NOMINATION OF HISTORIC BUILDING, STRUCTURE, SITE, OR OBJECT
PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

SUBMIT ALL ATTACHED MATERIALS ON PAPER AND IN ELECTRONIC FORM (CD, EMAIL, FLASH DRIVE)
ELECTRONIC FILES MUST BE WORD OR WORD COMPATIBLE

1. ADDRESS OF HISTORIC RESOURCE *(must comply with an Office of Property Assessment address)*

Street address: 4648-62 Frankford Ave

Postal code: 19124

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: Circle Theatre

Current/Common Name:

3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

☑ Building ☐ Structure ☐ Site ☐ Object

4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Condition: ☐ excellent ☑ good ☐ fair ☐ poor ☐ ruins

Occupancy: ☑ occupied ☐ vacant ☐ under construction ☐ unknown

Current use: Commercial

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Please attach a narrative description and site/plot plan of the resource's boundaries.

6. DESCRIPTION

Please attach a narrative description and photographs of the resource's physical appearance, site, setting, and surroundings.

7. SIGNIFICANCE

Please attach a narrative Statement of Significance citing the Criteria for Designation the resource satisfies.

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1929 to 1953

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: 1928-29

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Hoffman-Henon

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: Day & Zimmerman

Original owner: Mercantile & Theatre Corporation, leased to Stanley Company of America

Other significant persons:

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION:

The historic resource satisfies the following criteria for designation (check all that apply):

- ☐ (a) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past; or,
- ☐ (b) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- ☑ (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; or,
- ☐ (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; or,
- ☑ (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- ☐ (f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or,
- ☐ (g) Is part of or related to a square, park or other distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif; or,
- ☐ (h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City; or,
- ☐ (i) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history; or
- ☐ (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

8. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Please attach a bibliography.

9. NOMINATOR

Organization: Philadelphia Historical Commission Staff Date: _____

Name with Title: Ted Maust, Preservation Planner Email: theodore.maust@phila.gov

Street Address: 1515 Arch St Telephone: _____

City, State, and Postal Code: Philadelphia, PA 19102

Nominator ☐ is ☑ is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: 12/12/2025

☑ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete Date: 12/15/2025

Date of Notice Issuance: 12/16/2025

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: PAPK SANG KOO, PAPK BONG HO

Address: 4648-62 FRANKFORD AVE

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19124

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: _____

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: _____

Date of Final Action: _____

☐ Designated ☐ Rejected

Figure 1. The Circle Theatre as drawn by the architects of Hoffman-Henon. Image from the Irvin R. Glazer Theater Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

Nomination to the

Philadelphia Register of Historic Places

The Circle Theatre

4648-62 Frankford Avenue

Built 1928-29

Figure 2: The boundary for the proposed designation is delineated in blue. Atlas.phila.gov.

