted by Valdemar Kjoldgaard, the murals depict oriental scenes with caravans of elephants, camels, and traders approaching large galleons (Photo 10).

From the lobby, staircases lead up to the loge and balcony levels. The promenades leading from the stair halls to the auditorium at these levels are decorated with pilasters and Renaissance and Rococo ornament. The shallow stage was originally equipped for vaudeville performances; the equipment remains but has not been used recently.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>This report is based in its entirety on the Landmarks Preservation Commission Designation Report, Beacon Theater, LP-1097, December 1979, by Marjorie Pearson.

### B. Significance

Period prehistoric 1400–1499 1500–1599 1600–1699 1700–1799 1800–1899X 1900–	agriculture X architecture art commerce communications		ing landscape architecture law literature military music	science sculpture social/ humanitarian X theater transportation
Specific dates	1927-28	Builder/Architect	Walter W. Ahlschlager	

#### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Beacon Theater and Hotel is a unique complex combining a grand movie palace with a hotel to provide accommodations for those who would use it. In addition to providing economy of construction and operation, in this arrangement the theater could be partially supported by hotel income. The Beacon, one of the last surviving movie palaces in Manhattan, is associated with important names in the New York theater. Samuel L. Rothafel or Roxy, the most innovative theater manager of his day; the Chanin Construction Co., which had considerable experience in combining theaters with other buildings such as hotels and offices; and Walter W. Ahlschlager, the Chicago architect who had previously created the lavish Roxy Theater, known as the "Cathedrel of the Motion Picture." The technical innovations and dramatic design features of the theater have enabled it to continue to function as a multipurpose performing arts center while the hotel continues its original use as well. Each is enhanced by its proximity to the other and together the theater and hotel add another en-

riching element to Manhattan's diverse West Side.

Samuel L. Rothafel (1892-1936), better known as Roxy, had gained a reputation as the most innovative theater manager of the day. Having entered the movie business in 1911 in Pennsylvania, Roxy came to New York City in 1913 to manage the Regent Theater at Seventh Avenue and 116th Street and went on to manage the Strand, Rivoli and Capitol. While at the Capitol he began broadcasting radio programs which became famous across the country. 1925 Roxy and the Chanin Construction Co. joined forces to create the Roxy Theater at 50th Street and Seventh Avenue, which seated about 6000 people and was equipped with the most upto-date technical devices. While designed primarily as a movie house and dubbed the "Cathedral of the Motion Picture," the Roxy had film programs interspersed with vaudeville acts, music, and dance performances in accordance with Roxy's management policies. In 1931 Roxy was hired as the director of Radio City MusicHall where he played an influential role in the design as well as in the programming.

The Chanin Construction Co., under the direction of Irwin S. Chanin, (b. 1892) and Henry I. Chanin (1893-1973), was established in 1919 in Brooklyn. The firm had extended its construction activities into Manhattan in 1924 and expanded into the theater business, first building Chanin's 46th Street Theater (now the 46th Street Theater) and eventually building nine others. They also managed a number of the theaters. By 1926 when construction was begun on the Roxy, the Chanins had also built the Bilt more and the Mansfield (now the Brooks Atkinson) Theaters, and the Royale, the Theater Masque (now the John Golden Theater), and the Majestic were under construction. The latter three were built in conjunction with

the Hotel Lincoln on Eighth Avenue between 44th and 45th Streets (opened in 1928).

Even before the Roxy Theater opened, the Chanins and Roxy were making plans to continue their collaboration in the design of a new combination hotel and theater structure on Broadway between 74th and 75th Streets. Undoubtedly pleased with the success of combining three theaters with the Hotel Lincoln, thereby providing common building services for all, the Chanins saw a combination theater-hotel structure to be a logical solution for the site. In addition, revenues from the hotel could be used to offset the expenses of operating the theater. The Chanin Construction Co. was to act as consulting engineers and builders; the theater was to be managed by Roxy through the Roxy Circuit, Inc. and the intention was to

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

10. Geographic	ai Data	with the state of	
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State Historic Preservation Officer signal	gnature (	in hel	mm /
itle Commissioner	American de la compansión		date 9/30/82
For HCRS use only I hereby certify that this proper  Cloud By Keeper of the National Register	ty is included in t	he National Register Entered in the National Regist	date /1/4/82_
Attest:			date
Chief of Registration			

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call it Roxy's Midway. Walter W. Ahlschlager, the architect of the Roxy Theater, was commissioned as the architect for the design of the Beacon Theater and Hotel.

