

## COMMENT ON NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION

**ADDRESS: 4102-04 Lancaster Ave, Leader Theatre**

**OVERVIEW:** The Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission (PHMC) has requested comments from the Philadelphia Historical Commission on the National Register nomination of 4102-04 Lancaster Ave located in the West Powelton neighborhood of West Philadelphia and historically known as the Leader Theatre. PHMC is charged with implementing federal historic preservation regulations in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, including overseeing the National Register of Historic Places in the state. PHMC reviews all such nominations before forwarding them to the National Park Service for action. As part of the process, PHMC must solicit comments on every National Register nomination from the appropriate local government. The Philadelphia Historical Commission speaks on behalf of the City of Philadelphia in historic preservation matters including the review of National Register nominations. Under federal regulation, the local government not only must provide comments, but must also provide a forum for public comment on nominations. Such a forum is provided during the Philadelphia Historical Commission's meetings.

According to the nomination, the Leader Theatre is significant under Criterion A in the Area of Entertainment/Recreation, as an early model and local example of a neighborhood movie theater in the early 20th century. Located prominently on one of West Powelton's commercial corridors, the Leader Theatre was constructed during the early years of the movie industry, offering convenient and economical entertainment to the community. During its period of operation, it was known as one of the most popular movie theaters in West Philadelphia. Designed by prolific theater architect John D. Allen, the Leader Theatre was his first building designed to show movies only. The Period of Significance begins in 1912, when the theater was constructed, and ends in 1968, when the building ceased operation as a movie theater.



1928



2020

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Leader Theater  
Other names/site number: Leader Theatre  
Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

## 2. Location

Street & number: 4102-4104 Lancaster Avenue  
City or town: Philadelphia State: PA County: Philadelphia  
Not for Publication: NA Vicinity: NA

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national  statewide  local Applicable National Register Criteria:  A  B  C  D

Signature of certifying official: <u>Deputy SHPO/Pennsylvania Historical &amp; Museum Commission</u> Title/State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	Date
--	------

In my opinion, the property <input type="checkbox"/> meets <input type="checkbox"/> does not meet the National Register criteria.	
Signature of commenting official:	Date
Title/State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:  
 entered in the National Register  
 determined eligible for the National Register  
 determined not eligible for the National Register  
 removed from the National Register  
 other (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

**Category of Property**

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

**Number of Resources within Property**

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions:** Recreation/Theater

**Current Functions:** Vacant/Not in Use

Leader Theater

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

## 7. Description

**Architectural Classification:** Classical Revival Style

**Principal exterior materials of the property:** Brick

### Narrative Description

The Leader Theater stands at 4102-4104 Lancaster Avenue in the West Powelton neighborhood of West Philadelphia. The 3-story, brick and terra cotta building was constructed in 1912, with metal cladding over the upper floors of the primary façade that dates to 1971. The original façade remains underneath.

The building is located at the southwest corner of Lancaster Avenue and N. 41<sup>st</sup> Street. It is approximately one mile west of the Schuylkill River and one mile south of Fairmount Park. The block on which the subject property sits is bounded by Lancaster Avenue to the north, N. 41<sup>st</sup> Street to the east, Warren Street to the south, N. 42<sup>nd</sup> Street to the south west and Aspen Street to the northwest. The remainder of the block is occupied by 1-, 2- and 3-story commercial buildings and empty lots along Lancaster Avenue and contemporary, 4-story residential buildings along Warren Street.

It is situated on a flat parcel of land that is devoid of any landscape features other than concrete sidewalks to the north, east and south and a narrow, paved lot to the west. Abutting the north end of the east elevation is 4100 Lancaster Avenue and abutting the north end of the west elevation is 4106 Lancaster Avenue.<sup>1</sup> Both are 3-story, brick buildings with bay windows and neither were ever associated with the subject property. The surrounding neighborhood consists of a mix of late 19<sup>th</sup> century two- and three-story brick row houses, scattered low-rise industrial buildings and empty lots.

---

<sup>1</sup> The adjacent storefronts have always been considered to be separate lots from the subject property. Of the numerous references to the construction of the theater, the dimensions of the theater and its associated finishes, no mention was ever made of the adjacent storefronts or their construction. Additionally, the use of the storefronts never had any particular association to the function of the theater, either during the Period of Significance or afterward. Although it is impossible to date the adjacent buildings through maps, building permits or period journals, they were likely constructed after the theater and in response to its commercial success. Later references to the owners of the buildings never have any correlation to the owner of the theater. For example, a 1916 report of the Fire Insurance Patrol states that 4100 Lancaster Avenue was a dry goods store owned by J. Gartman. The closest relationship they have seems to be that when the adjacent buildings were advertising for available apartments, they would sometimes note that there was a theater next door.

Leader Theater

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

The building has a T-shaped footprint and was entirely constructed in 1912. The north portion of the building has a flat roof with scattered mechanical equipment and six, shallow, square skylights. The skylights have been covered with roofing material, but their outline is visible from the exterior and they remain exposed on the interior. The roof also has a high parapet with metal cladding along the north elevation and a low, brick parapet along the remainder. The south portion of the building has a gable roof with two hipped roof skylights on the peak flanking a round, metal vent. The section along the south elevation has a shed roof. The southwest corner of the floor plate also has mechanical equipment and a brick chimney, encircled by a tall brick parapet.

The north (primary) elevation faces Lancaster Avenue (Photographs #1 and 2). The 1<sup>st</sup> floor contains a centered, contemporary, double-leaf, glazed aluminum door with a multi-light, contemporary aluminum surround flanked by painted stucco piers. Between 1968 and 2020, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floors were covered by a projecting, corrugated metal box. The frame of this still remains along the bottom of the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor and around the perimeter of the upper portion of the façade. The 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floors are clad in painted terra cotta block flanked by painted brick quoins. The 2<sup>nd</sup> floor contains an arched opening, in conjunction with the 1<sup>st</sup> floor storefront below. Although still partially obscured, the arch has a terra cotta keystone and bas relief terra cotta spandrels with garlands and musical instruments. The 3<sup>rd</sup> floor contains three, double-leaf, multi-light steel doors with multi-light arched transoms. In front of the openings is a shallow balcony with scrolled brackets and dentils. The openings are topped by arched surrounds with scrolled keystones, which are supported by shallow, Doric pilasters. Above the openings is a denticulated stringcourse with hanging pendants that have Corinthian capitals and scrolled cartouches. Above that is a standard entablature with flat architrave, bracketed frieze and simple cornice. The entire façade is topped by a simple, but prominent, pediment.

The east elevation is divided into two portions: the northern, recessed section and the southern section fronting N. 42<sup>nd</sup> Street (Photographs #3 and 4). Both are clad in red brick. The northern section is largely obscured by 4100 Lancaster Avenue except for a very small portion of exposed brick along the roofline. The metal cladding on the north elevation also wraps slightly around the north end. The southern end of the section is abutted by 4100 Lancaster Avenue on the northern half of the 1<sup>st</sup> floor. The remainder of the 1<sup>st</sup> floor contains a small section that is flush with the sidewalk. It contains a single, elevated door opening with plywood infill, which is accessed by a set of stone steps with stone cheek walls. The 2<sup>nd</sup> floor has a large, rectangular opening with plywood infill and the upper floor contains a single window opening with cinderblock infill. Both openings have stone sills and arched brick heads. The southern section is six bays wide. The bays are separated by flat, brick pilasters and topped by shallow, brick corbels. The northernmost bay contains a single opening near the roofline, containing double-leaf wood doors with an arched wood surround. Below the opening is metal brackets that once supported a balcony. The second bay from the north contains an elevated, double-leaf wood door that is accessed by three stone steps. A garage-style metal door is in front of

Leader Theater

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

the opening. There is also a single opening near the roofline, containing double-leaf wood doors with an arched wood surround. Below the opening is a metal landing and brackets. The third bay from the north has no openings. Across the top of the three northernmost bays are diagonal metal brackets indicating that the bays were originally covered by some kind of awning. The fourth bay from the north contains an infilled window opening with an arched brick head. The fifth bay from the north contains a lower infilled window opening with an arched brick head. The southernmost bay contains three linear window openings, all of which have been infilled and have stone sills and arched brick heads.

The south elevation, facing Warren Street, is clad in red brick and has a single-leaf metal door at the west end (Photographs #4 and 5). There are no other openings. Projecting from the west end is a 1-story stucco section with a single-leaf metal door. On top of the projection is a large, metal mechanical unit.

The southern section of the west elevation, facing the center of the block is largely similar to the east elevation (Photographs #5 and 6). Clad in red brick, the bays are separated by flat, brick pilasters and topped by shallow, brick corbels. The limited window openings all have been infilled and have stone sills and brick heads. The northern section is largely obscured by 4106 Lancaster Avenue except for a very small portion of exposed brick along the roofline. The metal cladding on the north elevation also wraps slightly around the north end.

*Interior*

At the northernmost end of the 1<sup>st</sup> floor is the former vestibule space, which has a curved and fluted crown molding and a plaster ceiling (Photograph #7). Some contemporary fabric, including flooring and column surrounds remain. To the south of the vestibule is a double-height lobby space with a Mezzanine at the south end (Photographs #8 and 9). The space features plaster walls and a plaster ceiling with prominent beams. To the south of the lobby is the former auditorium space (Photographs #10 and 11). Although the floor has been leveled off, preliminary removal of contemporary fabric has revealed the original painted brick walls, coved plaster ceiling and arched proscenium with plaster detailing (Photograph #12).

The 2<sup>nd</sup> floor consists of a former projection room and office space at the north end and the balcony in the southern portion (Photograph #14). The former is accessed by a straight-run set of stairs in the center of the west elevation and the latter is accessed by a straight-run set of stairs near the south end of the east elevation (Photograph #15). The two sections are connected by two, short ramps. The balcony consists of rows of shallow concrete platforms with wood flooring and a simple, pipe metal railing (Photograph #13). The seats have been removed. The projection room and office space have

Leader Theater

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

concrete floors and painted concrete walls, ceilings and beams. Some of the movie projection equipment remains. As on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor, many historic finishes remain behind the contemporary installations, including full height wood mirrors and painted and plastered coved ceilings (Photographs #15 and 16).

The 3<sup>rd</sup> floor contains the upper portion of the balcony, as described below (Photograph #17). The northern portion of the floor plate remains open in plan (Photographs #18 and 19). Although the perimeter walls have been covered with contemporary wood paneling, the concrete floors and painted, plaster walls, coved ceilings, beams and columns remain visible. The ceiling also contains six, square skylights (Photographs #20).

