

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received AUG 19 1985

date entered

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

## 1. Name

historic Yiddish Art Theatre

and/or common

## 2. Location

street &amp; number 189 Second Avenue

not for publication

city, town New York vicinity of

state New York code 036 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	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	NA in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	NA 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 Julius Raynes, Raynes Realty

street &amp; number 469 Seventh Avenue

city, town New York vicinity of state NY 10018

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Surrogate's Court/Hall of Records

street &amp; number 31 Chambers Street

city, town New York state NY 10007

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Cooper Square Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes ☒ nodate 1985 federal state county ☒ local

depository for survey records NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission

city, town 20 Vesey Street, New York state NY 10007

## 7. Description

### Condition

☐ excellent  
☒ good  
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated  
☐ ruins  
☐ unexposed

### Check one

☐ unaltered  
☒ altered

### Check one

☒ original site  
☐ moved

date NA

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The former Yiddish Art Theatre is located on the southwest corner of Second Avenue and East 12th Street in Manhattan's East Village. The building almost completely fills its lots, and two elevations are visible from the street. This area of Second Avenue is comprised primarily of five- and six-story brick tenements with ground floor commercial establishments.

The theatre building includes a rectangular three-story block fronting Second Avenue and a larger rear auditorium that is visible on the northern elevation along E. 12th Street. The (eastern) Second Avenue facade is constructed of cast-stone made to resemble pink sandstone. This facade contains six intact ground level storefronts set within a two-story arcade. The capitals are decorated with a floral pattern incorporating two intertwining birds. Above each arch at the third floor level is a pair of smaller arched windows; each pair is divided by a small pilaster with floral decoration.

The entrance to the theatre is located in the second bay from the corner. Shallow poster display cases line the entryway, and a replacement marquee made of iodized aluminum rests directly over the entrance. The dominant architectural motif of the theatre is a monumental three-story arch that rises directly above the marquee and surrounds a window. The arch is surrounded by a band decorated in an intricate geometric and floral pattern. Recessed pilasters supporting portions of stylized candelabra flank the window; seven small Moorish arches with decorative medallions are set above the pilasters.

The East 12th Street facade contains two bays indential in materials and design to the Second Avenue facade and the rear elevation of the auditorium. The auditorium portion is constructed of brick over a steel frame and contains five exit doors grouped together and set within a cast-stone surround. Located above the center of the doors is a shallow blind arch surrounded by four bands of brick. The blind arch is filled with a Moorish-inspired lattice pattern of terra cotta. There is a door located at either side of the exit doors.

Entry to the auditorium is through a square vestibule on Second Avenue decorated with an ornate molded plaster ceiling and a terrazzo floor in a vacant white diamond pattern, and marble walls. Gilt edged mirrors line the south wall, opposite the box office.

The auditorium contains 1143 seats divided among an orchestra and one balcony. The floor of the orchestra is sloped toward the stage. The orchestra pit is located immediately in front of the stage. The stage, 30' x 36', is adorned with a rectangular molded plaster proscenium decorated with oriental-inspired (geometric and floral) patterns. To either side of the stage is a box which holds ten seats. The boxes are elaborately decorated with decorative geometric patterns that are Moorish in inspiration. Behind the box is an arch decorated with alternating blocks of geometric patterns.

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The rear of the auditorium contains two curved staircases which lead to the lounge in the basement and to the balcony. Wrought-iron balustrades adorn the stairs leading to the balcony. The stairs and the space around them form a two-story lobby with a narrow balcony at the second level and an ornately decorated ceiling containing circular and foliated motifs.

The underside of the balcony is decorated with molded plaster medallions with small light fixtures centered within the medallion. The base of the dome is surrounded by ornamental wrought-iron grillework and tracery containing small stars of David. The medallion contains a smaller Star of David set within a larger, more ornately stylized star set among additional floral ornament. A two-tiered chandelier decorated with gold leaf hangs from the center. Outside of the dome, the rest of the ceiling is decorated with molded plaster in floral and geometric patterns that have been gold leafed and painted to produce a jewelled effect.

There are twelve small dressing rooms located above the stage, where there is also access to the dome. Underneath the stage are unadorned rooms used for office and storage space, which can also be entered from a door in the southernmost bay on Second Avenue. The orchestra pit can also be reached from this level. On the lower lobby (lounge) level, located under the rear of the auditorium, is a snack bar, lavatories and the administrative offices for the theatre. Above the storefronts along Second Avenue are unadorned rehearsal rooms. Access to these rooms is from a door at street level south of the main entrance to the theatre.

There have been no major alterations to the theatre.

## 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 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** 1926 **Builder/Architect** Harrison G. Wiseman

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Yiddish Art Theatre is historically significant for its association with the history of Yiddish theatre in New York City. The only theatre structure built on the Lower East Side on Manhattan expressly for a Yiddish theatre group, this building was the home of Maurice Schwartz's Yiddish Art Theatre Company, the longest running repertory company in the history of Yiddish theatre in New York and possibly in the United States. Located in the area of Second Avenue in Manhattan known in the early 20th century as the "Jewish Rialto," the theatre is the sole intact surviving theatre on the Lower East Side from this period. Built in 1926 to a design by Harrison Wiseman, the theatre is architecturally significant for its intact Moorish-inspired exterior and interior decoration including a central recessed ceiling dome containing a prominent Star of David.

