

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only
received **OCT 4 1983**
date entered

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

1. Name

historic Apollo Theater

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 253 West 125th Street not for publication

city, town New York vicinity of congressional district

state New York code 36 county New York code 061

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>NA</u> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<u>NA</u> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Inner City Broadcasting Corporation c/o Percy Sutton

street & number 802 Second Avenue

city, town New York vicinity of _____ state New York

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Surrogates Court / Hall of Records

street & number 31 Chambers Street

city, town New York state New York

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Landmarks Preservation Commission 1/6/83

title Urban Cultural Resources Surveys has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1983 federal state county local

depository for survey records 20 Vesey Street

city, town New York state New York 10007

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date <u>NA</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Apollo Theater is located in the heart of Harlem on the north side of 125th Street between 7th and 8th Avenues, a large and busy commercial street containing a variety of 19th and 20th century buildings. The three-story building, measuring four bays wide on its principal street facade, has been altered over the years but retains most of its early 20th century character. Originally the building contained a cafe and cabaret in the basement, a burlesque theater and store on the main floor, a restaurant on the second floor, and loft and meeting rooms on the third floor. Today the second and third floors above the lobby are divided into small rooms and serve as offices and storage space.

The south and principal facade is clad with white terra-cotta. The first floor incorporates several remodeling campaigns and the addition of a contemporary storefront with modern windows and doors. Above, the original ashlar coursed white glazed terra-cotta embellished with a denticulated cornice extends the width of the building. Five colossal pilasters divide the upper facade into four bays. These pilasters on the ends are panelled, with stylized Tuscan capitals. The three central pilasters are fluted with Ionic capitals. A heavy modillioned metal cornice is surmounted by three parapet-like pedestals placed above the central pilasters.

The bays are filled with large square windows with terra-cotta spandrels. The spandrels above the second story are decorated with fluted heraldic panels bearing shields. Narrow spandrels above the third story are decorated with Greek fretwork. The windows consist of both paired double-hung sash and a single-pane pivot type with a single transom in the two upper eastern bays and three lower western bays.

A heavy marquee above the entrance that bears the word "Apollo" on the two sides, extends across half the building, covering the width of the sidewalk. A large vertical two-sided sign also bearing the name "Apollo" rises above and perpendicular to the building, supported by metal framework. Both signs date from the 1940's.

The theater's original L-shape plan remains intact, retaining its entry sequence through a vestibule and lobby and into the main auditorium. The front portion of the building is divided into two equal sections: the western half consisting of the vestibule and lobby to the Apollo and the eastern half a separate store. The rear of the structure consists of a three-tiered auditorium. The theater is oriented on a perpendicular axis to the entrance with the stage at the east wall of the building.

The lobby, separated from the street by a small vestibule, retains its original volume and rectangular shape plan, although its finishes were removed in the 1960's. A large mural portraying black artists who have performed at the Apollo has been installed along the lobby walls leading to the auditorium.

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National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

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Continuation sheet Apollo Theater
253 W. 125th St. N.Y. Item number 7

Page 2

The auditorium is rectangular in plan and three stories in height. The floor of the orchestra is raked toward the stage, divided by two center aisles. The rows of seating are tiered and placed on a curve to provide for the best possible views. Monumental arches flank the proscenium and frame two levels of double-tiered boxes. The entablature and arches are decorated with classically inspired plaster ornament, including foliation and circle motifs.

The Apollo is one of the few theaters remaining in New York City with two balconies. The balconies, each reached by a separate set of stairs, curve around the back of the auditorium. They are supported on the orchestra level by fluted columns (stripped on the lower portions) and on the first balcony level by square columns with simple molded capitals. The balconies have brass handrails and the front panels retain much original classically inspired plaster ornament, including Greek fretwork, shields, wreaths, garlands, and rope moldings.

The interior of the Apollo Theater has retained much of its original character despite several minor renovations from the 1930's-1970's. These interior alterations include: replacement of the original seating and carpeting, stripping of the ornamental plaster from the lower boxes, and removal of the scagliola fluting from the columns supporting the balcony on the orchestra level.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1913

Builder/Architect George Keister

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Apollo Theater is historically and architecturally significant for its role as one of New York City's and the nation's leading entertainment centers for over four decades. Completed in 1914 as a burlesque house, it later became the premier performance hall for black American performers and a symbol of the movement to promote black cultural awareness in the 1930s. Its contribution as a nurturing force and a showcase of black talent ranks it as one of this country's most significant cultural resources. The Apollo's interior, with its classically inspired ornament, retains much of its original character, providing associations with its history as a theater.