*Integrity*

The Leader Theater retains its integrity. Both the overall form and the defining theater characteristics remain, including open lobby and auditorium spaces, deep balcony and access patterns, projection room and office space and open 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. The building, therefore, continues to read as a theater space. Although some of the surfaces have been covered by contemporary materials the vast majority of original finishes remain beneath. Moreover, because this was historically an architecturally simple interior design, the finishes themselves become secondary to the overall interior volumes. On the exterior, the east, south and west elevations are wholly intact. On the north elevation, only the storefront that has been permanently altered. The quality, placement and condition of the construction materials, as well as the vernacular architectural style are both highly characteristic of the period and also all remain wholly intact with the exception of the 1<sup>st</sup> floor. The building remains intact from its original construction with no demolition or new construction, other than the storefront and the interior and exterior cladding. On the interior, all of the original volumes remain, and the operation of the theater is expressed in these spaces. While initial removal of contemporary fabric has revealed the original elements remaining beneath, it is anticipated that further removal will continue to expose additional historic elements.

The overall location and setting of the building remain intact since the initial construction. The design and materials similarly retain their integrity. The workmanship is expressed in a consistent architectural style, is of good quality and is in keeping with contemporary trends. The feeling and associations of the building also have a high level of integrity, in large part because of the integrity of the previous five aspects. Although the furnishings and people have long since departed, the largely intact finishes, the voluminous auditorium space effectively relay the sense of place and the notable entertainment history of the building.

Leader Theater

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

**Areas of Significance:** Entertainment/Recreation

**Period of Significance:** 1912-1968

**Significant Dates:** 1912

**Significant Person:** NA

**Cultural Affiliation:** NA

**Architect/Builder:** Allen, John D.

Leader Theater

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

### Statement of Significance

The Leader Theater, constructed in 1912, is significant under Criterion A, Entertainment/Recreation, as an early and archetypal local example of a neighborhood movie theater in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that was ultimately known as “one of the most popular of the West Philadelphia Houses.”<sup>2</sup> Located on Lancaster Avenue in the West Powelton neighborhood of West Philadelphia and strategically fronting on one of the community’s major commercial corridors, the Leader Theater both spoke to the emergence of the neighborhood and provided an anchor for it. Although perhaps not considered as a community institution on par with a church or a school, a movie theater is nonetheless a consistent recipient of community members and very much an edited reflection of the neighborhood outside of its walls. The role of the movie theater, and the strength of the growth of the film industry in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, was its ability to provide an economical and accessible form of entertainment. As such, the Leader Theater is an early representation of this approach to entertainment and while it perhaps lacks some of the awe and glamour of the later movie palaces, their realization was the direct result of its establishment. Constructed by prolific theater architect, John D. Allen, the theater was his first designed exclusively for the showing of motion pictures and represents a hybrid design between the vaudeville palaces of the past and the emerging, “shooting gallery” style of movie theaters.<sup>3</sup> The period of significance begins in 1912, when the building was constructed, and ends in 1968, when the theater closed.

#### *A Brief History of the West Powelton Neighborhood*

The West Powelton neighborhood in West Philadelphia is defined as Lancaster Avenue to the northeast, Powelton Avenue to the south and 42<sup>nd</sup> Street to the west.<sup>4</sup> Originally a rural, more agricultural area, West Powelton experienced its first period of significant growth between 1880 and 1910, as electric trolley lines were built along Lancaster Avenue. These lines served to connect the neighborhood to both the suburbs and central Philadelphia, while facilitating its residential and commercial growth. The neighborhood had additional and substantive support from the many institutions that surrounded it, including the Institute of the Pennsylvania Hospital, Presbyterian Hospital, the University of Pennsylvania, the Drexel Institute of Art, Science and Industry, and the Industrial Home for Blind Women. By the time the subject property was constructed in 1912, West Powelton “balanced its residential, commercial, institutional and transportation [sic] components and [was] thriving socially and commercially.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> “Philadelphia.” *Moving Picture World* 18:8 (23 November 1913): 1450.

<sup>3</sup> Irving R. Glazer, *Philadelphia Theatres, A-Z* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986): 251.

<sup>4</sup> West Philadelphia is located on the west side of the Schuylkill River. Covering approximately fourteen square miles, the dense, largely middle class section of Philadelphia is comprised of numerous and overlapping residential, commercial, educational, medical and religious communities.

<sup>5</sup> “Preserving Community: A Neighborhood Preservation Plan for West Powelton, Philadelphia” (University

Leader Theater

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

### *Building History*

Prior to the construction of the subject property, the building lot was divided into two sections. The front half of the lot, facing Lancaster Avenue, was occupied by a 3-story, L-shaped rowhouse facing Lancaster Avenue that appeared to pair with 4100 Lancaster Avenue. The rear half of the lot, facing Warren Street, was occupied by paired, 2-story, rectangular rowhouses to the east of a small 3-story building with a rear shed (Figure #1).<sup>6</sup> Based on their footprints, the buildings appeared to be pairs of those located at 4100 Lancaster Avenue, although there is no photographic evidence to support this.

In 1912, the *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* reported that Mrs. J. Effinger of 4130 Parkside Avenue had commissioned a 3-story brick theater to measure 56 feet by 172 feet from John D. Allen, a local theater architect.<sup>7</sup> It was to have a slag room, electric lighting and steam heating. B. Ketcham and Sons of 1029 Brown Street was listed as the contractor. It was to contain 988 seats – 802 in the orchestra and 186 in the balcony – and the estimated cost was \$80,000.<sup>8</sup> Later entries also reference Jennie Effinger's son, Herbert, as well as the Stanley Warner Company as being involved in the project. Effinger and Herbert were later referenced to as "two of Philadelphia's most progressive and successful exhibitors, who built and own the house."<sup>9</sup>

The subject property first appears on a 1918 Bromley Atlas, which refers to the building as "The Leader, Photo Plays." A 1922 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map provides the first record of the building with any level of detail (Figure #2). It refers to the building as, "The Leader, Moving Picture Theater." The building is divided into two sections: a narrower section fronting on to Lancaster Avenue, which contained lobby space on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor and an open room above, which was used for dancing. The rear portion of the building, facing Warren Street, is wider and contained a balcony at the north end and the stage to the south.<sup>10</sup> This configuration took advantage of the more visible, but

---

of Pennsylvania, School of Design, 2010): 15.

<sup>6</sup> Smith Atlas, 1912.

<sup>7</sup> *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* (21 February 1912): 100. 4130 Parkside Avenue was a prominent address located approximately one mile north of the subject property. In addition to theaters, Jennie Effinger also included the Belle Claire Apartments at 40<sup>th</sup> Street and Girard Avenue in her portfolio. "Settlement Made for Apartment." *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (8 June 1919): 27.

<sup>8</sup> *Motography* (1 March 1912): np; Glazer, 149. At the time, the average-sized movie theater had 650 seats. Joel Frykholm, *Framing the Feature Film* (Stockholm Cinema Studies, 2009): 153.

<sup>9</sup> "Strand Theater, Philadelphia, PA." *Moving Picture World* (3 March 1917): 1351. The duo were also involved in the commissioning of the 69<sup>th</sup> Street Theater in 1921 and Herbert developed the Lansdowne Theater in 1927.

<sup>10</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1922.

Leader Theater

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

expensive, street frontage along Lancaster Avenue, as well as the cheaper real estate along Warren Street.

It was also a hybrid design between the larger, vaudeville theaters and the more streamlined, “shooting gallery” style of later movie theaters.<sup>11</sup> Its more traditional elements included a horseshoe seating plan of older theaters and a separate, prominent lobby area.<sup>12</sup> However, in contrast to this, the Leader Theater positioned the screen behind the proscenium, and had a massive, cantilevered balcony. This both eliminated the need for obstructive poles but also eliminated the use of side boxes and galleries, again emphasizing that this was a neighborhood destination. The shift in theater design, as represented by the subject property, is of particular note since as late as 1914, theaters were still being constructed exclusively for vaudeville performances.<sup>13</sup>

Repeated mention is also made that the building was of fireproof construction, a condition of considerable importance, given the highly flammable nature of celluloid films and the potential for a dense crowd.<sup>14</sup> A 1951 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map shows no change to this configuration.

A 1928 photograph of the subject property depicts the property as it was originally constructed (Figure #3). The brick building has a partial terra cotta floor with a large, arched 1<sup>st</sup> floor opening containing a centered ticket booth and three, double-height, multi-light arched steel windows. An electrified blade sign extends the height of the building above the 1<sup>st</sup> floor. The extensive Classical Revival style detailing speaks to the building as a formal and worthwhile destination. Although not seen in the photograph, it is worth noting that this level of architectural design did not extend to the interior of the building, which was relatively plain with carpeted floors and flat plaster walls. Those awe-inspiring interiors would be reserved for the movie palaces of the 1920s and 1930s.

In 1935, the building, which was then wholly owned by Warner Brother Pictures, underwent a significant interior renovation by John Ebersson (1875-1954) of New York City.<sup>15</sup> The work included “interior repairs, painting, plastering and new bathrooms.”<sup>16</sup> The *Philadelphia Real Estate Record*

---

<sup>11</sup> The “shooting gallery” style of movie theater featured a central aisle, flanked by rows of perpendicular seats.

<sup>12</sup> Glazer, 20.

<sup>13</sup> Glazer, 23.

<sup>14</sup> The theater ultimately had small fires in 1949 and 1953.

<sup>15</sup> Warner Brothers Pictures was a later iteration of the Stanley Warner Company.

<sup>16</sup> Building Permit #3927 (29 November 1935). Little is known of John Ebersson other than that he was born in Romania and settled in the United States in 1901. His commissions included buildings in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Richmond, Akron and Chicago. “John Ebersson.” [https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar\\_display.cfm/45607](https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/45607). Accessed on June 25, 2020. He also worked repeatedly with Warner Brothers, including the Dixie Theater in Staunton, VA in 1936, which is

Leader Theater

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

*and Builders' Guide* goes into more detail, referencing that the work involved “excavation, reinforced concrete, stone masonry, plastering, miscellaneous iron work, marble, hollow metal sash, tile, metal toilet partitions, sheet metal work, painting, plumbing, steam heating, electric work, air conditioning, tile coping, asphalt roofing, oil burner.”<sup>17</sup> The theater reopened on Christmas Day in 1936 after being “completely refurnished and renovated.”<sup>18</sup>

In 1937, air conditioning was added to the building.<sup>19</sup> Installed by the American Ice Company, this was a significant development for the theater, as it was otherwise forced to close for portions of the summer months. In contrast, this installation reinforced the determination that “neighborhood theaters provided an air-conditioned respite from the grind of modern life.”<sup>20</sup> The installation of the air conditioning involved the delivery by an ice truck of large blocks of ice up to a refrigerator on the roof. Fans then blew on the ice to push the air throughout the theater.<sup>21</sup>

A 1945 photograph of the building shows that a large, rectangular marquee has been installed in front of the arched opening on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor and that the blade sign has been replaced with a slightly smaller design (Figure #4).