The origins of Yiddish theatre date from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when lengthy poems about the festive Jewish holiday of Purim were written in Yiddish and circulated in Venice and Northern, Central, and Eastern Europe. Called Purimspiel, which means Purim play in Yiddish, the poems evolved through the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries from monologues to parodies of Purim, Bible stories, and/or contemporary life. By the seventeenth century, Purimspiel had grown into elaborate skits which included a prologue and epilogue, vulgar language, a narrator and characters in costume, and were often performed by students recruited into rival performing groups. Always performed at home as part of the celebration of the festive spring holiday, Purimspiel was the only form of theatre in which the rigidly traditional Ashkenazis, those Jews of Northern, Central, and Eastern Europe, participated or observed. Purimspiel was always written and performed in Yiddish, the common language of Ashkenazi Jewry.

From the 1750s until the 1880s, the Haskala, or Jewish Enlightenment, spread across Europe. The Haskala promoted assimilation of secular popular culture by Jews in terms of language, dress and manners. It advocated secular education versus strictly religious studies and encouraged Jews to become productive in crafts and agriculture. One of its primary objectives was emancipation, a condition denied to most Jews of Europe. The Haskala had its strongest effect in Central, Western and Northern Europe; in Eastern Europe, adherence to orthodox religious practices, poorer economic conditions, and autocratic anti-Semitic governments inhibited the movement for change. Emancipation was not accomplished in Eastern Europe, but cultural assimilation was affected. In Western Europe, Yiddish was abandoned, but in Eastern Europe, classics and popular works written in other languages were translated into Yiddish. Original works in Yiddish were produced, and books, plays, and poems were available for the general Jewish population. Many Jews ignored religious prohibitions and began to take part in popular culture and

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Brooklyn

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A 18 585600 4509150  
Zone Easting Northing

B           
Zone Easting Northing

C         

D         

E         

F         

G         

H         

Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property occupies block 467, lot 31 in Manhattan

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

state NA code county code

state NA code county code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Merrill Hesch

organization Division for Historic Preservation date August 1985

Agency Building 1

street & number Empire State Plaza telephone (518)474-0479

city or town Albany state New York

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

   national    state X 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 Julia S. Stokes

title Deputy Commissioner for Historic Preservation

date August 16, 1985

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

Entered in the  
National Register

date 9-19-85

Keeper of the National Register Delores Byrum

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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entertainment. In 1876, Abraham Goldfaden (1840-1908), a Yiddish poet, dramatist and composer, produced the first performance of Yiddish theatre in Jassy, Rumania.

Goldfaden was a true product of the Haskala. He was fluent in several languages and wrote poetry, lyrics, music and serious drama. His plays were drawn from popular culture, poetry, Jewish folk traditions, and synagogue liturgy. They had broad appeal to Jews of Eastern Europe who were anxious for popular entertainemnt in their own language. Goldfaden, encouraged by the success of his performances in Jassy, organized wandering minstrels, cantors' assistants, and actors into a touring company which traveled across Rumania and the Pale of Settlement in Russia. The Pale of Settlement was that area of Western Russia in which Russian Jewry was confined to live. Stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea, it was an area of numerous small villages and a few urban centers. In 1897, the Jewish population was counted at 4,889,300, and comprised 11.6% of the total population. It was fertile ground for the Yiddish Theatre to grow. In 1883, the Russian government banned Yiddish theatre as part of a succession of anti-Semitic laws, which caused many actors, writers and producers, as well as millions from the general Jewish population, to flee the country.

Jews, fleeing religious and cultural oppression and poverty, were attracted to America by the promise of freedom and opportunity. In 1881, a series of pogroms started in Russia, which lasted into the early twentieth century and resulted in the deaths of thousand of Jews. In 1882, the institution of the May Laws in Russia, severely curtailing Jews' civil and religious rights, fueled the mass migration of Jews to America which had started with the first pogroms. Although there were Jews living in America since 1654, Jewish immigration was slow and few in number, but between 1881 and 1914, the start of the First World War, close to two million Jews arrived in America, almost all of them from Eastern Europe. Jews preferred New York City as their port of entry and their place of settlement. In 1880, only 4% of the total population of the city was Jewish, but by 1910, it had risen to 23% and by 1920, to 29%. Statistics on Jewish immigration between 1899 and 1910 show that the Jews of Eastern Europe tended to come in family groups more than other European immigrants. Like other groups, it was a movement of youth; and Jewish immigration was directed toward permanent settlement. Fewer Jewish immigrants left the United States after arrival than other groups; Jewish immigrants included a higher proportion of skilled laborers and most of them came from urban or semi-urban areas. After 1900, Jewish immigration changed to include a greater number of intellectuals, which would have an impact on the growth of Yiddish theatre.

The East Side, or Lower East Side, as it is known today, was the first area of New York in which many immigrants looked for housing. Formerly an area of Irish and German immigrants characterized by two-story frame houses converted to multi-family housing, the Lower East Side spread to include the area from East Broadway to 14th Street and from the Bowery to the East River

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by the end of the First World War. The "dumbbell tenement," taking its name from its shape, soon became the predominant building type, as it was developed to house ever increasing numbers of immigrants. The Lower East Side included enclaves of Ukrainians, Poles, Germans, and Irish, but the predominant group was Jewish, and the Lower East Side became synonymous with East European Jewish immigrant life. Living conditions were highly congested, reported to be 701.9 persons per acre in the heart of the area in 1883.