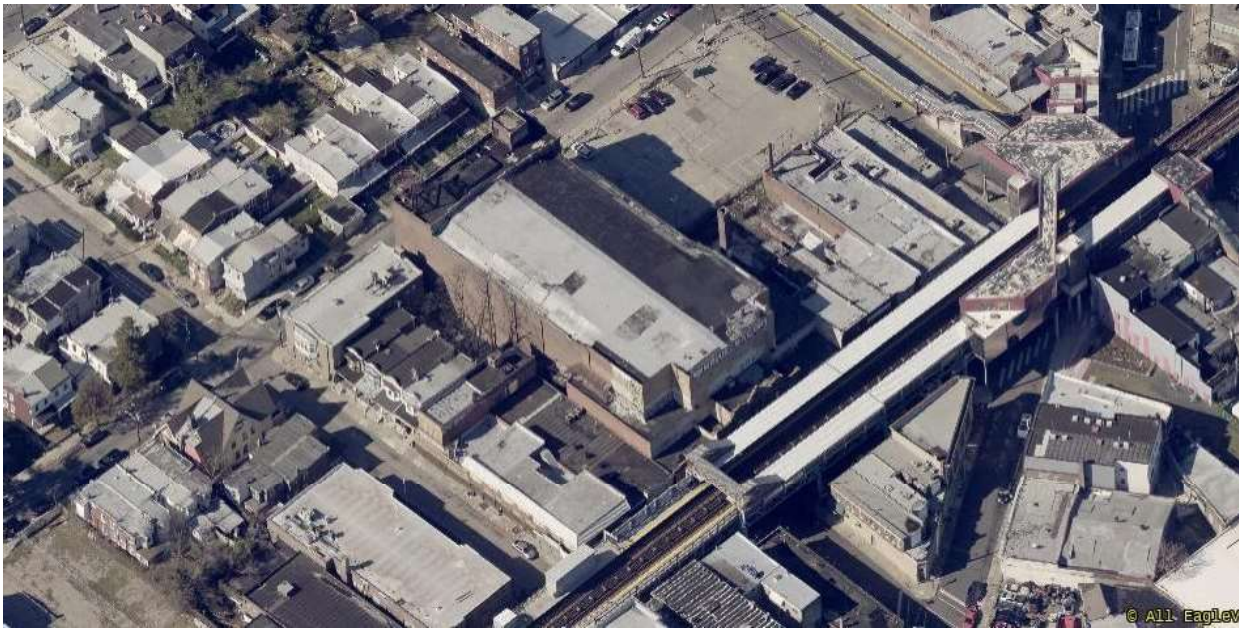
Figure 3: Aerial view looking west at the subject building. Pictometry.phila.gov, image from May 2023.

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary for the proposed designation is as recorded on the most recent deeds:

> ALL THAT CERTAIN lot or piece of ground with the buildings and improvements thereon erected, Hereditaments and Appurtenances, Situate in the 23rd Ward of the City of Philadelphia and State of Pennsylvania, bounded and described according to a Survey thereof made by Amos B. Engle, Surveyor and Regulator of the Eighth Survey District of the City of Philadelphia, dated April 28, 1943, as follows, to wit:
>
> BEGINNING at a point on the Northwesterly side of Frankford Avenue (70 feet wide) at the distance of 75 feet, 5/8 of an inch Northeastwardly from the Northeasterly side of Overington Street (40 feet wide); thence extending Northwestwardly on a line parallel with Arrott Street 242 feet, 3 1/2 inches to the Southeasterly side of Griscom Street (40 feet wide); thence extending Northeastwardly along the Southeasterly side of Griscom Street 120 feet to a point; thence extending Southeastwardly on a line parallel with said Arrott Street 114 feet to a point on the Southeasterly side of a 14 feet wide driveway leading Northeastwardly into Arrott Street; thence extending Northeastwardly on the Southeasterly side of said driveway 12 feet, 1/4 of an inch to a point; thence extending Southeastwardly 128 feet, 2 7/8 inches to the Northwesterly side of Frankford Avenue; thence extending Southwestwardly along the Northwesterly side of Frankford Avenue 132 feet to the first mentioned point or place of beginning. BEING Nos. 4648-4662 Frankford Avenue.[1]

6. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Circle Theatre is a former movie theater located at 4648-62 Frankford Avenue between Overington Street and Arrott Street in the Frankford neighborhood of Philadelphia. The building extends the depth of the lot, with its rear elevation fronting Griscom Street.

Primary Elevation

The primary elevation along Frankford Avenue is constructed of buff brick and terracotta and comprises three segments: the former movie theater entrance at the center, occupying approximately half of the frontage, flanked by two wings designed as commercial spaces. The ornamented central portion of the elevation is two-stories in height and executed in a Spanish Revival style, while the commercial spaces to either side of it are one-story in height and display the Commercial Style with some Art Deco flourishes. While the elevation is largely symmetrical, the storefront wings are differentiated in their ornament.

[1] "Termination of Assignment of Rents," HSBC Bank USA to Sang Koo Park and Bong Ho Park, February 5, 2002. Accessed via PhilaDox, Document Number 50433071.

Figure 4: The primary elevation, along the northwest side of Frankford Ave near the Arrott Transit Center. Site photos by author, 2025, unless otherwise noted.