During much of the nineteenth century, Harlem was a fashionable suburb for wealthy and upper-middle class white Manhattan residents. At the turn of the century, following the completion of subway routes, speculative overbuilding of rowhouses and apartment buildings resulted in a real estate bust in 1904. At this time, major black neighborhoods, (the west side, streets 20s-60s), were experiencing redevelopment and the residents were being displaced. The combination of available real estate in Harlem and displacement from other neighborhoods made Harlem attractive to New York City blacks, who began to move into Harlem around 1910.

This migration increased during the 1920s as blacks moved to Harlem from the American south and the West Indies. During these years, Harlem became the urban cultural capital of black America. The "center" of Harlem was then considered to be around 135th Street, between Lenox and Seventh Avenues. By the 1930s, as the black population moved southward, 125th Street, already a major shopping and entertainment throughfare, became the "Main Street" of black Harlem.

Built as Hurtig and Seamon's New (Burlesque) Theater, the Apollo originally catered to a primarily white clientele and presented the popular entertainment of the day: burlesque. The New Theater was in operation until 1934, when a crackdown on burlesque shows was undertaken by Mayor La Guardia's administration. In 1935 Frank Schiffman and Leo Brecher, two white businessmen, purchased the building and renamed it the Apollo Theater. Under their direction, the theater presented a permanent variety show format which featured leading black entertainers.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Apollo Theater. The Apollo Theater Story. New York: Apollo Operations, Inc. 1966.
Schiffman, Jack. Uptown: The Story of Harlem's Apollo Theater. New York: Cowles Book Co., Inc., 1971.
Shockley, Jay. Apollo Theater-Designation Report. New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1983.

10. Geographical Data

Acree of nominated property Approximately 2/5 of an acre

Quadrangle name Central Park, N.Y. - N.J.

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	8	5	88	5	50	4	5	17	9	90
Zone		Easting			Northing					

B

Zone		Easting			Northing					

C

Zone		Easting			Northing					

D

Zone		Easting			Northing					

E

Zone		Easting			Northing					

F

Zone		Easting			Northing					

G

Zone		Easting			Northing					

H

Zone		Easting			Northing					

Verbal boundary description and justification

The boundary of the Apollo Theater, 253 West 125th Street, is shown as the bold line on the accompanying plot map.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries NA

state code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Contact; Merrill Hesch

organization NYS Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation date September 1983

street & number E.S.P. Agency Bldg. 1 telephone 518 474-0479

city or town Albany state New York 12238

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national 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.

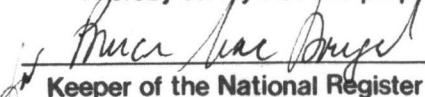
State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title Commissioner

date 9-22-83

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register


Keeper of the National Register

date 11/17/83

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet Apollo Theater 253 W. 125th St., Item number 8 Page 2

New York, New York Co.

The Apollo became the center for Harlem's popular entertainment and one of the nation's most important arenas for the display of leading black performing talent for a period of four decades. "Harlem recognized no popular entertainer until he or she had appeared or excelled at the Apollo."¹ Throughout its history, it displayed every form of popular black entertainment, including comedy, drama, dance, gospel, blues, jazz, swing, bebop, rhythm and blues, rock and roll and soul music. In programing such a variety of black entertainers, the Apollo's management contributed to the development of Harlem into the major urban cultural and intellectual center for blacks in the United States.

"The Apollo," according to former New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission Chairman Kent L. Barwick, "is unparelled in shaping both the careers of major black performers and a variety of forms of American entertainment. Nearly every black American performer has played the Apollo, from blues singer Bessie Smith in the 1930s, to jazz great Louis Armstrong, Count Basie, and Duke Ellington, to Dinah Washington, Sam Cooke, and the Supremes, through soul singer Aretha Franklin and James Brown in the 1970s. It is no wonder that the Apollo, aside from having had an extraordinary impact on our culture, has become synonymous with Harlem itself."²