In America, the social and cultural institutions of East European Jews took on new forms. In the large, pluralistic, urban setting, Jews redefined their communal structure to meet the demands of the new society. The centrality of the synagogue and religious life diminished in importance and fraternal organizations, labor unions, political parties and secular education took precedence. Entertainment and cultural activities also became important components of the immigrant experience, such that into the arena of overcrowded living and sweatshop working conditions, Yiddish theatre was introduced. It quickly achieved widespread popularity, providing entertainment and escape from everyday life, a sense of cultural enrichment in the immigrants' quest for self improvement, and a relief from the alienation resulting from the new and unsettling culture.

Yiddish theatre made its first professional appearance in America in 1882. Boris Thomaschevsky (1868-1939), an immigrant from the Ukraine and a cigar roller, produced and acted in Abraham Goldfaden's Koldoyne (The Witch), at Turn Hall on East Fourth Street. Thomaschevsky organized his own theatre company immediately, but with the wave of immigrants fleeing Europe, among whom were professional actors and theatre troupes, he soon had stiff competition. Yiddish performances proliferated in the theatres along the Bowery, Second Avenue, and the surrounding side streets. Drama clubs flourished in the succeeding decade after the start of Yiddish theatre in New York, and amateur groups performed as part of fraternal organizations and labor unions.

The plays written and produced between 1883 and 1892 tended to be sentimental melodramas, embellished to please the audience. Described as "shund," a slightly derogatory word in Yiddish which would place the plays on a level of today's television soap operas or situation comedies, the plays centered on the immigrant experience and romanticized familiar Jewish characters. Yiddish theatre was dominated by dramatists Joseph Lateiner and Moshe Hurwitz, who wrote over two hundred plays for their respective rival companies, tailoring their work for notoriety and to lure audiences away from other theatres. The prominent stars of the day, Boris Thomaschevsky, Jacob Adler (1855-1926), and David Kessler (1860-1920), dominated the Yiddish stage for many years, and their personalities and private lives became as important as the roles they played. Thomaschevsky was considered the matinee idol of

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the shund theatre, while both Adler and Kessler were known for their acting ability. Each of these actors would eventually have his own company and theatre and both contributed to the change in Yiddish theatre that was to come in succeeding years. Thomaschevsky willingly produced newer serious drama; Adler produced plays that appealed to the intelligentsia and fathered an entire theatrical family; Kessler provided a veritable laboratory for other actors, such as Maurice Schwartz (the founder of the Yiddish Art Theatre) to perfect their talent. All three of these actors would make the transformation to the next phase of Yiddish theatre.

The years 1892 through 1902 marked what is often called the first "Golden Era" or the "Gordin Era" in the Yiddish Theatre. Jacob Gordin (1853-1909), a writer born in Russia who was heavily influenced by nineteenth-century Russian literature, arrived in America in 1891 and was immediately distressed by the state of Yiddish theatre and shund. Gordin soon came to the forefront of Jewish intellectual circles who were demanding a change in the theatre, and after a meeting with Jacob Adler, he wrote his first play, Siberia. Gordin believed that by using drama, it was possible to educate the masses to higher culture, to encourage self-improvement, and to instill them with socialist principles. His next plays, The Great Socialist and The Jewish King Lear, brought him and Jacob Adler enthusiastic support and notoriety. Theatre companies could now vary their repertoire. A new generation of actors had interesting and challenging materials, Hurwitz and Lateiner's dominance of the theatre was broken, and other playwrights were inspired to produce new works. Audiences loved Gordin's work and the aspects of realism it brought to the stage. His plays, which encompassed ethical problems and universal topics, turned away from the traditional Jewish folkways of earlier theatre and spoke directly to the immigrant experience of change.

In 1918, the Yiddish theatre entered into its second major transformation with the introduction of the art theatre concept. Art theatres had been developing in Europe during the early years of the twentieth century. They concentrated on serious drama, ensemble acting, establishment of a tradition of performance, and performance of new and experimental works. The fact that its origins were strongly rooted in Eastern Europe facilitated Yiddish theatre's absorption of the art theatre concept. The intervening years, from 1903 to 1918, had seen a return to popularity for shund theatre, but there was soon a new demand for serious drama. This time, it came from audiences as well as from those within the theatre. The Yiddish speaking audience was a lot better off economically and educationally. Their standards had changed and the Yiddish theatre had to change or lose its audience completely to the English language stage. Actors wanted to play new roles and to perform in plays which they believed raised the level of their work. When art theatre was introduced, it was accepted readily and spread throughout the Yiddish theatre world.

The art theatre movement ushered in the "Second Golden Era" of Yiddish theatre. Second Avenue was known as the "Jewish Rialto" with close to

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twenty theatres in the area having Yiddish productions. Maurice Schwartz (1890-1960), a prominent young actor in David Kessler's company, started his own troupe in 1918 by attracting a group of talented young actors to his company with the intention of performing serious drama. They first performed at the Irving Place Theatre on Irving Place and Fifteenth Street, but like most theatre companies, moved from one theatre to another over the years. Schwartz named his company the Yiddish Art Theatre. Thirty-two years later, when the company disbanded, it had achieved the status of the longest continuously running Yiddish repertory company ever to have been formed, and Schwartz was known as "Mr. Second Avenue." Schwartz and his company outlasted all of the other companies, and with only a few digressions, the history of the Yiddish theatre in America is embodied in the history of Maurice Schwartz and the Yiddish Art Theatre.