In 1955, a hot dog stand was added to the 1<sup>st</sup> floor. Previously, only shelf-stable snacks, such as candy, had been offered.

In 1963, the building was sold to Paul Kleiman, who operated other movie theaters in Philadelphia and the surrounding areas. Kleiman subsequently spent \$80,000 “to restore the W. Philly film house...” into a “modern, completely equipped theater.”<sup>22</sup> There is no reference to the work in the building permit files. A newspaper article from June of that year advertised the theater’s reopening as the “most modern and beautiful theater in West Philadelphia.”<sup>23</sup> This major renovation testifies to the theater’s ongoing viability through the 1960s.

---

perhaps why he was selected for the renovation work. “Staunton’s New Dixie Theatre Opens Today.” *The News Leader* (15 December 1936): 5.

<sup>17</sup> *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* (20 November 1935): 205.

<sup>18</sup> “News.” *The Philadelphia Exhibitor* (1 January 1936): np.

<sup>19</sup> Building Permit #5445 (7 January 1937).

<sup>20</sup> “Neighborhood Movie Theaters.” <https://www.phillyhistory.org/blog/index.php/2011/06/neighborhood-movie-theaters/>. Accessed on June 25, 2020.

<sup>21</sup> George D. Johnson, *Except for the Grace* (New York: Trafford Publishing, 2005): np.

<sup>22</sup> “The Entertainment Beat.” *The Philadelphia Daily News* (8 June 1954): 35.

<sup>23</sup> “Advertisement.” *The Philadelphia Daily News* (8 June 1964): 34.

Leader Theater

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

In 1965, a zoning notice stated that the 1<sup>st</sup> floor was used as a motion picture theater, the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor was used as a balcony and office and the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor contained space for the projection booth and seat repair.<sup>24</sup>

In 1968, the building was donated by Klieman to the Police Athletic League (PAL).<sup>25</sup> According to period articles, the decision was twofold. As then-Vice President of the PAL, Klieman believed strongly in its message and purpose. As a local businessman, he was concerned for the welfare of the community. The donation of the building served the benefit of both. In 1971, a new storefront was installed on the building and the metal cladding and electric lettering and signage was added to the upper floors. In 1987, the PAL left the building and it was soon occupied by a discount store, which undertook some interior modifications, such as dropping the ceiling.

*Entertainment Offerings*

When the theater opened, it offered photoplays, which were silent movies filmed from a fixed position and accompanied by a live orchestra to enhance the performance. Typically, this involved anything from a few miscellaneous musicians to a full-scale, 18-piece orchestra. Although the Leader Theater did frequently employ musicians to support the film, its main draw was the organ that was installed in the theater from the time of its opening.<sup>26</sup> Not only was this an economical decision but it also gave the theater an enormous level of notoriety, when theaters were always looking to promote the next best thing.

The first recorded installation of an organ in a movie theater was in New York in 1912. In October of that year, the Leader Theater installed its organ, making it the first organ to be installed in a Philadelphia theater.<sup>27</sup> The original organ at the Leader Theater was a small, 2-manual Esty organ with five stops and it was a main advertising draw when the theater opened, touting the “wonderful Vox Humana Organ – the organ with the human voice.”<sup>28</sup> Later advertisements not only featured the organ, but the various musicians who were brought in to play it. The recitals of Professor Harry Spiller were “causing no end of comment.”<sup>29</sup> Spiller was the “acknowledged peer of Philadelphia’s organists and the daily overtures played on the great Kimball organ are attracting music lovers from

---

<sup>24</sup> Zoning Violation Referral (27 January 1965).

<sup>25</sup> His other theater in West Philadelphia, the Capital Theater, remained in operation by him until 1992 when financial issues forced its closure.

<sup>26</sup> Period advertisements call for piano, cornet, violin and clarinet players.

<sup>27</sup> Montiville Morris Hansford, “Preparing Music for Photoplay Accompaniments.” *The Console: Journal of the National Association of Organists* (29 December 1917): 12.

<sup>28</sup> Hansford, 12.

<sup>29</sup> “The Photoplay Man About Town.” *Philadelphia Evening Ledger* (29 April 1916): np.

Leader Theater

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

all over the city.”<sup>30</sup> Additionally, Harry Patterson Hopkins, was there for a three-week engagement and was “acquiring a metropolitan reputation as an interpreter of photo-dramas” and Leonard “Melody Mac” MacClain, was an internationally famous organist who was featured at the Leader Theater numerous times between 1920 and 1927.<sup>31</sup>

In 1915, the theater replaced its earlier organ with a \$15,000 W.W. Kimball organ (Figure #5). At the time of installation, an advertisement in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* referred to the new organ as being “unsurpassed for its magnificent full tones, ranging from the deep, full throated, powerful 32 ft. acoustic base, to the sweet treble of the piccolo. The heavenly tones of the harp, the solemn ringing of the cathedral chimes, the merry jingle of the orchestral bells, the entrancing singing of the Vox Humans. All are a part of this instrument, representing the last word in organ construction.”<sup>32</sup> An advertisement taken out by the W.W. Kimball Company stated that they had already installed \$15,000 organs in the Regent and Locust Theaters in Philadelphia were currently installing them in the Arcadia, Alhambra and Leader Theaters.<sup>33</sup> Other renovations that year included, a new system of indirect lighting, new Wilton carpets, and a redecoration of the Auditorium with a projection of a parlor room on one side and a conservatory on the other, making it the “first neighborhood theater in Philadelphia to put in such extensive improvements.”<sup>34</sup> After the renovation, the theater was offering two matinees and two evening performances daily.

A 1918 article refers to the operation of the theater, remarking that Sidney Kaufman, the theater’s manager, was “one of the most attentive and resourceful in the city..., [ensuring that] the management of the house is faithfully adhered to at all times, and all attendants and ushers are carefully directed regarding their special duties. The consequence is that upon entering the Leader, the patrons find a most inviting theater having an atmosphere of refinement and comfort that always brings them back.”<sup>35</sup>

In 1927, the first talking film was introduced and the theater was forced to pivot how it showed films. A 1928 photograph of the building shows billboards offering the “vitaphone” and movietone” systems. Vitaphone was a film sound system specifically designed by Warner Brothers and used between 1926 and 1931. It was the “last major analog sound-on-disc system and the only one which

---

<sup>30</sup> “The Photoplay Man About Town.”

<sup>31</sup> “Organist Hopkins Plays in Philadelphia Theater.” *Musical America* 24 (1916): 30; Lloyd E. Klos, “Melody Mac’: Giant of the T.O. World” *Theater Organ* (Fall 1962): 5.

<sup>32</sup> “Advertisement.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (26 September 1915): 53.

<sup>33</sup> “Advertisement.” *Philadelphia Evening Ledger* (10 April 1915): 7.

<sup>34</sup> “Accessory News.” *Motion Picture News* 11:17 (1915):130.

<sup>35</sup> “Making a Theater Attractive to Patrons.” *Moving Picture World* (16 February 1918): 1000.

Leader Theater

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

was widely used and commercially successful.”<sup>36</sup> Movietone was not specific to Warner Brothers but it was also a sound-on-disc system that “guaranteed synchronization between sound and picture.”<sup>37</sup>

Information on the daily operation of the theater best comes from the advertisements of the films it was showing. Typically, the advertisement just provided the theater name, address and name of the film. Most theaters would run one film for one or two days and then be closed on Sunday. The basic film information would sometimes be supplemented by a description and review of the film would be provided as well. In still other instances, two theaters would advertise jointly, as was the case when *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* premiered (Figure #6). The film was first released at the Forrest Theater – this was typical for a more prominent venue to have the first run – and was subsequently run for one week at the Leader Theater, continuously from 1pm to 11pm.<sup>38</sup>

The theater also offered special film programming, such as the “Special Paramount-Artcraft Program”, which offered more artistic films produced under the Paramount umbrella and serial films, including *Hop Harrigan*.<sup>39</sup>

In order to supplement the income from movies showings, the theater offered other, larger scale performances, including a recital by the Academy of Dancing in 1916. Directed by Edward A. Coll, it was titled “Preparedness” and was described as a “unique dance featuring decorations and surprises suggestive to modern warfare. AMMUNITION IN ABUNDANCE.”<sup>40</sup> In 1958, the Leader Theater offered “one of the biggest and best stage shows ever to be presented in Philadelphia.”<sup>41</sup>

From the beginning, the building offered other entertainment and recreation space to the community, in addition to showing films. In the open, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor space, the activities included numerous dance classes for children and adults, meetings for the Women’s Auxiliary, magic shows, local talent shows

---

<sup>36</sup> “Vitaphone.” <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vitaphone#:~:text=Vitaphone%20was%20a%20sound%20film,widely%20used%20and%20commercially%20successful>. Accessed on June 25, 2020.

<sup>37</sup> “Movietone.” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Movietone\\_sound\\_system](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Movietone_sound_system). Accessed on June 25, 2020.

<sup>38</sup> “Advertisement.” *Philadelphia Evening Ledger* (2 June 1917): 9. The Forrest Theater was located at 129 S. Broad Street in Center City. It was constructed in 1905 and was an “advanced Vaudeville” theater with a full orchestra.

<sup>39</sup> *Hop Harrigan* was a serial based on a DC Comics series. The Leader Theater was one of nine places to show it in Philadelphia and the surrounding area and only one of two in West Philadelphia.

<sup>40</sup> “Dancing.” *Philadelphia Evening Ledger* (19 February 1916): 1.

<sup>41</sup> “Big Stage Show.” *The Philadelphia Tribune* (14 January 1958): 12.

Leader Theater

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

and cooking classes.<sup>42</sup> The theater itself was also used for community service events, such as free showings for the newsboys of the *Philadelphia Tribune* and a canned food drive that offered a free movie ticket to children who arrived at select showings with a can of food.<sup>43</sup>

After World War II, the West Powelton neighborhood, like innumerable others across the country, saw a huge demographic shift as most White families fled for the suburbs. Although theaters had always had marketing campaigns and movie selections targeted to local residents, this change in audience required a change in content. In particular, “inner-city neighborhood theaters enjoyed proximity to a larger percentage of the black movie audience and were developing strategies to serve the communities near those theaters.”<sup>44</sup> This was primarily done through advertisements that highlighted the movie roles played by African-American actors, including Sidney Poitier and Ossie Davis. The Leader Theater also prioritized obtaining first-release showings of movies with African American leads, including *Duel at Diablo* with James Garner and Sidney Poitier.<sup>45</sup> In 1953, the Leader Theater was one of only two theaters in the city to offer the first run of *Holiday in Harlem*, which was the “biggest all-Negro film in motion picture history.”<sup>46</sup>

This approach was continued throughout the remainder of the theater’s operation, with Klieman specifically partnering with studios like Paramount, who offered him first-run rights to films with African American leading men.<sup>47</sup>

*Police Athletic League (PAL)*

Even after the closure of the movie theater in 1968, the building continued to serve the community.