Figure 5: The decorative façade above the former entrance to the Circle Theatre. Image from cyclomedia.phila.gov.

The second floor of the central section is highly decorated in terracotta ornament and complex, with terracotta piers breaking it up into 5 elements: a second-floor blind arcade at the very center, with two segments of similar height on each side featuring large window openings (now closed) which are in turn flanked by simpler segments, each topped by a balustrade. These elements step up toward the center and feature subtle variations in plane, collectively giving the sense that the center extends forward through forced perspective.

While the second floor retains significant integrity of original material and design, the first floor of the central portion of the building has been altered to accommodate several store fronts with plate-glass windows. The original wing storefronts have also been altered, though terracotta detailing above the signage remains and further historic fabric may survive behind those signs.

Figure 6: Photograph of the Circle Theatre in 1929 showing its original marquee and entrance. Photo from the Irvin R. Glazer Theater Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

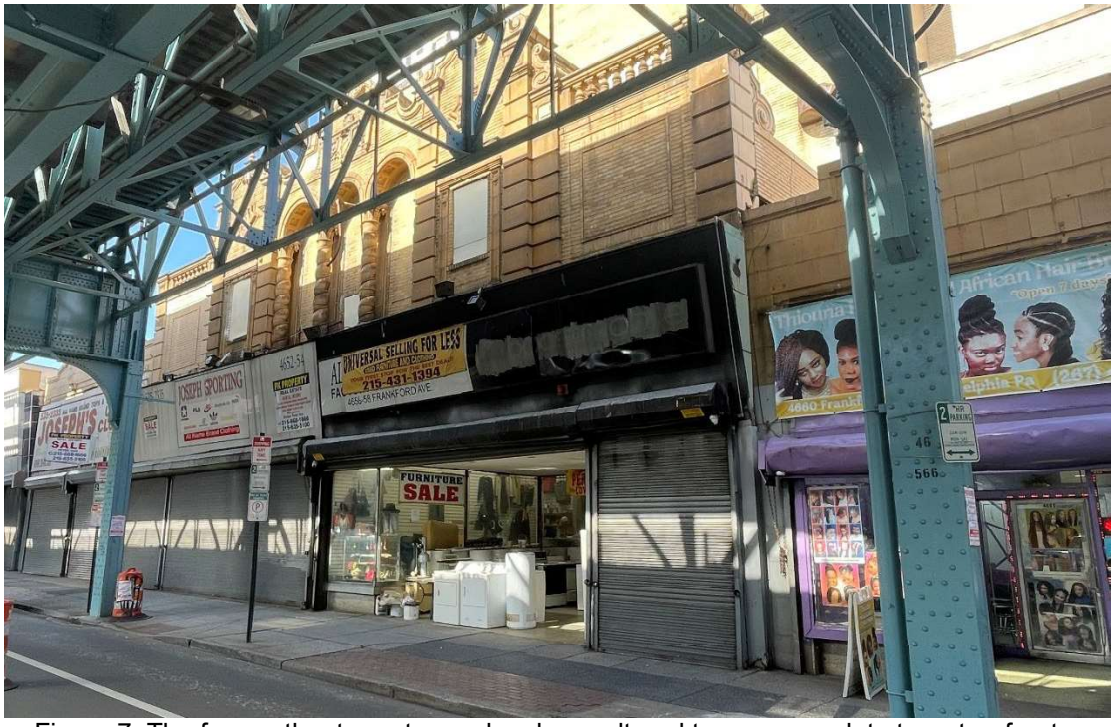

Figure 7: The former theater entrance has been altered to accommodate two storefronts.

Figure 8: The left (south) storefront wing appears to be significantly altered, but historic fabric may survive behind the signage. Image from cyclomedia.phila.gov.

Figure 9: The right (north) storefront wing is also altered, but the terracotta details remain.