Schwartz was an immigrant from the Ukraine and started his acting career in 1905 in a drama club in Brooklyn. He perfected his acting skills and learned about the theatre by performing in shund productions in New York, Philadelphia, Cleveland, and Baltimore. He was devoted to the Yiddish language and the continuation of the Yiddish theatre, even at a time when audiences were diminishing. To raise money for his company when it was in debt, he would accept roles in vaudeville, film and Broadway. He and his company established a loyal following. The fact that he was able to keep his company going for so many years is often attributed to his tenacity and personality. Rather than functioning as an art theatre in its pure form, Schwartz's enterprise combined art theatre with elements of the star system inherited from shund theatre. He usually cast himself in leading roles, writing, producing and at times autocratically running the company.

In the first season, in 1918, the production of A Favorn Vinkl ( Secluded Corner), a literary play by Peretz Hirschbein, convinced Schwartz to continue his company in the art theatre movement. Jacob Ben-Ami, an actor in Schwartz's company, had convinced Schwartz to produce the play. Hirschbein and Ben-Ami had both had experience in the art theatre movement in Europe and had been influenced by the Moscow Art Theatre and the Vilna Troupe, a Yiddish art theatre group with an outstanding reputation for its acting and expressionistic sets. The play ran for fourteen weeks, an outstanding success in Yiddish theatre, and inspired Schwartz to follow with two similar productions. Schwartz's domination caused problems in the company, and the following year Ben-Ami left with several other actors to start their own company, called the Jewish Art Theatre.

The Jewish Art Theatre functioned as a collective with no stars or prompters and a fair division of roles and labor, but it was an economic failure and lasted only two seasons. Offering serious drama to the Yiddish speaking public, its most important contribution was the introduction of the "method," a psychological truthfulness and realism in acting.

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The Yiddish Art Theatre moved into its own home on the southwest corner of 12th Street and Second Avenue in 1926. The building was built by Louis N. Jaffe (1844-1944), a patron of the theatre and a loyal follower of Schwartz. Jaffe later founded Yiddish Art Theatre Films. This was the first and only time a theatre had been built especially for a Yiddish theatre company, and the bold Star of David in the center of the dome, as well as other Judaic references in the interior decor, recall the original purpose of the building. Jaffe hired Harrison G. Wiseman, a prominent theatre architect in New York, to design the theatre. Wiseman had done the plans for the Manhattan Opera House, the John Golden Theatre, and numerous movie palaces.

The theatre was designed in the Moorish Revival style popular for the design of synagogues in this period. The 1143 seat auditorium features a proscenium with flanking boxes, a balcony and a domed ceiling. The elaborate Oriental-inspired plaster ornamentation covers the ceiling of the auditorium, the boxes, proscenium, and the underside of the balcony. At the time the theatre was built, the prevailing architectural style for theatres was Art Deco, with streamlined forms contrasted with blank walls and flat decoration. The Oriental revival style evident in the Yiddish Art Theatre conforms to the modern tendency, with its expanse of blank walls and concentrated ornamentation. The choice of styles also signifies the continued search by Jews for a historic and national identity as is evident in the design of such synagogues as Central Synagogue (1872; NR listed), Eldridge Street Synagogue (1886-7; NR listed), and Mt. Nebo (1927-8; NR listed).

Schwartz kept the Yiddish Art Theatre running until 1950. In the years of its existence it performed works by such Yiddish writers as Abraham Goldfaden, Jacob Gordin, Sholem Aleichem, Sholem Asch, I. L. Peretz, Peretz Hirschbein, and I. B. Singer, as well as works in translation by Gorky, Schnitzler, Shaw, Moliere, Ibsen, Wilde and Chekhov. In addition to Ben-Ami, Celia Adler, Joseph Buloff, and Paul Muni (Muni Weisenfreund), a host of Yiddish actors performed with the company and went on to film, stage and television. The Yiddish Art Theatre's most critically acclaimed works were performed at its home on Second Avenue. In 1926, the new theatre opened with an expressionist production of The Tenth Commandment, by Abraham Goldfaden, and in 1932, I. B. Singer's Yoshe Kalb ran for a record 300 performances.

By the 1930s, however, Yiddish theatre was slowly disappearing. In the 1920s and 1930s a few attempts were made to revitalize repertory companies, most notably the Artef, which was an avant-garde, communist-inspired theatre, and a puppet theatre sponsored by the Federal Theatre Project, a program of the Federal government's Depression Era relief. In a few years, they both failed. The quotas on immigration after the First World War, a rapid assimilation of Jewish Americans into mainstream culture, and the

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destruction of European Jewry during World War II depleted Yiddish theatre of its audience, its actors, and its talent. New York, which had been the center of the Yiddish stage, witnessed the dissolution of a once vital cultural expression.

Retaining an outstanding level of exterior and interior integrity, the former Yiddish Art Theatre is the most tangible resource associated with this important cultural phenomenon in New York City.