The PAL was founded in New York City in 1914 in order to curb juvenile delinquency by offering youth recreational programs, primarily in areas of the city that were otherwise lacking them. The PAL expanded to Philadelphia in 1947, under the direction of Paul Klieman, who was also later given the title of Board Chairman. By the late 1960s, the PAL operated twenty-one centers in Philadelphia serving 25,000 kids.

---

<sup>42</sup> “News.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (29 May 1921): 22; “Advertisement.” *The Philadelphia Daily News* 27 November 1951): 31. This was a standard way for smaller, neighborhood theaters to supplement their income and make the most of their space in the downtime.

<sup>43</sup> “Tribune Newsboys Enjoy Show at W. Phila. Movie.” *The Philadelphia Tribune* (19 September 1950): 16; “Tribune Charities 1000 Cans of Goods Richer.” *The Philadelphia Tribune* (24 December 1963): 1.

<sup>44</sup> Kevin Heffernan, “Inner-City Exhibition and the Genre Film: Distributing ‘Night of the Living Dead.’” *Cinema Journal* 41:3 (Spring 2002): 62.

<sup>45</sup> “Advertisement.” *The Philadelphia Tribune* (25 June 1966): 15.

<sup>46</sup> “All-Star Film to be Shown Here.” *Philadelphia Tribune* (11 April 1953): 12.

<sup>47</sup> Barbara Demick, “A One-Man Trustbuster.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (17 April 1988): 37.

Leader Theater

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

In 1968, the subject property was donated by Klieman to the PAL to be used as an “all-purpose center” and a “town hall” for the entire West Philadelphia community (Figure #7).<sup>48</sup> The opening of the building, which was dedicated to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., saw a parade down Lancaster Avenue, a speech by then-Mayor Frank Rizzo and a promise to “build positive relationships between youth, the communities in which they live, and the dedicated men and women of the Philadelphia Police Department.”<sup>49</sup>

By 1973, the subject property had served over 1,000 teenagers, who participated in baseball, basketball, table tennis, music, karate, arts and crafts, sewing and social activities, all organized by the center. The former theater space was used as an auditorium, while the former lobby space contained game rooms and space for arts, crafts and hobbies. The 2<sup>nd</sup> floor contained a movie theater and meeting rooms. The 3<sup>rd</sup> floor contained a gymnasium with boxing rings and locker rooms with showers.<sup>50</sup>

The building also hosted special events for the community, including an annual children’s Christmas party, which gave presents to over 700 neighborhood children.<sup>51</sup>

The PAL occupied the building until 1987, at which time the center relocated, and the building was occupied by a discount store.

#### *A Brief Discussion of General Theater Operations*

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the entertainment industry in middle-class, urban neighborhoods was concentrated around vaudeville, which consisted of travelling troupes and single performers. Given the cost and the complication of scheduling and managing these performances, moving pictures ultimately emerged as a cheaper and easier, but equally profitable, alternative.<sup>52</sup>

Initially, there were multiple venues that offered viewings of moving pictures, including nickelodeons, lecture halls and legitimate theaters, which were theaters that typically had live

---

<sup>48</sup> “Police Athletic League Builds King Community Center” *Jet* (1 July 1971): 22; “PAL to Open King Center in ’71.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (31 July 1970): 31.

<sup>49</sup> “PAL to Open King Center in ’71.”

<sup>50</sup> “PAL to Open King Center in ’71”; “41<sup>st</sup>, Lancaster PAL to Open in February/” *Philadelphia Tribune* (5 January 1971): 4.

<sup>51</sup> “Children’s Party at Leader Theatre.” *Philadelphia Tribune* (26 December 1964): 6.

<sup>52</sup> Noah Yoder, “The Locust Theater.” *Nomination of Historic Building, Philadelphia Historical Commission* (2017): 9-10.

Leader Theater

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

performances.<sup>53</sup> However, by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the rise of national theater chains “nearly monopolized the theater industry in America and controlled movie prices, showings and schedules for entire regions.”<sup>54</sup> Philadelphia, in particular, was a hub of the entertainment industry and headquartered two of the largest national chains: Nixon and Zimmerman Company and the Stanley Warner Corporation.<sup>55</sup> The latter company was ultimately involved with the operation and ownership of the subject property.

The primary way for these chains to dominate the industry was through the financing of new theaters that were specifically designed to show moving pictures, as was the case with the subject property. In 1914 alone, twelve new theaters were constructed in West Philadelphia, giving greater Philadelphia at least thirty-five new theaters at that time.<sup>56</sup>

Movie theaters continued to be a safe investment in urban areas until the areas themselves were no longer a good investment. After World War II, however, the lure of the suburbs and their shiny new home televisions, multiplexes and drive-ins proved too strong. The urban theater, which once provided a respite for daily life, suddenly became obsolete.

*John D. Allen (fl. 1890-1923)*

John D. Allen was “by far the city’s most prolific architect of theaters and music halls”, whose work can be seen in Baltimore, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Brooklyn, New York and Atlantic City.<sup>57</sup> In Philadelphia, his work includes the Arch Street Opera House (Alt. 1905, NR 1978, extant), the Nixon Theater (1910, demolished), the Orpheum Theater (1912, demolished) (Figure #8), the Jefferson Theater (1913, DOE 1987, extant) (Figure #9), and the Frankford Theater (1914, demolished). Although Allen’s early theater work largely involved alterations to existing structures, the 1910s were the peak of his original theater commissions. The subject property falls directly in the middle of his period of greatest growth and is in keeping with his Revivalist, if somewhat fantastic, (perhaps even theatrical?), design style. Allen also designed the Hotel Kernan in Baltimore (1904, NR 1999), which was a massive entertainment and recreational venue that included a theater.

---

<sup>53</sup> A nickelodeon was a theater offering short films that could be viewed for the cost of a nickel. Frykholm, 93.

<sup>54</sup> Yoder, 9.

<sup>55</sup> Yoder, 10.

<sup>56</sup> Frykholm, 111.

<sup>57</sup> “Jefferson Theater.” *Pennsylvania Historic Resource Survey Form*, 1987; “John D. Allen.” [https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar\\_display.cfm/24086](https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/24086). Accessed June 25, 2020.

Leader Theater

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

*Comparable Movie Theaters in Philadelphia*

The Leader Theater stands as an early example of a moving picture theater, constructed when the notion of a national theater chain was just beginning, and the clientele was not restricted only to those who could afford “luxury” entertainment. As such, it stands in contrast to those buildings constructed only a few years later or by comparable entities.

The Strand Theater at Germantown Avenue and Venango Street was a brick, concrete and terra cotta building designed in 1916 by Hoffman Co. (Figures #10 and 11).<sup>58</sup> Also commissioned by Jennie Effinger, the building was described by *Moving Picture World* as the “latest and probably the most complete temple of the silent drama to be found in that city.”<sup>59</sup> Larger than the Leader Theater, it could hold 1,800 people on the floor plus another 500 people in the boxes. In contrast to the Leader Theater, it had no balcony. Although it also initially offered photoplays, it had an 18-piece orchestra and an organ, which was also played by Professor Spiller. Despite the difference in scale and finish between the two buildings, the article even references the Leader Theater as a firm precursor: “Mr. Effinger’s previous success with the Leader Theater in West Philadelphia ensures his ability to pick programs.”<sup>60</sup> The building was demolished in 1961.

The Lansdowne Theater (1927, NR 1986) in Lansdowne, PA is another theater commissioned by Herbert Effinger and The Stanley Warner Company (Figure #12). Designed in 1927 by noted theater architect William H. Lee, the theater is architecturally significant for its portrayal of an “exotic fantasy of early Spanish intrigue.”<sup>61</sup> The theater also had a Kimball organ, but one costing \$50,000, making it one of the last to be installed in the Philadelphia region.

The Jefferson Theater (1913, DOE 1987) is located in North Philadelphia and was also designed by John D. Allen (Figure #9). Slightly larger than the subject property, it was built at a cost of \$100,000 and was “among the largest and most prestigious of North Philadelphia’s neighborhood movie theaters.”<sup>62</sup> Although no historic fabric remains on the interior, the space was organized in a similar manner with a multi-story front section and the auditorium space behind. Like the subject property, it was constructed with the exclusive intent of showing motion pictures. However, the extensive architectural detailing place it firmly in the category of a movie palace.

---

<sup>58</sup> *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide* (5 January 1916): 3.

<sup>59</sup> “Strand Theater, Philadelphia, PA.”

<sup>60</sup> “Strand Theater, Philadelphia, PA.”

<sup>61</sup> “Lansdowne Theater.” *National Register Nomination* (1983): 8:1.

<sup>62</sup> “Jefferson Theater.”