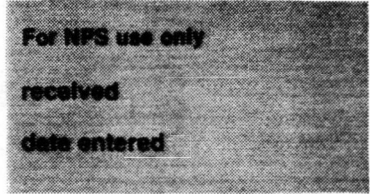
Designed by architect George Keister in the neoclassical style, the Apollo retains much of its original character. The 1700-seat theater auditorium features a proscenium arch with flanking boxes and elaborate classically inspired plaster ornament. The Apollo is one of the few theaters remaining in New York City with two balconies. The Apollo's exterior, faced in white terra cotta, handsomely displays five colossal pilasters capped by stylized Tuscan and Ionic capitals decorated with anthemion motifs. Keister was one of the most prominent theater architects in practice at the turn of the century. He worked throughout the metropolitan area designing the Sewlyn and the Belasco Theaters in Times Square, the Colonial Theater at 68th Street and Broadway, Loew's Yorkville (demolished), and the Bronx's Opera House.

1. Jervis Anderson, This was Harlem; A Cultural Portrait, 1900-1950 (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982) p. 238.

2. "Landmark News," (New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission), June 29, 1983.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet Apollo Theater
253 W. 125th St. Item number 8 Page 3
New York, New York Co.

The Apollo Theater's continuous tradition of live entertainment since the 1910s (which featured leading black performers since the 1930s) came to an end in the mid-1970s. A number of factors are usually cited for the Apollo's decline, including dwindling audiences, higher ticket prices, the opening of other arenas to black patronage, the decline of stage shows in the recording era, the ease with which top-name black performers could earn more money elsewhere, and the decline of 125th Street as a healthy commercial center. The building has subsequently had a mixed history: as a movie theater with occasional shows, a short-lived attempt to revive live entertainment without top names, years of standing vacant, and the sale to the Harlem Urban Development Corporation. The Apollo Theater remains, however, as a building of great significance in the history of American culture, representing the contribution of Harlem and black Americans to the entertainment of New York City and the nation.

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCRS use only
received
date entered

Apollo Theater New York

Continuation sheet 253 W. 125th St., N.Y.Co Item number 11

Page 2

Form Prepared By: Michael May, Graduate Research Assistant
Carol Clark, Associate Director
Elizabeth Igleheart, Reasearch Consultant

Organization: New York Landmarks Conservancy
330 West 42nd Street
New York, NY 10036

Telephone: (212) 736- 7575

Date: August 19, 1983

83004059

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Substantive Review

Apollo Theater
New York County
NEW YORK

Working No. OCT 4 1983

Fed. Reg. Date: 2/5/83

Date Due: 11/3/83 - 11/18/83

Action: ACCEPT 11/17/83

RETURN

REJECT

Federal Agency: _____

- resubmission
- nomination by person or local government
- owner objection
- appeal

Substantive Review: sample request appeal NR decision

Reviewer's comments:

The Apollo Theater is significant for its historical associations with the development of Harlem into the nation's major black cultural and intellectual center. The statement of significance does not provide adequate justification for architectural significance but minimally established the exceptional importance of the theater to American history.

Recom./Criteria Accept A

Reviewer Bushong

Discipline Historic

Date 11/17/83

see continuation sheet

Nomination returned for: technical corrections cited below
 substantive reasons discussed below

1. Name

2. Location

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
	Public Acquisition	Accessible	

4. Owner of Property

5. Location of Legal Description

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Has this property been determined eligible? yes no

7. Description

- | | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| Condition
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent
<input type="checkbox"/> good
<input type="checkbox"/> fair | <input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated
<input type="checkbox"/> ruins
<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed | Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered
<input type="checkbox"/> altered | Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____ |
|--|---|--|---|

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

- summary paragraph
- completeness
- clarity
- alterations/integrity
- dates
- boundary selection

8. Significance

Period _____ Areas of Significance—Check and justify below

Specific dates _____ Builder/Architect _____
Statement of Significance (*in one paragraph*)

- summary paragraph
- completeness
- clarity
- applicable criteria
- justification of areas checked
- relating significance to the resource
- context
- relationship of integrity to significance
- justification of exception
- other

The initial significance of the Apollo Theatre is its historical associations with the emergence of Harlem in the 1930s as a black cultural mecca. The direct role the theater played in the literary, artistic and cultural lives of black Americans has not been discussed at a national level of significance. In addition, events after 1935 were not demonstrated to be exceptionally significant and lack both geographic and thematic context. In this case the nomination was acceptable for its obvious local significance, but it did not do justice to the resource.