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Bibliography

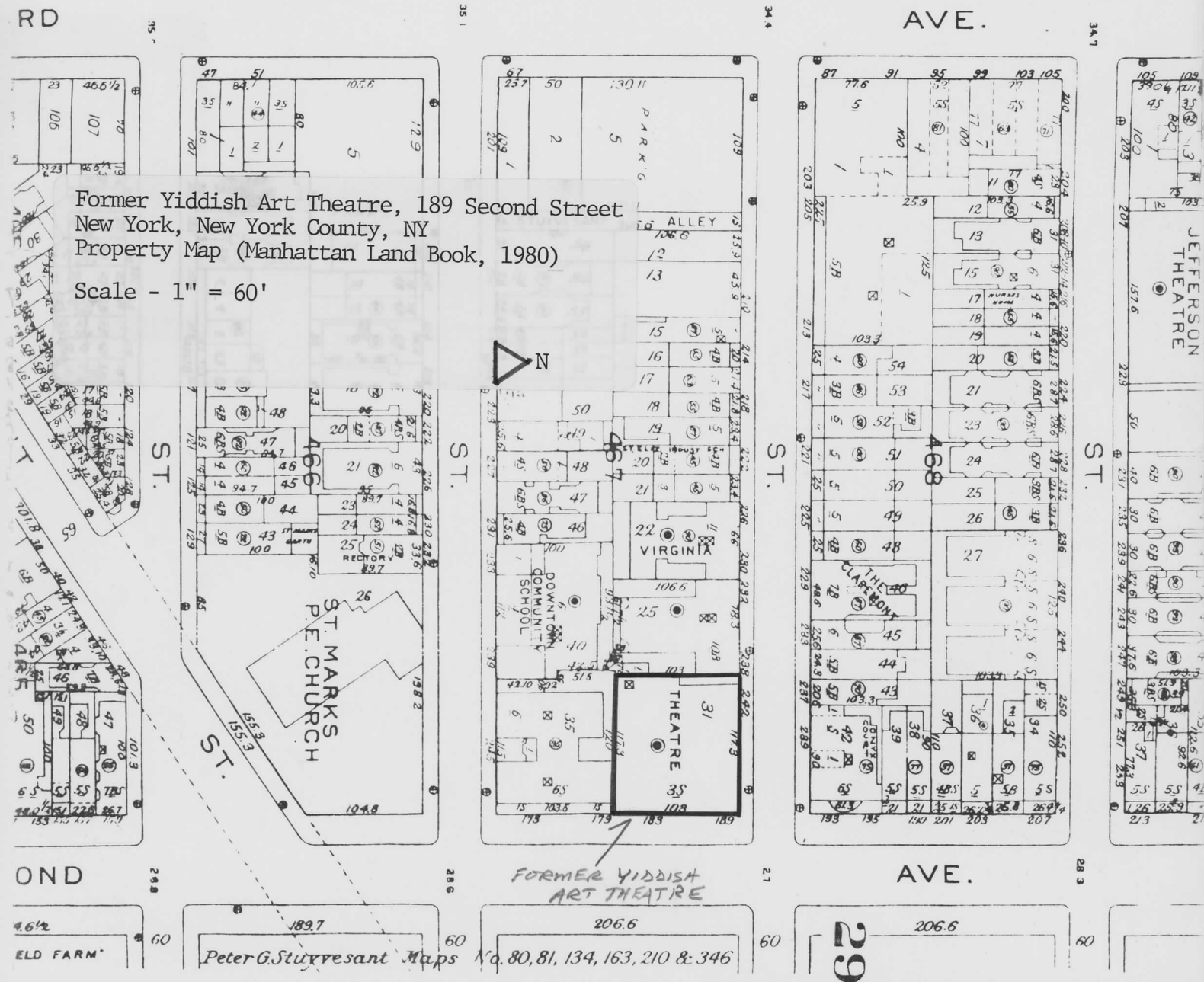
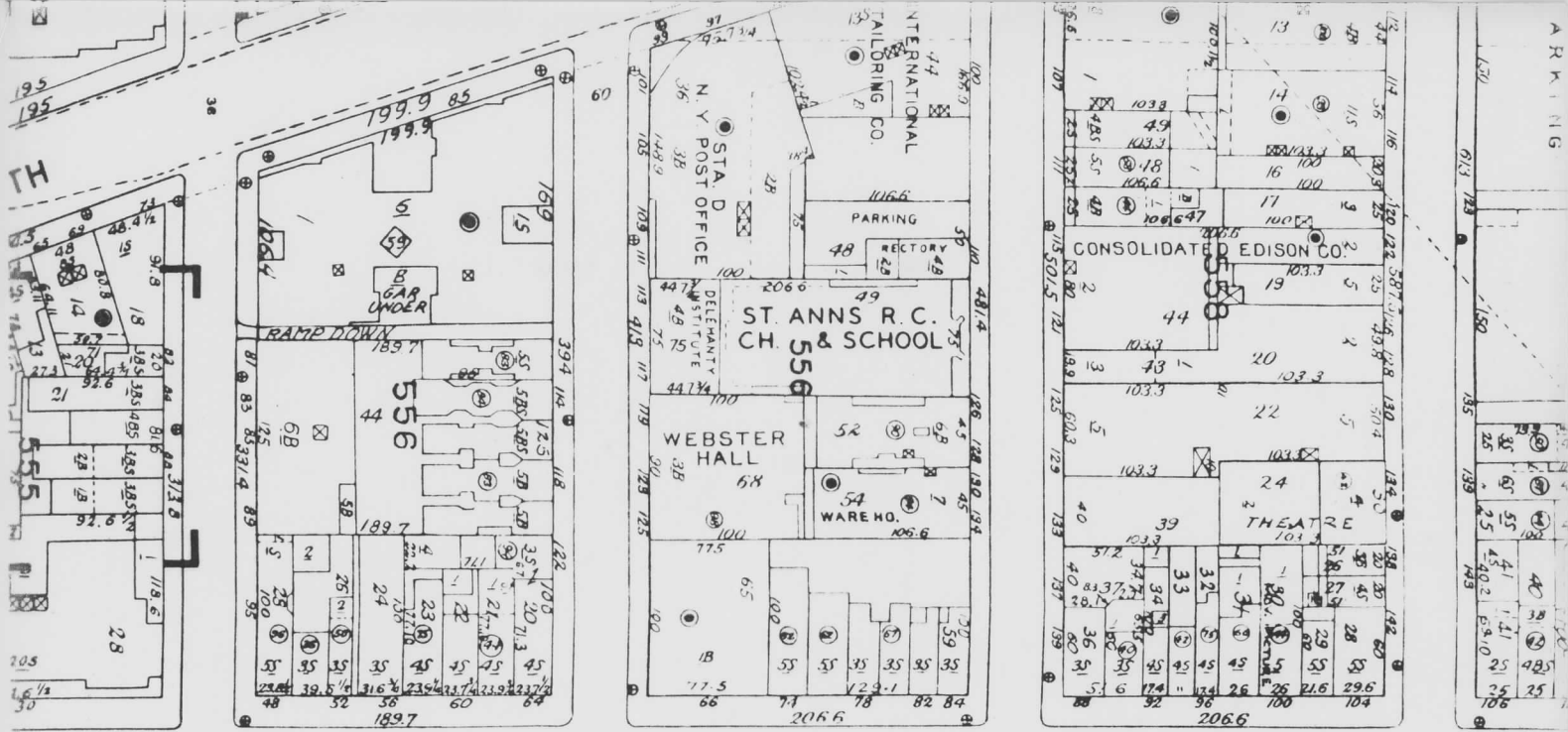
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Former Yiddish Art Theatre, 189 Second Street  
New York, New York County, NY  
Property Map (Manhattan Land Book, 1980)