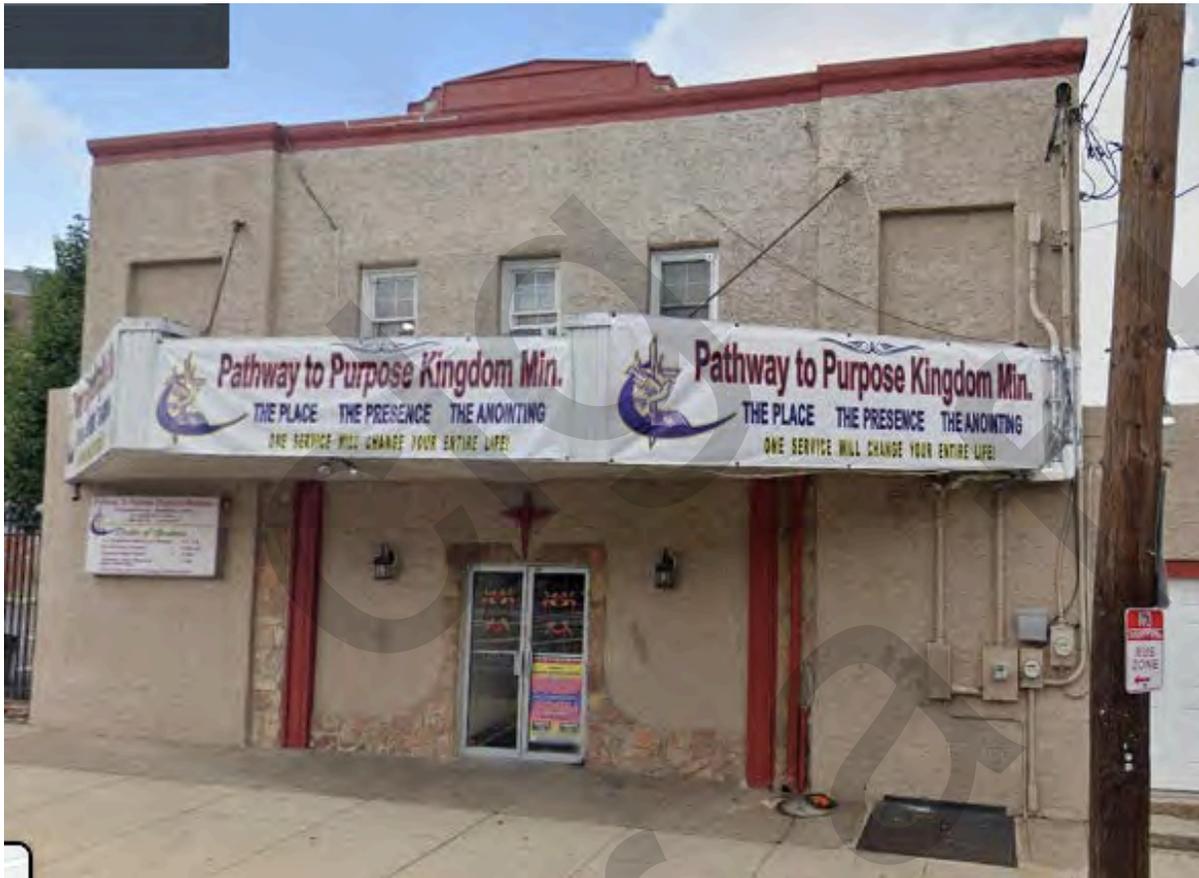
Leader Theater

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

In West Philadelphia, in particular, the 1910s were a time of great growth in theater construction. Of the approximately forty theaters in West Philadelphia in 1914, few remain, and even fewer retain integrity. The following is a selection of extant theaters that are comparable to the subject property.



Tuxedo Theater, 3949 Haverford Avenue, 1908

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



Capital Theater, 1237 N. 52<sup>nd</sup> Street, 1913



Hamilton Theater, 5928 Lansdowne Avenue, 1913

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



Lancaster Theater, 4545 Lancaster Avenue, 1913



Frolic Theater, N. 52<sup>nd</sup> Street and Wyalusing Avenue, 1914

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



Garden Theater, 5300 Lansdowne Avenue, 1914



Imperial Theater, 219 S. 60<sup>th</sup> Street, 1914

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



Grand Theater, 5206 Market Street, 1914



Locust Theater, N. 52<sup>nd</sup> and Locust Streets, 1914

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



Overbrook Theater, 6242 Haverford Avenue, 1914



Ritz Theater, 1106 N. 40<sup>th</sup> Street, 1914

Leader Theater

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

- “Accessory News.” *Motion Picture News* 11:17 (1915): 130.
- “Advertisement.” *Philadelphia Evening Ledger* (10 April 1915): 7.
- “Advertisement.” *Philadelphia Evening Ledger* (2 June 1917): 9.
- “Advertisement.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (26 September 1915): 53.
- “Advertisement.” *The Philadelphia Daily News* 27 November 1951): 31.
- “Advertisement.” *The Philadelphia Daily News* (8 June 1964): 34.
- “Big Stage Show.” *The Philadelphia Tribune* (14 January 1958): 12.
- “Advertisement.” *The Philadelphia Tribune* (25 June 1966): 15.
- “All-Star Film to be Shown Here.” *Philadelphia Tribune* (11 April 1953): 12.
- Building Permit #3927 (29 November 1935).
- Building Permit #5445 (7 January 1937).
- “Children’s Party at Leader Theatre.” *Philadelphia Tribune* (26 December 1964): 6.
- “Dancing.” *Philadelphia Evening Ledger* (19 February 1916): 1.
- Demick, Barbara. “A One-Man Trustbuster.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (17 April 1988): C1, C4.
- “41<sup>st</sup>, Lancaster PAL to Open in February” *Philadelphia Tribune* (5 January 1971): 4.
- Frykholm, Joel. *Framing the Feature Film* (Stockholm Cinema Studies, 2009): 153.
- Glazer, Irving R. *Philadelphia Theatres, A-Z*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986.
- Hansford, Montiville Morris. “Preparing Music for Photoplay Accompaniments.” *The Console: Journal of the National Association of Organists* (29 December 1917): 12.
- Heffernan, Kevin. “Inner-City Exhibition and the Genre Film: Distributing ‘Night of the Living Dead.’” *Cinema Journal* 41:3 (Spring 2002): 59-77.
- “Jefferson Theater.” *Pennsylvania Historic Resource Survey Form*, 1987.

Leader Theater

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

“John D. Allen.” [https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar\\_display.cfm/24086](https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/24086). Accessed June 25, 2020.

“John Ebersson.” [https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar\\_display.cfm/45607](https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/45607). Accessed on June 25, 2020.

Johnson, George D. *Except for the Grace*. New York: Trafford Publishing, 2005.

Klos, Lloyd E. “‘Melody Mac’: Giant of the T.O. World” *Theater Organ* (Fall 1962): 5.

“Lansdowne Theater.” *National Register Nomination*, 1983.

“Making a Theater Attractive to Patrons.” *Moving Picture World* (16 February 1918): 1000.

*Motography* (1 March 1912): np.

“Movietone.” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Movietone\\_sound\\_system](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Movietone_sound_system). Accessed on June 25, 2020.

“Neighborhood Movie Theaters.”

<https://www.phillyhistory.org/blog/index.php/2011/06/neighborhood-movie-theaters/>. Accessed on June 25, 2020.

“News.” *The Philadelphia Exhibitor* (1 January 1936): np.

“News.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (29 May 1921): 22.

“Organist Hopkins Plays in Philadelphia Theater.” *Musical America* 24 (1916): 30.

“PAL to Open King Center in '71.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (31 July 1970): 31.

“Philadelphia.” *Moving Picture World* 18:8 (23 November 1913): 1450.

*Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* (21 February 1912): 100.

*Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* (5 January 1916): 3.

*Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* (20 November 1935): 205.

“Police Athletic League Builds King Community Center” *Jet* (1 July 1971): 22-25.

“Preserving Community: A Neighborhood Preservation Plan for West Powelton, Philadelphia.” University of Pennsylvania, School of Design, 2010.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1922.

Leader Theater

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

“Settlement Made for Apartment.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (8 June 1919): 27.

Smith Atlas, 1912.

“Staunton’s New Dixie Theatre Opens Today.” *The News Leader* (15 December 1936): 5.

“Strand Theater, Philadelphia, PA.” *Moving Picture World* (3 March 1917): 1351

“The Entertainment Beat.” *The Philadelphia Daily News* (8 June 1954): 35.

“The Photoplay Man About Town.” *Philadelphia Evening Ledger* (29 April 1916): np.

“Tribune Charities 1000 Cans of Goods Richer.” *The Philadelphia Tribune* (24 December 1963): 1

“Tribune Newsboys Enjoy Show at W. Phila. Movie.” *The Philadelphia Tribune* (19 September 1950): 16

“Vitaphone.”

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vitaphone#:~:text=Vitaphone%20was%20a%20sound%20film,widely%20used%20and%20commercially%20successful>. Accessed on June 25, 2020.

Yoder, Noah. “The Locust Theater.” *Nomination of Historic Building, Philadelphia Historical Commission*, 2017.

Zoning Violation Referral (27 January 1965).

---

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

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

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other:

Leader Theater

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** N/A

---

### Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** less than 1 acre

### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

### Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property corresponds to current tax parcel #882929260, as presented in Figure 14, Site Plan with NR Boundary.

### Boundary Justification

The boundary includes all resources and land associated with the Leader Theater and does not exclude any known buildings, structures, or acreage.

---

### 10. Form Prepared By

name/title: Logan I. Ferguson, Senior Associate

organization: Powers & Company, Inc.

street & number: 1315 Walnut Street, Suite 1717

city or town: Philadelphia

state: PA

zip code: 19107

e-mail: logan@powersco.net

telephone: (215) 636-0192

date: October 2020

---

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

### Photograph Log

Name of Property: Leader Theater

City or Vicinity: Philadelphia County: Philadelphia State: PA

Photographer: Robert Powers, Powers and Company, Inc.

Date Photographed: June and September 2020

<i>Photograph #</i>	<i>Description of Photograph</i>
1.	North elevation, view south

Leader Theater

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

2.	North elevation, view southeast
3.	East elevation, view southwest
4.	East and south elevations, view northwest
5.	South and west elevations, view northeast
6.	West elevation, view north
7.	1 <sup>st</sup> floor, view east
8.	1 <sup>st</sup> floor, view south
9.	1 <sup>st</sup> floor, view north
10.	1 <sup>st</sup> floor, view south
11.	1 <sup>st</sup> floor, view north
12.	1 <sup>st</sup> floor, Proscenium detail
13.	2 <sup>nd</sup> floor, Balcony, view west
14.	2 <sup>nd</sup> floor, Projection room, view east
15.	2 <sup>nd</sup> floor, Mirror detail, view west
16.	2 <sup>nd</sup> floor, Ceiling detail, view west
17.	3 <sup>rd</sup> floor, Balcony, view southwest
18.	3 <sup>rd</sup> floor, view north
19.	3 <sup>rd</sup> floor, view south
20.	3 <sup>rd</sup> floor, Skylight detail

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



**Photograph 1** – North elevation, view south

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



**Photograph 2** – North elevation, view southeast



**Photograph 3** – East elevation, view southwest

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



**Photograph 4** – East and south elevations, view northwest



**Photograph 5** – South and west elevations, view northeast

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



**Photograph 6** – West elevation, view north

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



**Photograph 7** – 1st floor, view east

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



**Photograph 8 – 1st floor, view south**

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



**Photograph 9** – 1st floor, view north

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



**Photograph 10 – 1st floor, view south**

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



**Photograph 11 – 1st floor, view north**

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



**Photograph 12** – 1st floor, Proscenium detail

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



**Photograph 13** – 2nd floor, Balcony, view west

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



**Photograph 14** – 2nd floor, Projection room, view east

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



**Photograph 15** – 2nd floor, Mirror detail, view west

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



**Photograph 16** – 2nd floor, Ceiling detail, view west

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



**Photograph 17** – 3rd floor, Balcony, view southwest

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



**Photograph 18** – 3rd floor, view north

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



**Photograph 19** – 3rd floor, view south

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



**Photograph 20** – 3rd floor, Skylight detail

Leader Theater

Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA

County and State

**Index of Figures:**

1.	Smith Atlas, 1912.
2.	Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1922.
3.	Leader Theater, 1928.
4.	Leader Theater, 1945.
5.	“Advertisement.” <i>The Philadelphia Inquirer</i> (26 September 1915): 11.
6.	“Advertisement.” <i>Philadelphia Evening Ledger</i> (2 June 1917): 9.
7.	“Police Athletic League.” <a href="https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/police-athletic-league/">https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/police-athletic-league/</a> . Accessed on June 25, 2020.
8.	Orpheum Theater. <a href="https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/pj_display.cfm/7032">https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/pj_display.cfm/7032</a> . Accessed on October 12, 2020.
9.	“Jefferson Theater.” Google maps.
10.	“Strand Theater.” <a href="http://cinematreaures.org/theaters/21839/photos/71505">http://cinematreaures.org/theaters/21839/photos/71505</a> . Accessed on October 12, 2020.
11.	“Strand Theater, Philadelphia, PA.” <i>The Moving Picture World</i> (3 March 1917): 1351.
12.	“Lansdowne Theater.” <a href="https://www.abandonedamerica.us/slideshow314710.html">https://www.abandonedamerica.us/slideshow314710.html</a> . Accessed on June 25, 2020.
13.	USGS Map.
14.	Site Plan with NR Boundary.
15.	Aerial Photograph, 2019. North and east elevations, view southwest.
16.	Existing Plans with Photograph Key.