Side and Rear Elevations

Beyond the primary elevation, the subject building displays the pragmatic design of movie theater architecture, with a large volume set back from the ornate entrance, with side and rear walls largely blank and constructed of red brick. A fire escape descends along the southwest elevation, and the remains of fire balconies can be seen along the rear (northwest) elevation. The skeleton of a water tower sits at the rear corner of the roof and a chimney extends from the rear corner of the lower roof of the northeast storefront wing.


Figure 10: The side (northeast) and rear elevations of subject property. Aerial image from EagleView.

The northern corner of the building features four bays of punched window openings. While some of these have been boarded up, others appear to have windows which may be original, though many panes are broken. The windows are double-hung, in six-over-six and four-over-four variations. The 1920 Sanborn map, updated to 1951, shows that this part of the building was dedicated to dressing rooms (Figure 11).

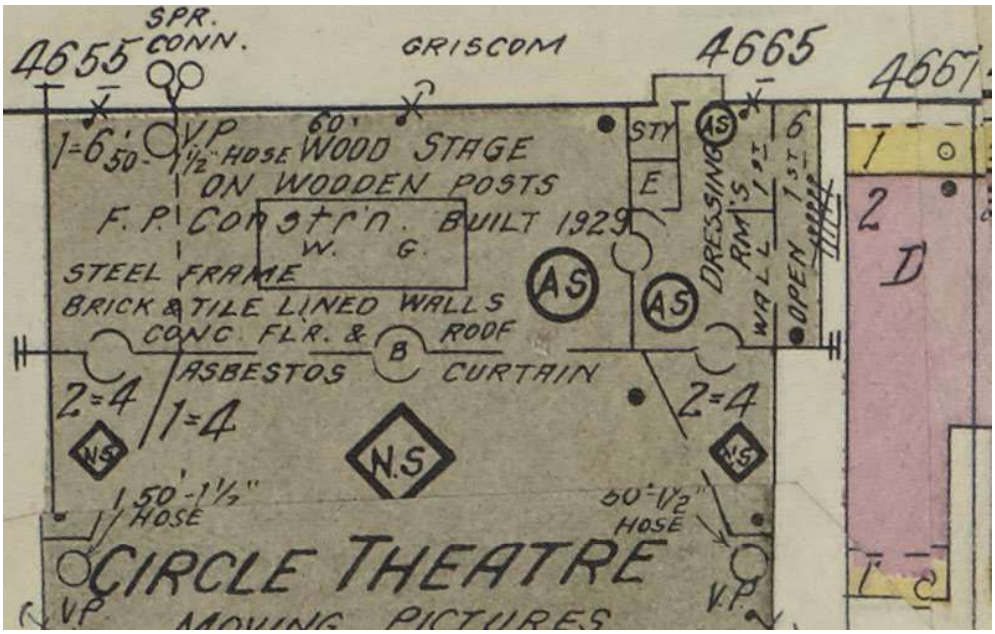

Figure 11: Detail of Sanborn fire insurance map updated to 1951, showing the rear of the Circle Theatre. Adjacent to the Dressing Rooms are an elevator (“E”) and a fire stair (“STY”) which could be accessed from the rear balconies.


Figure 12: The rear corner of the property features punched window openings.

Figure 13: A 1961 photo documenting the municipal parking lot created earlier that year at the corner of Arrott and Griscom also shows the northeast façade of the Circle Theatre, including the operation of the windows. Photo from the Department of Public Property Collection, Philadelphia City Archives.


Figure 14: The south elevation, seen from the rear corner.

Figure 15: A portion of the south (side) elevation and the primary elevation, seen from the from the Eastbound platform of the Market-Frankford Line at Arrott Transportation Center.

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Circle Theatre at 4648-62 Frankford Avenue in the Frankford neighborhood of Philadelphia is a significant historic resource worthy of designation by the Philadelphia Historical Commission and inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

Hoffman-Henon, the building's architects, were renowned designers of movie theaters (especially for the Stanley Company of America and Warner Brothers[2]) and were featured in prominent trade periodicals of the motion picture industry and received commissions from as far away as Quito, Ecuador. The firm's work for Catholic churches, schools, and institutions has also greatly contributed to Philadelphia's built environment and has been historically designated at the local and national level.