Scale - 1" = 60'

FORMER YIDDISH  
ART THEATRE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Ref # 85002427

Yiddish Art Theatre  
New York County  
NEW YORK

Working No. AUG 19 1985  
Fed. Reg. Date: 2/4/86  
Date Due: 9/19/85 10/3/85  
Action: ☒ ACCEPT 9-19-85  
☐ RETURN  
☐ REJECT  
Federal Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Entered in the  
National Register

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

Substantive Review: ☐ sample ☐ request ☐ appeal ☐ NR decision

Reviewer's comments:

Recom./Criteria \_\_\_\_\_  
Reviewer \_\_\_\_\_  
Discipline \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ see continuation sheet

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

1. Name

2. Location

3. Classification

Category	Ownership Public Acquisition	Status Accessible	Present Use
----------	---------------------------------	----------------------	-------------

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

- ☐ excellent  
☐ good  
☐ fair

- ☐ deteriorated  
☐ ruins  
☐ unexposed

Check one

- ☐ unaltered  
☐ altered

Check one

- ☐ original site  
☐ 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

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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### 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property \_\_\_\_\_

Quadrangle name \_\_\_\_\_

UTM References \_\_\_\_\_

Verbal boundary description and justification \_\_\_\_\_

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### 11. Form Prepared By

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### 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: \_\_\_\_\_

*Comments for any item may be continued on an attached sheet*



Former Yiddish Art Theatre

189 Second Avenue, New York, New York Co, NY

photog: Albert Winn, 5/85

negs: Winn, 21 Gramercy Park S., NYC 10003

view: north and east facades

photo 1 of 7



THEATRE

ART

YIDDISH

Winn

T.

ART

Former Yiddish Art Theatre  
189 Second Avenue, New York, New York Co., NY  
photog: Albert Winn, 5/85  
negs: Winn, 21 Gramercy Park S., NYC 10003  
view: north facade

photo 2 of 7



YIDDISH ART THEATRE

PHOTO: ALBERT J. WINN

Former Yiddish Art Theatre  
189 Second Avenue, New York, New York Co., N. Y.  
photog: Albert Winn, 5/85  
negs: Winn, 21 Gramercy Park S., NYC 10003  
view: proscenium

photo 3 of 7



YIDDISH

ART

THEATRE

PHOTO: ALBERT J. WINN

Former Yiddish Art Theatre  
189 Second Avenue, New York, New York Co., NY  
photog: Albert Winn, 5/85  
negs: Winn, 21 Gramercy Park S., NYC 10003  
view: looking toward auditorium from stage  
photo 4 of 7