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State

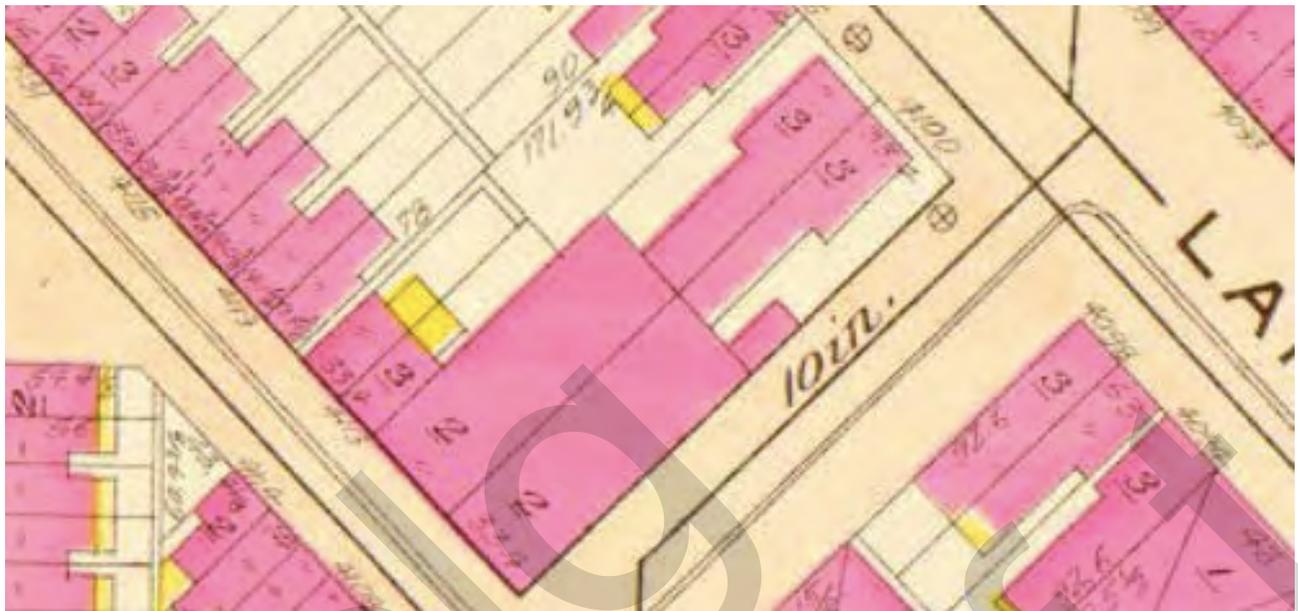


Figure 1 – Smith Atlas, 1912.

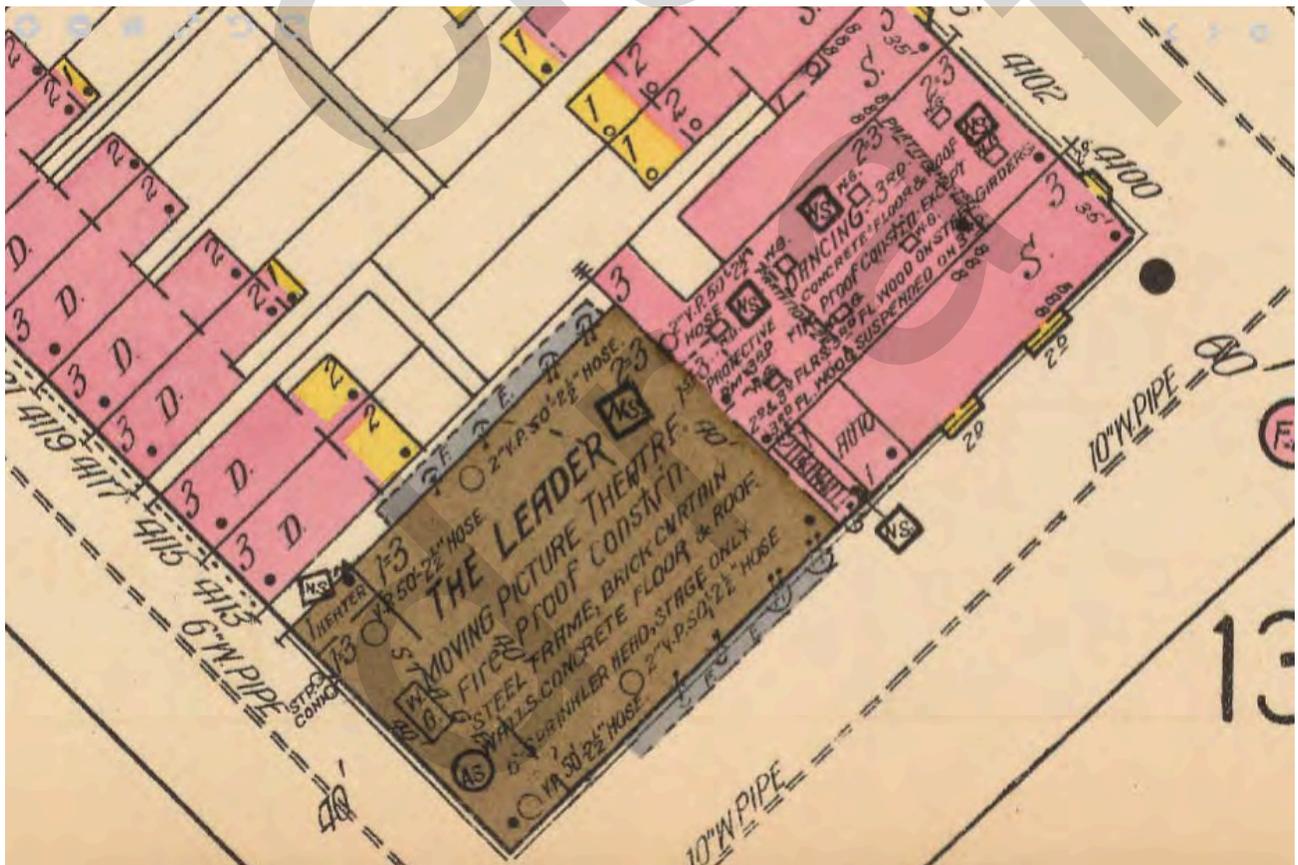


Figure 2 – Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1922.

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



**Figure 3 – Leader Theater, 1928.**

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



Figure 4 – Leader Theater, 1945

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State

**The LEADER THEATRE**  
41st and Lancaster Ave.  
Announces the completion of the  
**\$15,000**  
**Kimball Organ**  
To be played for the first time at the  
MATINEE PERFORMANCE OF  
**Mary Pickford**  
in "Rags"  
**MONDAY, SEPT. 27th**

This wonderful organ is unsurpassed for its magnificent full tones, ranging from the deep full throated, powerful 32 ft. acoustic base, to the sweet treble of the piccolo.

The heavenly tones of the harp, the solemn ringing of the cathedral chimes, the merry jingle of the orchestral bells, the entrancing singing voice of the Vox Humana. All are a part of this instrument, representing the last word in organ construction.

The Leader Theatre extends to the public the opportunity of seeing the best photoplays presented amid play house surroundings, accompanied by the finest music ever heard in any photoplay theatre in the country.

Figure 5 – "Advertisement." *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (26 September 1915): 11.

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State

Direct From Triumphant Engagement at the  
Forrest Theatre to the

# Leader Theatre

11st and LANCASTER AVENUE  
Commencing Monday Next  
Continuing  
**ONE WEEK ONLY**  
CONTINUOUS 1 TO 11 P. M.  
JULES VERNE'S  
THRILLING SCIENTIFIC DRAMA

## 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA

TIMELY! ENTERTAINING! NOVEL!  
SENSATIONAL! MAGNIFICENT!

### Nothing Like It on Earth

PHOTOGRAPHED AT THE BOTTOM OF  
THE OCEAN AMIDST GREAT DANGERS  
A TIMELY PICTORIZATION OF THE  
GREATEST IMAGINATIVE WRITER  
THE WORLD HAS EVER KNOWN.

Wonder tale that surpasses the utmost  
flights of fancy contained in its countless  
scenes, and the innermost workings and  
operation of the submarine are placed  
clearly before your eyes.

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State

**Figure 6** – “Advertisement.” *Philadelphia Evening Ledger* (2 June 1917): 9.



**Figure 7** – “Police Athletic League.” <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/police-athletic-league/>.  
Accessed on June 25, 2020.

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



**Figure 8** – Orpheum Theater. [https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/pj\\_display.cfm/7032](https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/pj_display.cfm/7032).  
Accessed on October 12, 2020.

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



Figure 9 – “Jefferson Theater.” Google maps.