9. Major Bibliographical References

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property _____
 Quadrangle name _____
 UTM References _____

Verbal boundary description and justification _____

11. Form Prepared By

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

____ national ____ state ____ local

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title _____ date _____

13. Other

- Maps
- Photographs
- Other

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to _____

Signed _____ Date _____ Phone: _____



APOLLO
WBLS 67.5 FM
THEATRE
STUDIO

APOLLO
WBLS City
TELEVISION STUDIOS
UNDER CONSTRUCTION

REPAIRS

REPAIRS

Branch Spang
RESTAURANT

LORD'S
Mens fashions

FOR RENT

MR. PALMER



photo 1

Apollo Theater
253 West 125th Street
New York, New York County, N.Y.

Photographer: Carl Forester
Date Taken: October 1981
Negative filed at: New York City
Landmarks Preservation Commission
View looking north along W.125th St.

New York Landmarks Conservancy

Broadway
New York, New York 10004
25-4085
390 W. 42nd Street
New York, New York 10036
212 273 6735





photo 2

Apollo Theatre
253 West 125th Street
New York, New York County, N.Y.

Photographer: Carl Forester
Date Taken: October 1981
Negative filed at: New York City
Landmarks Preservation Commission
Interior view of stage, looking east

New York Landmarks Conservancy

330 West 42nd Street

330 W. 42nd Street

New York, New York 10036

New York, New York 10036

212-736-7575

212-736-7575





photo 3

Apollo Theater
253 West 125th Street
New York, New York County, N.Y.

Photographer: Carl Forester
Date Taken: October 1981
Negative filed at: New York City
Landmarks Preservation Commission
Side boxes

New York Landmarks Conservancy

330 W. 42nd Street
New York, New York 10004
212-425-4085
New York, New York 10036
212-736-7575



Apollo Theater
253 West 125th Street
New York County, New York

UTM Reference:
Central Park Quad
All Zone 18

Easting 588550
Northing 4517990



Apollo Theater
685 11th St
New York City

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
Revised in cooperation with New York
Department of Transportation

Control by USGS, USC&GS, and New Jersey Geodetic Survey

Planimetry by photogrammetric methods and from USC&GS Charts T-4567,
T-5089, T-5264, T-5278, T-5448, T-5449, T-5451, T-5452, T-5453, T-5458,
and T-5778. Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs
taken 1954 and planimetric surveys 1956

Revised from aerial photographs taken 1966. Field checked 1966

Selected hydrographic data compiled from USC&GS Charts 226, 274, 745,
746, and 747 (1966). This information is not intended for navigational purposes

Polyconic projection, 1927 North American datum

10,000-foot grids based on New York coordinate system, Long Island zone,
and New Jersey coordinate system

1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 18, shown in blue

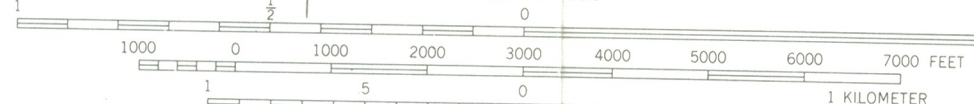
Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown

UTM GRID AND 1979 MAGNETIC NORTH
DECLINATION AT CENTER OF SHEET

12° 21' 30" N
0° 42' 12" W

CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET
NATIONAL GEODETIC DATUM OF 1929
DEPTH CURVES AND SOUNDINGS IN FEET—DATUM IS MEAN LOW WATER
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO DATUMS IS VARIABLE
SHORELINE SHOWN REPRESENTS THE APPROXIMATE LINE OF MEAN HIGH WATER
THE AVERAGE RANGE OF TIDE IS APPROXIMATELY 2 FEET
4 FEET IN THE HUDSON RIVER AND 5 FEET IN THE EAST RIVER

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST



ROAD CLASSIFICATION
Heavy-duty ——— Light-duty ———
Medium-duty ——— Unimproved dirt ———
Interstate Route ——— U.S. Route ——— State Route ———

CENTRAL PARK, N. Y. - N. J.
SW/4 HARLEM 15' QUADRANGLE
N4045-W7352.5-7.5

1966
PHOTOREVISED 1979
AMS 6265 IV SW-SERIES V821

Revisions shown in purple compiled from aerial photographs
taken 1977 and other source data. This information
not field checked. Map edited 1979

There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of
the National or State reservations shown on this map.