Walter W. Ahlschlager (1887-1965), born in Chicago, was trained at the Armour Institute of Technology (later the Illinois Institute of Technology) and the school at the Art Institute of Chicago. He had joined his father in the firm of Ahlschlager & Son and then continued under his own name after the death of his father. Although Ahlschlager had achieved a reputation early in his career when he won a competition for the design of the campus of Lutheran Concordia College in West Chicago, he focused his attention on the design of office buildings and hotels, most of which were in Chicago and other midwestern cities. He also wrote on the efficacy and design characteristics of the skyscraper. He moved his practice to Dallas in 1940. The Roxy, undoubtedly because of the important role it played in the American theater, remains Ahlschlager's most famous work, even though the theater was demolished in 1960.

In the Beacon, Ahlschlager was able to use certain design features and effects that had been used in the Roxy. Roxy wanted stage facilities to allow him to produce a program similar to the Roxy, even if on a somewhat less grand scale. Thus the stage has three elevators: one on the main stage, one in the orchestra pit and one for the Wurlitzer electric organ. Spatial relationships providing a sense of contrast between the ticket lobby and the lobby rotunda are also similar. The rotunda is often said to be based on the Roxy rotunda, but the Beacon's is smaller, and inspired by Rococo, rather than Spanish Renaissance, design. While Roxy has been described as Moorish and "early Plateresque, which prevailed in the early Renaissance in Spain, with a touch of Italian," Ahlschlager varied his design sources somewhat for the Beacon. The Renaissance is not negleted, but Greek, Roman, and Rococo sources are also used.

Roxy was not destined to manage the new theater in the Hotel Beacon (which gained its name from the airplane beacon on its roof). Because of delays in the completion of the theater, the Roxy Corp., filed suit in July 1928 to vacate its lease. After a complicated series of financial transactions, the Chanin Realty Corp. purchased the Beacon Hotel and Theater in April 1930. Several months earlier a lease had been negotiated for the management of the theater with Warner Bros. Pictures, Inc., by 1929 one of the fastest growing motion picture companies in the United States and in the process of acquiring theaters to provide an outlet for its films. According to press accounts, Warner Bros. found it necessary to make some modifications to the theater before opening it, paying special attention to the problems of sound. The concern was understandable considering the pioneering role of Warner Bros. in developing talking pictures.

The Beacon Theater officially opened on December 24, 1929, with Harry Warner making a welcoming speech, Ben Bernie, the orchestra leader, acting as master of ceremonies, and Stuart Barrie at the Wurlitzer organ. Vitaphone short subjects, a newsreel, and the feature film, Tiger Rose, starring Lupe Velez and Rin Tin, made up the film program.

The Beacon remained in business as a movie theater under various managements until 1974. That year it was taken over by a group which scheduled live performances in the theater, but the group defaulted in 1976. In February 1977, the Concert Arts Scoiety, Inc. took over the lease of the theater and is now operating it as a multi-purpose performing arts center.

The Beacon Hotel has served continuously for its original purpose while the Beacon Theater survives as a great movie palace—a tribute to the showmanship of Roxy and the design effects of Walter W. Ahlschlager.

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Ahlschlager, Walter W., Clipping File, New York Public Library, Art and Architecture Division.

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The Chanins. Clipping File. New York Public Library, Theater Division, Lincoln Center.

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MacGown, Keith. "Profiles: Deus Ex Cinema." The New Yorker, 3 (May 28, 1927), 20-22.

New York Times, January 25, 1927, p. 41; September 2, 1928, X, p. 17; December 18, 1928, p. 55; December 25, 1929, p. 21; April 5, 1930, p. 36; April 20, 1930, X, p.2; March 30, 1965, p. 47 (Walter W. Ahlschlager Obituary).

Rothafel, Samuel L., as told to Fistere, John Cushman. "The Architect and the Box Office." Architectrual Forum, 57 (September 1932), 194-196.