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

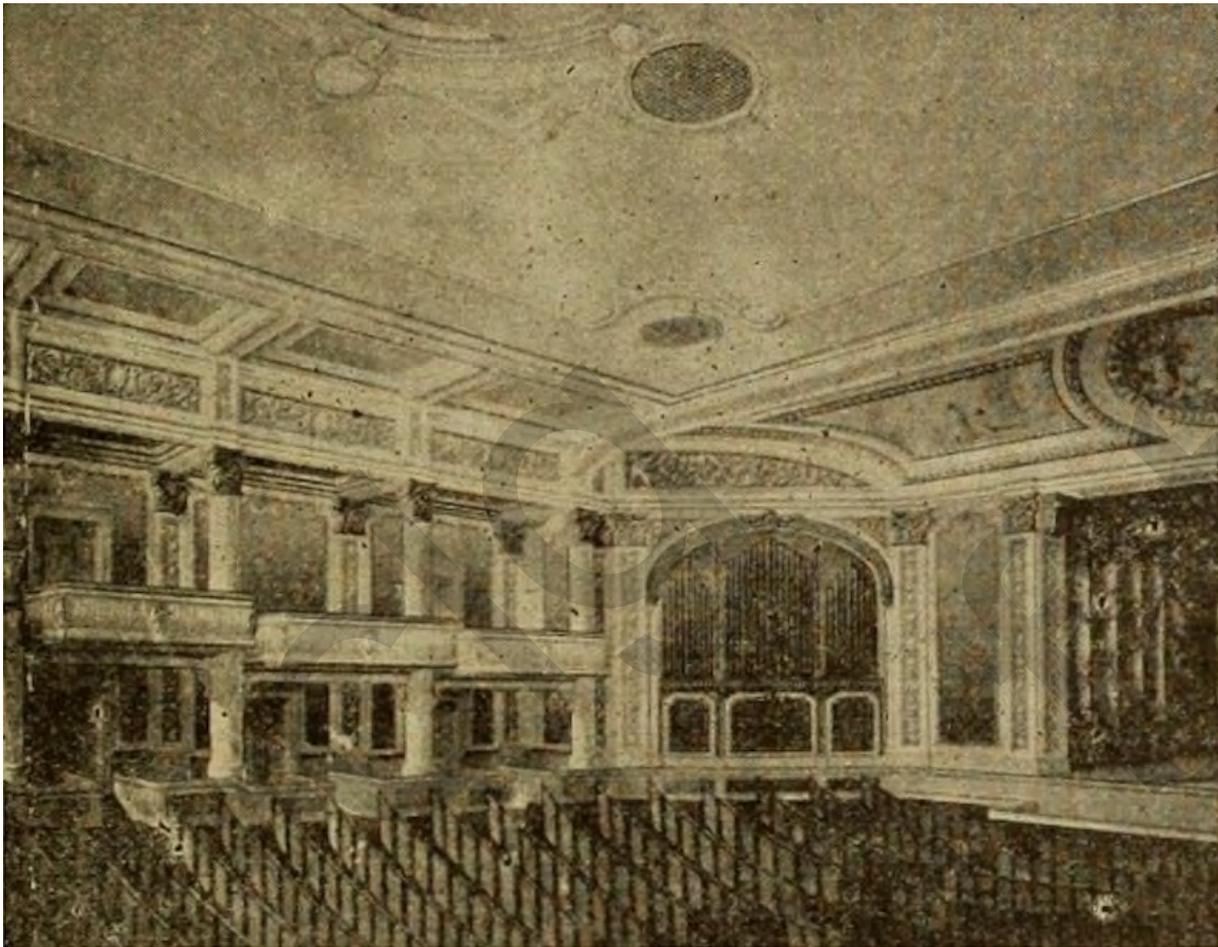
Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



**Figure 10** – “Strand Theater.” <http://cinematreaures.org/theaters/21839/photos/71505>. Accessed on October 12, 2020.

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



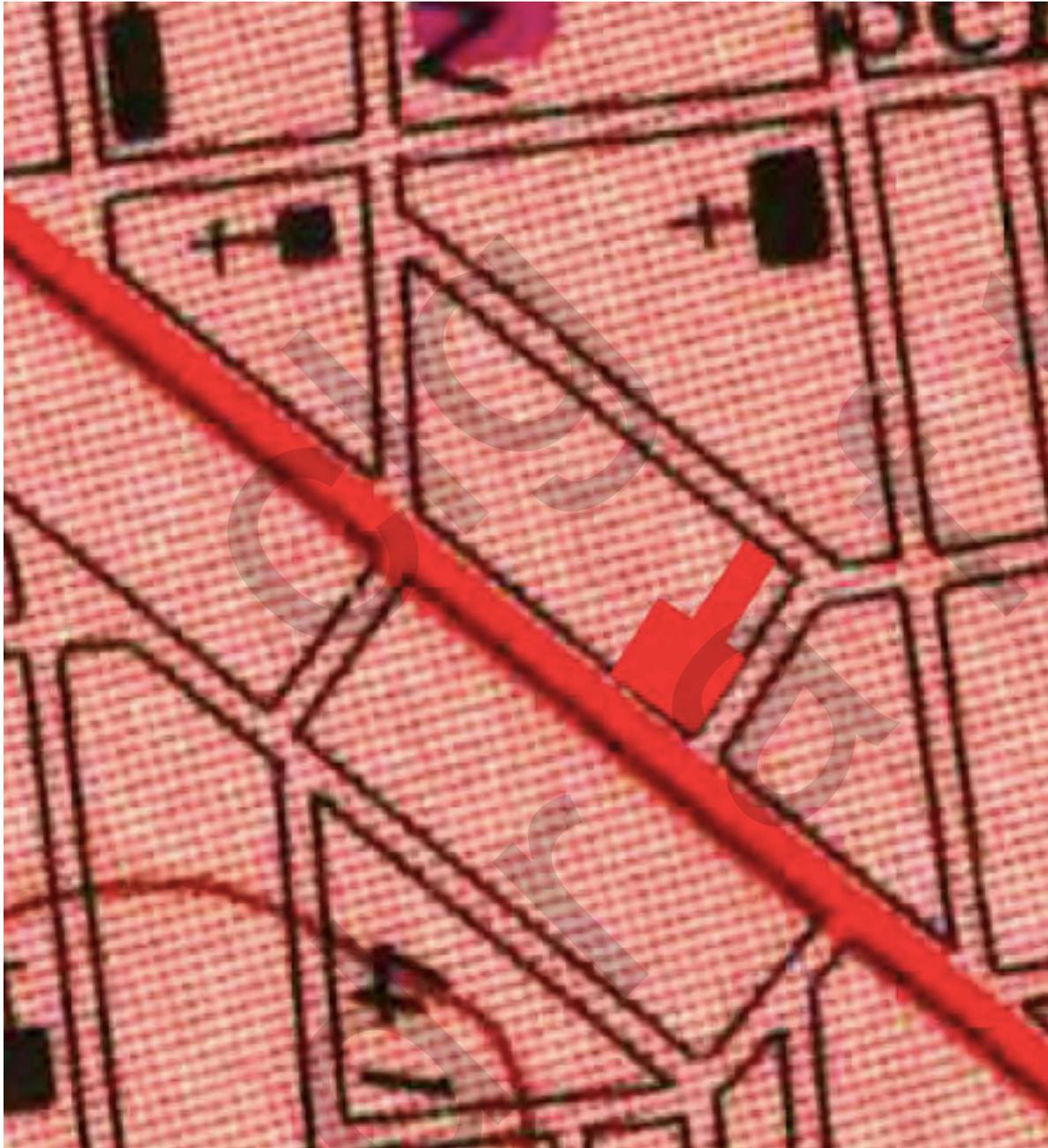
**Figure 11** – “Strand Theater, Philadelphia, PA.” *The Moving Picture World* (3 March 1917): 1351.



**Figure 12** – “Lansdowne Theater.” <https://www.abandonedamerica.us/slideshow314710.html>. Accessed on June 25, 2020.

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

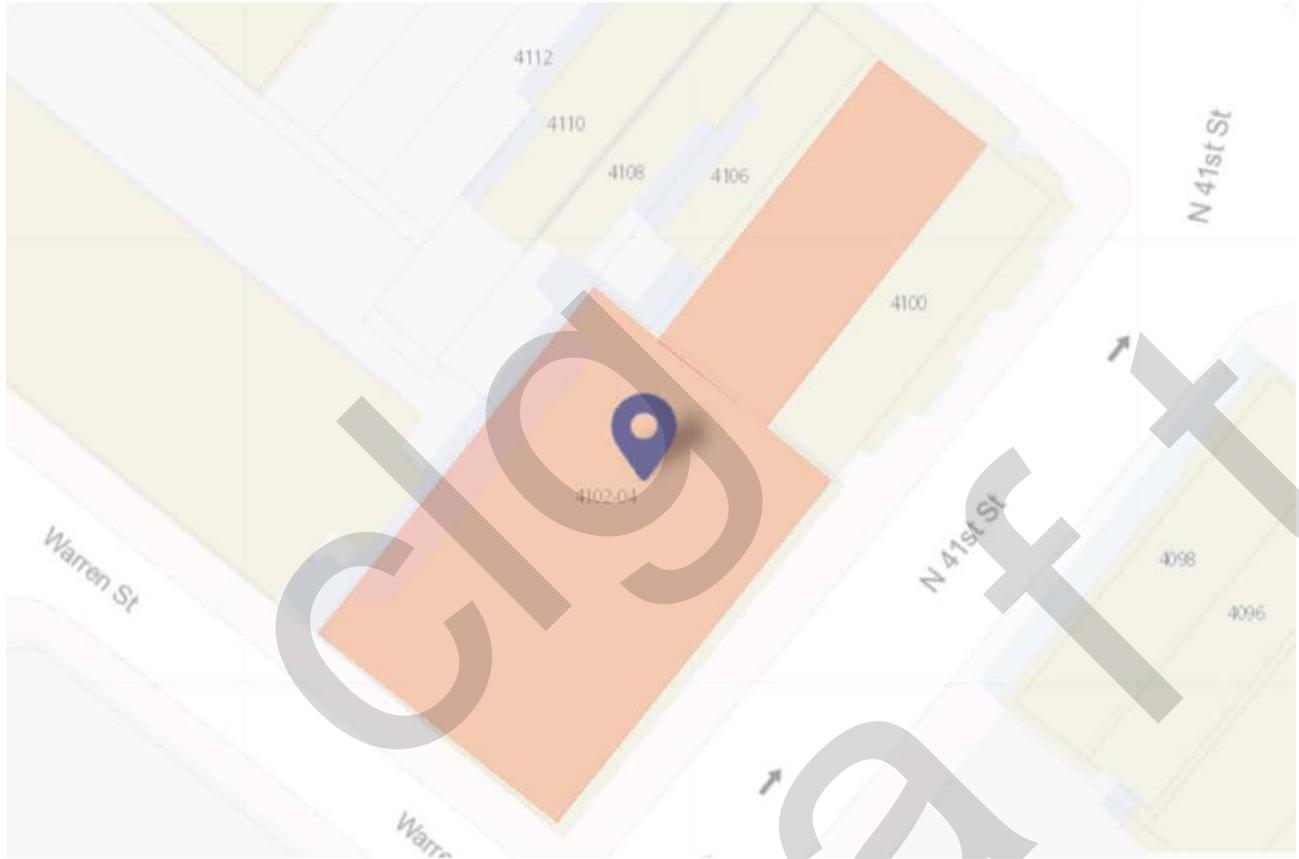
Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