YIDDISH ART THEATRE

Winn  
7

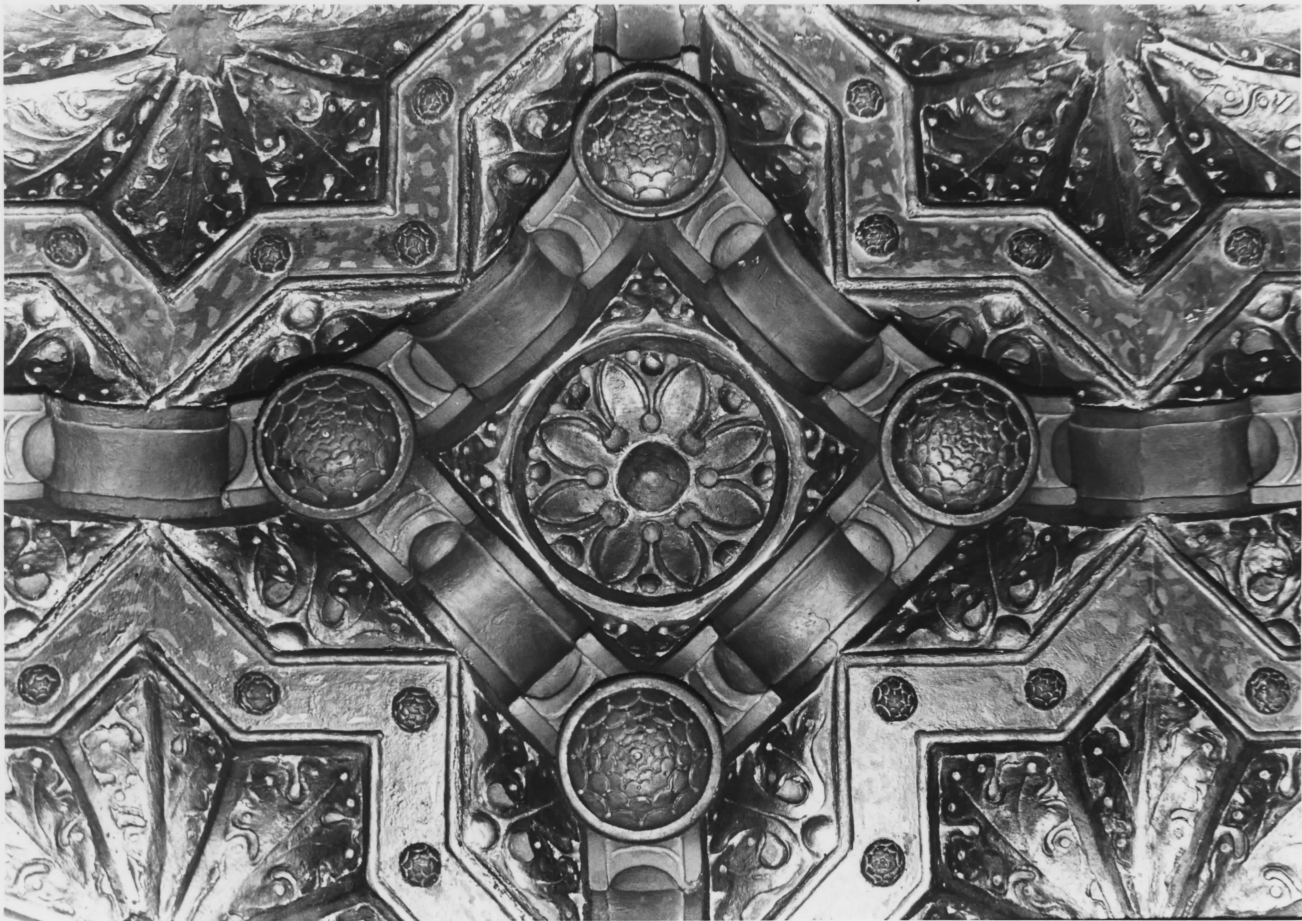
Former Yiddish Art Theatre  
189 Second Avenue, New York, New York Co., NY  
photog: Albert Winn, 5/85  
negs: Winn, 21 Gramercy Park S., NYC 10003  
view: box seats, west wall  
photo 5 of 7



YIDDISH ART THEATRE

PHOTO: ALBERT J. WINN

Former Yiddish Art Theatre  
189 Second Avenue, New York, New York Co., NY  
photog: Albert Winn, 5/85  
negs: Winn, 21 Gramercy Park S., NYC 10003  
view: detail, ceiling dome  
photo 6 of 7