The Hoffman-Henon design for the Circle Theatre reflects the economic conditions and aesthetic trends which characterized neighborhood movie theaters built between 1910 and 1930. Each of these theaters sought to stand out from its immediate context and so these designs often drew from a variety of architectural styles which grew more flamboyant as theaters proliferated and competition intensified. The Circle, designed in the Spanish Style, reflects a period in which theater aesthetics expanded upon the broadly neoclassical forms of earlier theaters. Like many other neighborhood theaters, the Circle incorporated streetfront commercial spaces, which were executed with distinct aesthetics which likewise reflect the environment in that era. While Philadelphia

[2] See **Appendix A** for more information about these companies.

once had over 400 movie theaters, the Circle is one of relatively few survivors with significant architectural integrity.

For these reasons, the building satisfies the following Criteria for Designation as enumerated in Section 14-1004 of the Philadelphia Code:

> (c) It reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; and
>
> (e) It is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth, or Nation; and

The period of significance stretches from the building's completion in 1929 to the end of its use as a movie theater in 1953.

Criterion E: Henon and Hoffman[3]

In its "Theatre Building & Equipment Buyers Guide" of December 29th, 1928, *Moving Picture News* devoted twenty-four pages to an essay written by Paul J. Henon, Jr. titled "The Architect's Service to the Industry" and illustrated with a multitude of photos and illustrations (including eight color plates) of theaters designed by the firm of Hoffman-Henon. Another ten pages of advertisements touted various companies' work with Hoffman-Henon and wished the firm well "on the completion of its sixteenth year of highly merited success in its distinctive branch of architecture."[4] Above the title of his essay, Paul Henon is described as "The Designer of 100 Theatres"; whether or not that number was based in any fact (and Hoffman-Henon had been making variations on that claim since at least 1921), it is certainly true that the firm had left a significant mark on the business of designing theaters and on the built environment of Philadelphia.[5]

Paul J. Henon, Jr.

Paul Henon began his career in partnership with James F. Boyle from 1911 to 1918, the firm carrying on the legacy of Boyle's father, Rowland J. Boyle, designing primarily for Catholic churches and schools.

[3] This nomination includes portions of the nomination of 4732-42 N Broad St, the Logan Theatre, to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, written by the same author, reproduced without further citation.

[4] "Theatre Building & Equipment Buyers Guide," *Motion Picture News,* December 29, 1928, Section Two. The advertisements citing Hoffman-Henon run from page 17 to page 26, and Henon's essay runs from page 27 to page 50. It seems plausible that the "16 years" began with William H. Hoffman's first theater commissions in Philadelphia in 1912.

[5] Advertisement for Hoffman-Henon Co., Inc., *Motion Picture News,* November 26, 1921: page 2867.

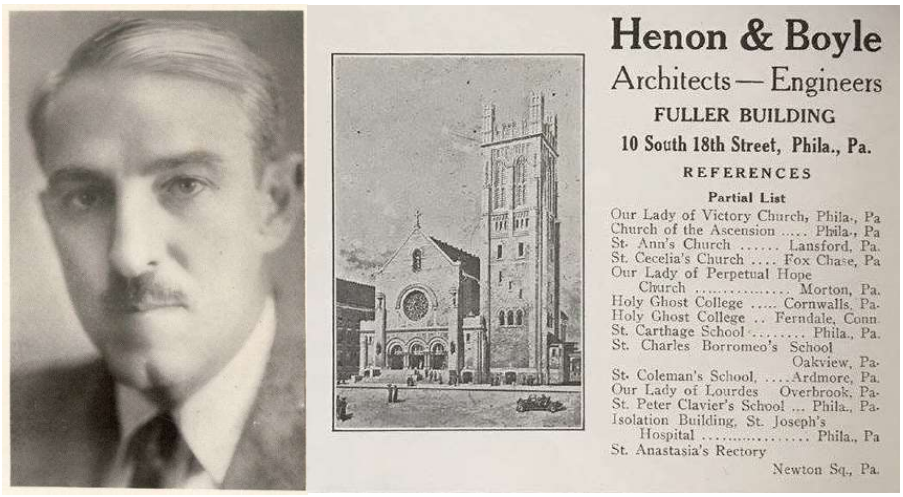

Figure 16, Left: Portrait of Paul J. Henon, Jr., published with his essay in *Motion Picture News*, December 29, 1928.