**Figure 13** – USGS Map. Subject property shown in red.

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

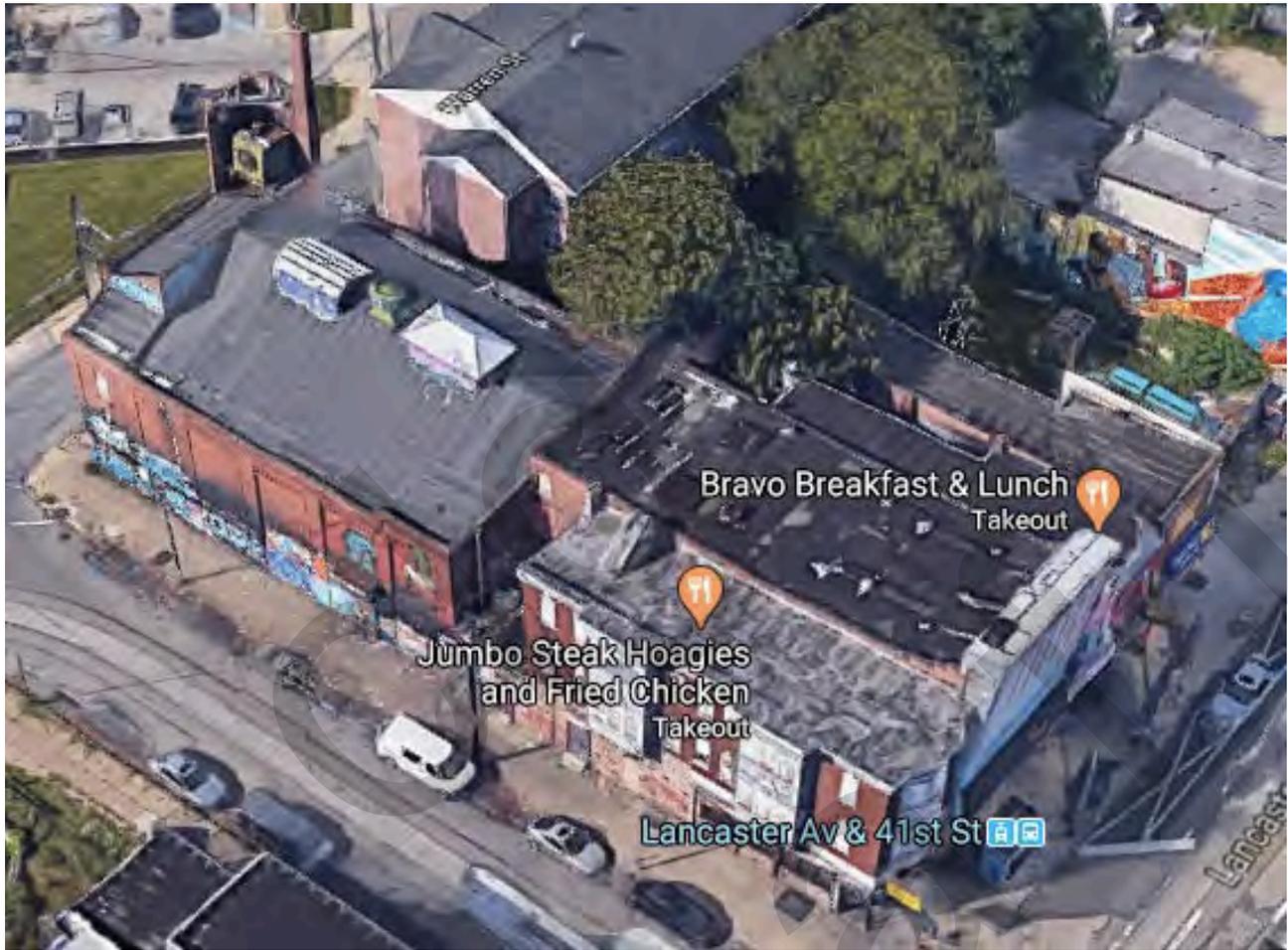
Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



**Figure 14** – Site Plan with NR Boundary shown in red. Scale: 1" = 20'0".

Leader Theater  
Name of Property

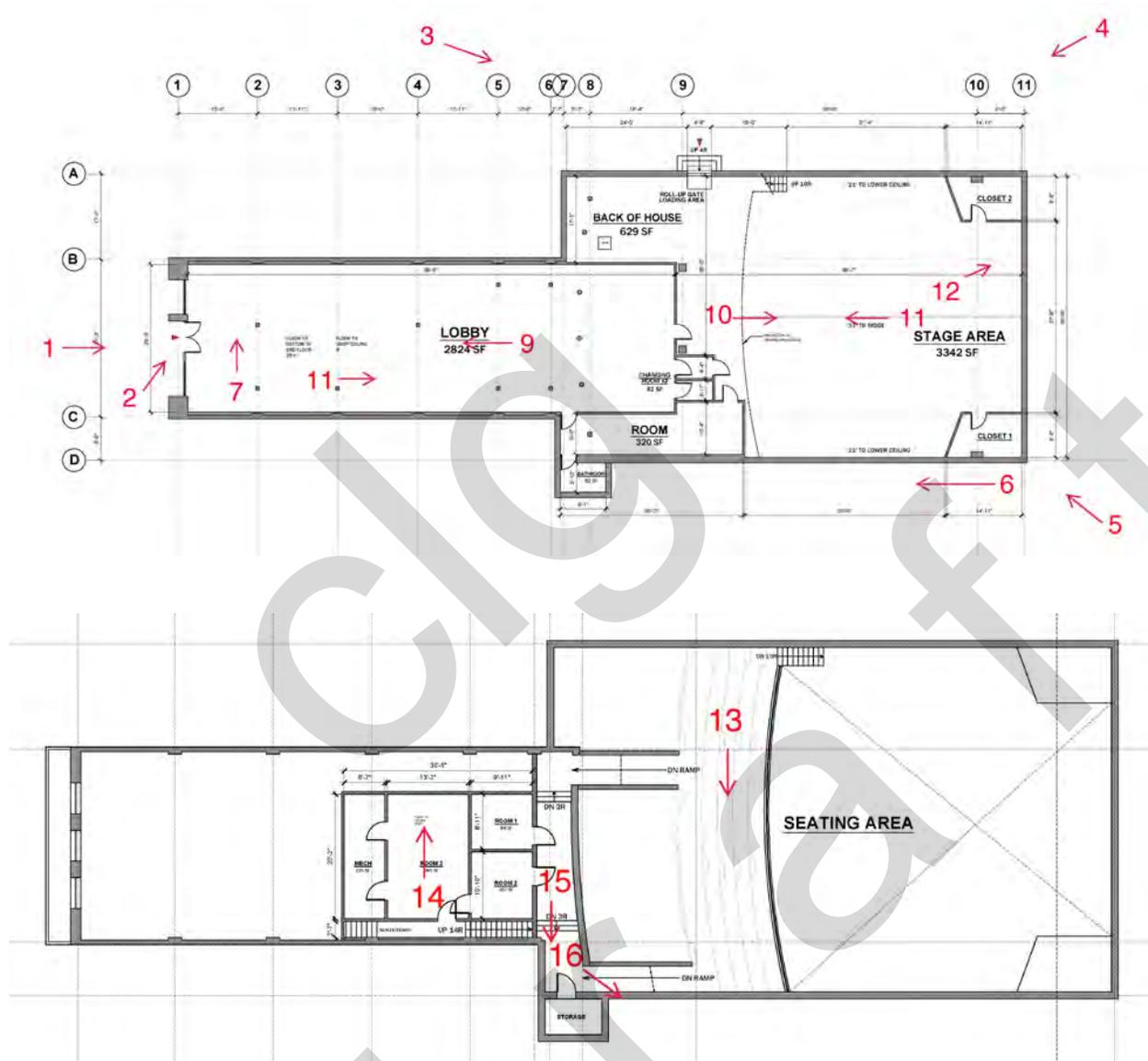
Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



**Figure 15** – Aerial Photograph, 2019. North and east elevations, view southwest.

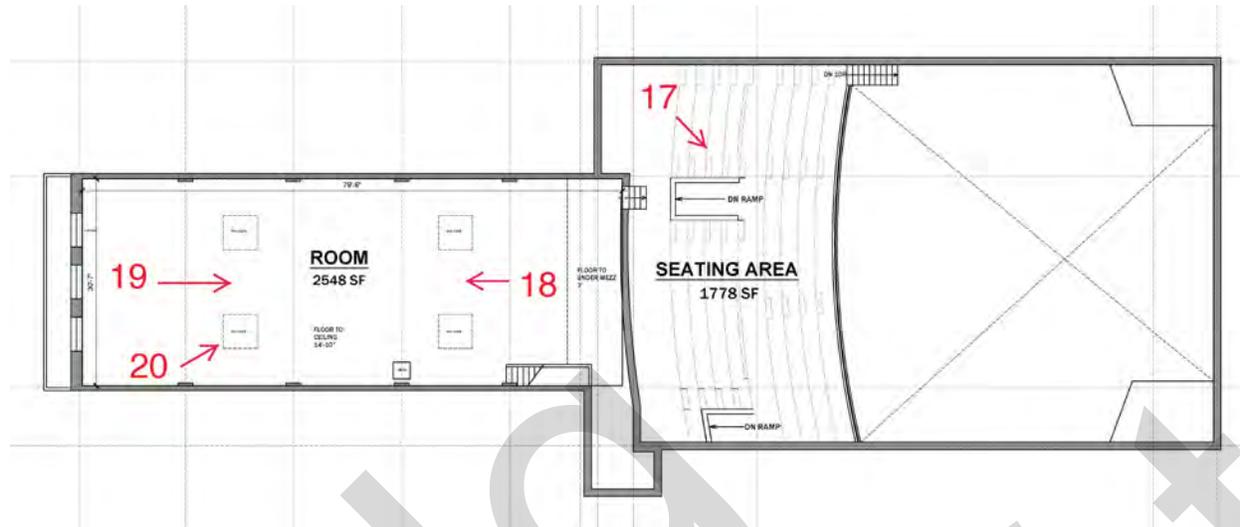
Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



Leader Theater  
Name of Property

Philadelphia, PA  
County and State



**Figure 16 – Existing Plans with Photograph Key.**

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.