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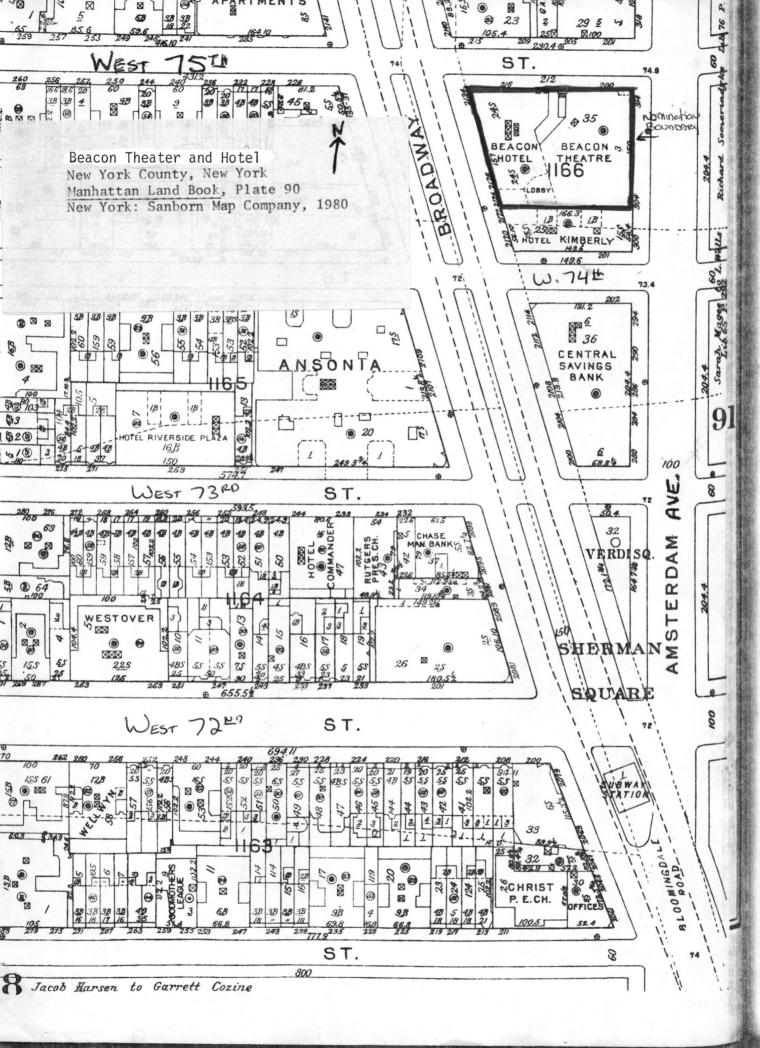
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FORM RESEARCHED AND PREPARED BY:

Anthony W. Robins Landmarks Preservation Commission 20 Vesey Street New York, New York 10007

February, 1981 212-566-7577



## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

EVALUATION / RETURN SHEE

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

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Comments for any item may be continued on an attached sheet



BEACON THEATRE AND HOTEL 2124 Broadway
New York County, New York

Carl Forster, 1981 New York Landmarks Photo by:

Neg. at:

Preservation Commission

View from the northwest



2. BEACON THEATRE AND HOTEL 2124 Broadway New York County, New York

Photo by: Carl Forster, 1981

Neg. at: New York Landmarks
Preservation Commission

Entrance and marquee View from the west



3. BEACON THEATRE. AND HOTEL 2124 Broadway
New York County, New York

Photo by:

Carl Forster, 1981 New York Landmarks

Neg. at: New York Land

Preservation Commission

W.75th Street elevation View from the northeast



4. BEACON THEATRE AND HOTEL 2124 Bloodway
New York County, New York

Photo by: Carl Forster, 1981

Neg. at: New York Landmarks

Preservation Commission

Amsterdam Avenue elevation View from the northeast



5. BEACON THEATRE AND HOTEL 2124 Guadway New York County, New York

Photo by:

Carl Forster, 1981

Neg. at:

New York Landmarks Preservation Commission

Inner ticket lobby View from the south



6. BEACON THEATRE AND HOTEL 2124 Broadway New York County, New York

Photo by: Carl Forster, 1981

Neg. at: New York Landmarks

Preservation Commission

Rotunda lobby View from the east



7. BEACON THEATRE AND HOTEL 2124 Swaderbury New York County, New York

Photo by: Carl Forster, 1981 New York Landmarks

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Preservation Commission

Rotunda lobby View from the west



8. BEACON THEATRE AND HOTEL 2124 Burdeway
New York County, New York

Carl Forster, 1981 Photo by:

New York Landmarks Preservation Commission Neg. at:

Auditorium: Proscenium View from the south



9. BEACON THEATRE AND HOTEL 2124 Broadway New York County, New York

Photo by: Carl Forster, 1981 Neg. at: New York Landmarks

Neg. at: New York Landmarks
Preservation Commission

Auditorium View from the east



BEACON THEATRE AND HOTEL 2124 Sucadway New York County, New York

> Carl Forster, 1981 Photo by:

> New York Landmarks Neg. at:

Preservation Commission

Auditorium: Balcony View from the east



#### 11. BEACON THEATRE AND HOTEL 2124 Browling New York County, New York

Photo by: Carl Forster, 1981 Neg. at: New York Landmarks

Preservation Commission

Auditorium View from the north