Figure 17, Right: Advertisement for Henon & Boyle, from 1910, cites their work on churches and schools. Source: Athenaeum of Philadelphia, Hoffman-Henon Collection.

By 1914, if not earlier, Paul Henon began a working relationship with future executives of the Stanley Company of America when Henon & Boyle were contracted by Alexander R. Boyd to build a theater (the Arcadia Theatre) at 1529-31 Chestnut Street on land belonging to Jules and Stanley Mastbaum and their real estate partner Alfred W. Fleisher.[6]

In June 1918, Henon and Boyle took on a contract with the Mastbaums' Stanley Company for alterations to a theater in the vicinity of 16th and Market Streets (likely the Regent Theatre at 1632-34 Market Street).[7] After Boyle's death in October from the 1918 Influenza epidemic, Henon was solely credited in early 1919 with alterations to the Palace Theatre (1214-16 Market Street) and converting 722-24 Market Street, formerly a millinery store, into the Capitol Theatre.[8] Both of these projects were included in Jules Mastbaum's announcement of the incorporation of the Stanley Company of America that June.[9]

William H. Hoffman

Meanwhile, William H. Hoffman had been building a significant reputation of his own. Originally from Pittsburgh, Hoffman received his first mentions in *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* in October 1911.[10] In January 1912, he won a contract for a theater at 52nd and Market Streets for a Pittsburgh-based property owner and in July of that year, he was contracted to design a "Moving Picture Theatre" at 333

[6] "Theatre on Chestnut Street," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* July 5, 1914, page 15.
[7] "Building Permits Granted," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* July 31, 1918, page 13; "Activities of the Day in Real Estate," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* June 17, 1919, page 17.
[8] "Activities of the Day in Real Estate," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* March 22, 1919, page 9; "Activities of the Day in Real Estate," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* March 28, 1919, page 15; "Capitol Theatre," *Philadelphia Architects and Buildings,* the Athenaeum of Philadelphia.
[9] "Theatre Firms Here Merge with Stanley," *Evening Public Ledger,* Philadelphia, PA, June 3, 1919, page 11.
[10] *Builders' Guide,* Volume 26, n. 41, October 11, 1911, pages 687 and 690.

Market Street (the Market Street Theatre).[11] By October of 1912, *the Philadelphia Inquirer* was calling him "one of the best known of theatre architects" when it announced he was designing a vaudeville theater at 26th Street and Girard Avenue for J. Fred Zimmerman.[12]

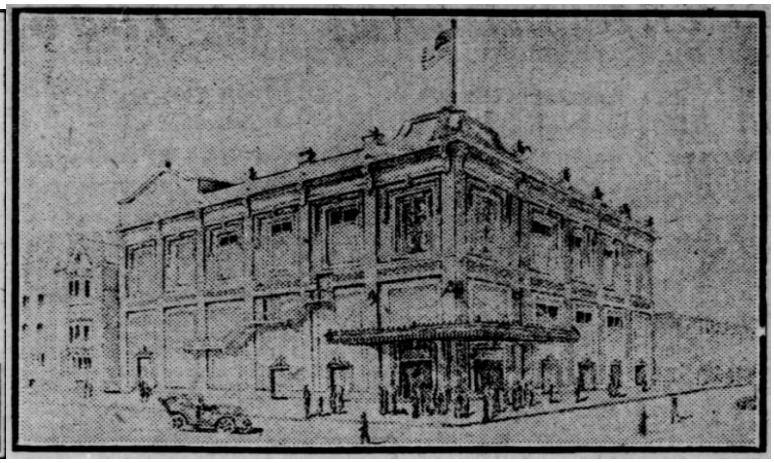

Figure 18, Left: Portrait of William H. Hoffman, which ran in *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* November 25, 1923, page 3.