YIDDISH

ART

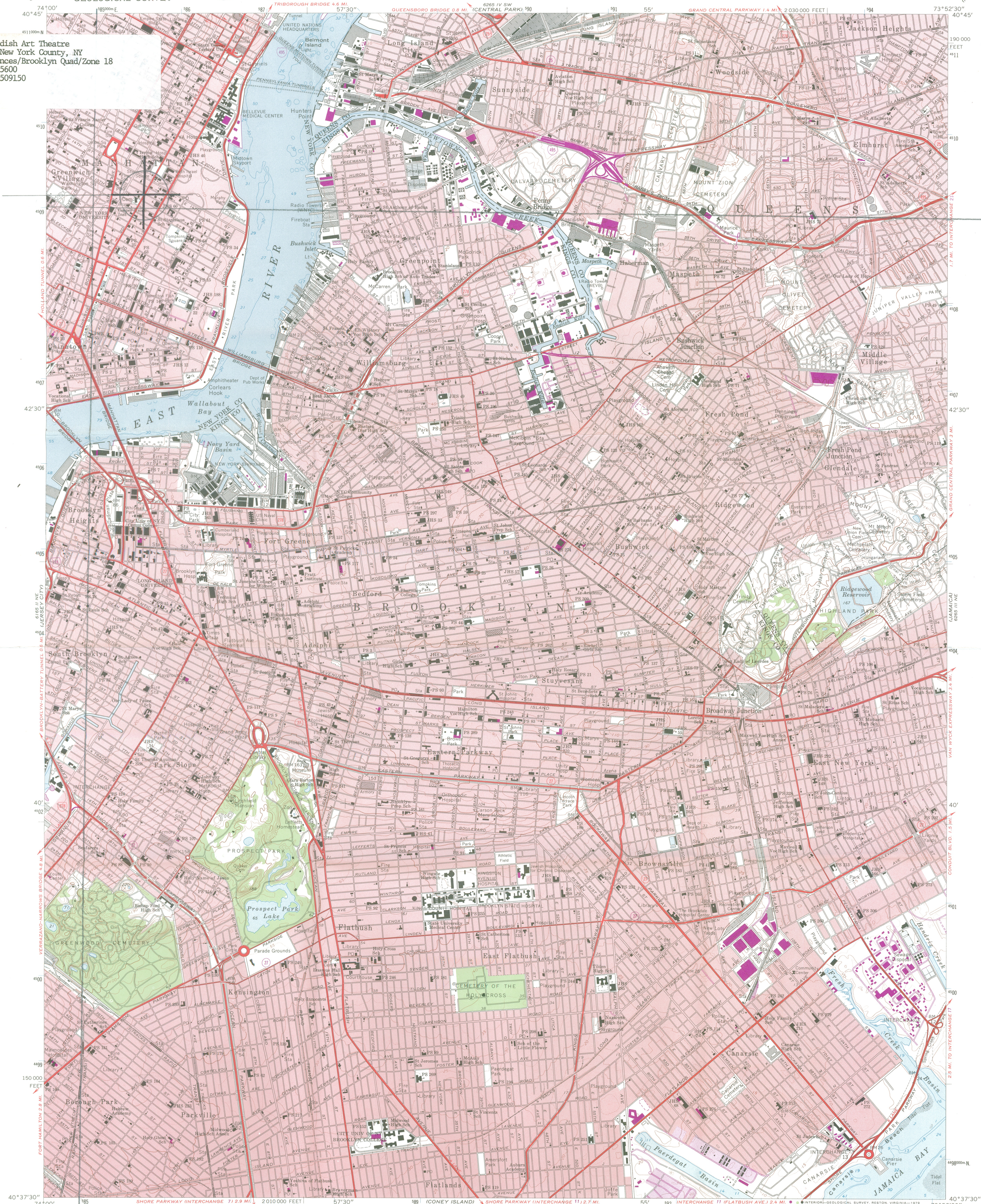
THEATRE

PHOTO: ALBERT J. WINN

Former Yiddish Art Theatre  
189 Second Avenue, New York, New York Co., NY  
photog: Albert Winn, 5/85  
negs: Winn, 21 Gramercy Park S., NYC 10003  
view: molded plaster ceiling adjacent to  
dome photo 7 of 7



Former Yiddish Art Theatre  
New York, New York County, NY  
UTM References/Brooklyn Quad/Zone 18  
Easting 585600  
Northing 4509150

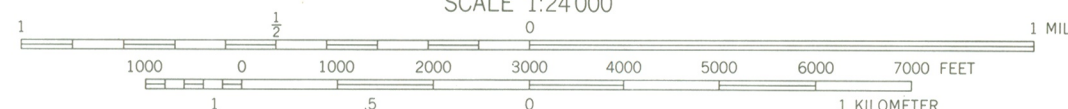


Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Revised in cooperation with New York Department of Transportation  
Control by USGS, USCGS, USCE, and City of New York Board of  
Estimate and Apportionment

Planimetry by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs  
taken 1954, and from USCGS Charts T-5094, T-5335, T-5454  
T-5459, T-5460, and T-5449  
Topography by planimetric surveys 1955-1956. Revised from  
aerial photographs taken 1966. Field checked 1967

Selected hydrographic data compiled from USCGS Charts  
275 (1964), 542 (1967), and 745 (1966). This information  
is not intended for navigational purposes

Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
10,000-foot grid based on New York coordinate system, Long Island zone  
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 18, shown in blue  
Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown  
Entire area lies within New York City



CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET  
NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL 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 MEAN RANGE OF TIDE IS APPROXIMATELY 4.2 FEET IN THE EAST RIVER  
AND 5.2 FEET IN JAMAICA BAY

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 ———  
Unimproved dirt ———  
Interstate Route ——— State Route ———

BROOKLYN, N. Y.  
N4037.5—W7352.5/7.5

1967  
PHOTOREVISED 1979  
AMS 6265 18 NW—SERIES 7821



**New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation**

The Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller Empire State Plaza  
Agency Building 1, Albany, New York 12238

518-474-0456

August 22, 1985

Carol Shull  
National Register of  
Historic Places  
Interagency Resources Division  
National Park Service  
1100 L Street NW, Room 6209  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Carol:

Enclosed is a letter of support for the Yiddish Art Theatre, New York, New York County, which was nominated to the National Register on August 16, 1985. This letter was inadvertently omitted from our nomination submission of last week.

Sincerely,

*Larry E. Gobrecht / KL*

Larry E. Gobrecht  
National Register and  
Survey Coordinator  
Historic Preservation  
Field Services Bureau

KL/ms

SEP 11 1985

LETTER OF  
SUPPORT  
YIDDISH ART  
THEATRE  
NY NY CO.



Ms. Merrill Hesch  
Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau  
New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation  
Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller Empire State Plaza  
Albany, New York 12238

July 16, 1985

Dear Ms. Hesch,

I wholeheartedly support the naming of the Yiddish Art Theatre (189 Second Avenue, New York City) to the National Register of Historic Places. It is the only surviving theater built especially for the once flourishing American Yiddish theater. Furthermore it is the last remnant of the "Yiddish Rialto" which was Second Avenue -- a lively center for Yiddish theater artists and playgoers. It holds an important place in the history of Yiddish theater, and therefore in the history of American ethnic theater.

I have been studying the history of Yiddish theater for a number of years. My book **Vagabond Stars: A World History of Yiddish Theater**, published by Harper & Row in 1977, is widely used, and I also lecture on the subject. I am also the author of two off-Broadway musicals based on Yiddish theater material.

Yours sincerely,

*Nahma Sandrow*  
Nahma Sandrow

180 Riverside Drive  
New York, N.Y. 10024