Figure 19, Right: Illustration of the vaudeville theater Hoffman designed at 26th Street and Girard Avenue, published in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 13, 1912, page 7.

Hoffman formed a productive partnership with fellow Pittsburgher Harvey Childs Hodgens upon the latter's move to Philadelphia in 1913. *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* reported contracts for at least eleven theater projects in 1913 to W. H. Hoffman and Co.[13] Newspaper notices report Hodgens' involvement in at least four of those.[14] Hodgens would go on to form an architectural partnership with Albert Douglas Hill by at least 1923, which would design many neighborhood theaters including the Colney Theatre (1924-25), the Admiral Theatre (1928), and the Rexy Theatre (1928) in Philadelphia, and the Tower Theatre (1927) in Upper Darby.[15]

One of Hoffman's 1913 contracts with Hodgens was with the Stanley Company, for whom Hoffman designed the Stanley Theatre (built 1914, later known as the Stanton) at 1614-22 Market Street, described as a "completely equipped vaudeville theatre."[16] Hoffman designed another vaudeville theater built in 1914, the Cross Keys, at 5931

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[11] *Builders' Guide,* Volume 27: n. 5, January 31, 1912, page 76; n. 30, July 24, 1912, page 481.

[12] "Northwest to have Vaudeville Theatre," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* October 13, 1912, page 7.

[13] *Builders' Guide*, Volume 28 (1913): April 16, n. 16, p. 252; May 7, n. 19, p. 295; May 14, n. 20, p. 313; June 11, n. 24, p. 375; July 2, n. 27, p. 423; July 16, n. 29, p. 466; July 23, n. 30, p. 479-80; July 30, n. 31, p. 496; September 3, n. 36, p. 577; October 22, n. 43 p. 687; November 5, n. 45 p. 720-21

[14] "To Begin Costly Operation," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* May 10, 1913, page 4; "Review of the Week in Real Estate," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* June 8, 1913, page 25; "Theatre Plans Finished," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* June 27, 1913, page 14; "This City Shows Gain," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* July 13, 1913, page 8.

[15] Attributions and dates from the Philadelphia Architects and Buildings project of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia, apart from the Admiral Theatre, which opened in 1928 according to Irvin R. Glazer in *Philadelphia Theaters, A Pictorial Architectural History*.

[16] "Review of the Week in Real Estate," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* June 22, 1913, page 22. 1914 completion date comes from Glazer, *Philadelphia Theaters, A Pictorial Architectural History,* 86.

Market Street, operated by John J. McGuirk for the Stanley Amusement Company, with the Mastbaum brothers negotiating the deal.[17]

World War I significantly slowed the construction of theaters in Philadelphia, and Hoffman is only credited with one such project during the war, 1916 alterations to the Coliseum Theatre.[18]

Hoffman-Henon Join Forces

In June 1919, just two weeks after Jules Mastbaum announced the reincorporation of the Stanley Company of America in the midst of tremendous growth, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that the two theater architects had joined forces:

> One of the biggest consolidations in architectural and engineering circles for some time was consummated last week with the combining of Paul J. Henon Company with Hoffman and Company. Some of the work done by Paul J. Henon, Jr., was the designing and building of the Church of Ascension, St. Cecilia's Church at Fox Chase, the Lady of Victory Church at Fifty-fourth and Vine streets, which was recently bombed, and the Arcadia and Regent Theatres.[19]

In October 1919, demolition began at the southwest corner of 19th and Market Streets. On May 8, 1920, Fanny Mastbaum, mother of Stanley and Jules, "wield[ed] the silver trowel" at the ceremonial laying of the cornerstone.[20] When the new Stanley Theatre opened on January 29th, 1921 with 4000 seats to fill, it was heralded as a needed solution:

> For some time there has been felt the necessity for providing for large attendance in a photo-play house. The present Stanley makes the nearest approach to the desideratum, but the New Stanley, it is believed, will solve the problem of seat accommodation for all patrons in the usual course of business.[21]

Paul's brother Daniel Henon, who had formed an engineering and construction company with W. Edward Pierce in 1920 which

Figure 20: Photos of Paul J. and Daniel T. Henon illustrating a feature on the opening of the Mastbaum Theatre. "Mastbaum Special," The Philadelphia Inquirer, February 28, 1929, page 6.

[17] "Theatre Contract Awarded," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* March 7, 1914, page 13; "New Era Came to West Phila with 'L' Road," *Evening Public Ledger,* November 14, 1914, page 2. The name of this theater is sometimes written as "Crosskeys."

[18] Irvin R. Glazer's *Philadelphia Theaters: A Pictorial Architectural History* includes a chronological list of theaters which shows that after a booming market for theater design resulting in forty-one theaters in 1913 and sixty-six in 1914, only fifteen theaters were completed in 1915, two in 1916, one in 1917, and two in 1918 before the industry picked up again in 1919. Hoffman's work on the Coliseum is noted in Glazer, *Philadelphia Theaters, A Pictorial Architectural History,* 85.

[19] "Activities of the Day in Real Estate," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* June 17, 1919, page 17.

[20] "$2,000,000 Theatre for Stanley Group," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* May 2, 1920, page 42; "New Stanley Theatre Cornerstone is Laid," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* May 9, 1920, page 2.

[21] "$2,000,000 Theatre for Stanley Group," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* May 2, 1920, page 42.

executed many of Hoffman-Henon's early designs, joined Hoffman-Henon by 1923.[22] William Hoffman died in 1924, but by then the Hoffman-Henon name had become established and the Henon brothers continued to operate their firm with that name into the 1930s.[23] In addition to theaters, the firm continued designing a significant number of buildings for Catholic institutions, as well as taking on alteration projects of various types.[24]

Hoffman-Henon designed theaters for a variety of clients but at least eleven were designed from the ground up for the Stanley Company of America (including several after Stanley merged with Warner Brothers), and many more renovated for Stanley within buildings designed by others. In addition to theaters in Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Atlantic City, Hoffman-Henon designed Stanley theaters in smaller towns and cities throughout Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware.[25]

As an example of the Stanley Company's dominance of the Philadelphia marketplace, in 1930, Stanley operated ten of the thirteen theaters which graced Market Street between 3rd Street and 22nd Street.[26] Four of these were designed by the firm of Hoffman-Henon and another five could be attributed to Hoffman (Stanton, 333 Market Street) or Henon (Regent, Palace, Capitol) before the architects went into business together.[27] Among the ten theaters on the Stanley roster, only the Victoria Theatre at 913 Market Street cannot (yet) be linked to design work by either William Hoffman or Paul Henon. Alterations to one of the non-Stanley theaters (the Princess Theatre at 1018 Market Street) are also credited to Hoffman-Henon in 1919.[28]

Figure 21: Market Street theaters, ca. 1930. Those designed by Hoffman-Henon for Stanley appear in red, and those designed or altered by Hoffman or Henon before their partnership appear in pink. Theaters designed by others appear in green. The Globe Theatre (demolished 1930) is shown in yellow and the Princess Theatre (altered by Hoffman-Henon, 1919) is in blue. Composite map by author using the 1942 Land Use Map as a base.

[22] "Henon, Daniel T.," *Philadelphia Architects and Buildings,* Athenaeum of Philadelphia.
[23] "William H. Hoffman, Architect, Former Pittsburgher, Dies," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette,* April 26, 1924, page 14.
[24] "Henon, Paul J., Jr.," *Philadelphia Architects and Buildings,* Athenaeum of Philadelphia.
[25] For instance, in 1921, *Motion Picture News* reported Hoffman-Henon working on theaters in Plainfield, NJ; Milford, DE; Middletown, Hazelton, and Pottstown, PA, as well as two theaters in Philadelphia. "Hoffman-Henon Busy on Many Theatre Plans," *Motion Picture News,* May 7, 1921, Vol. 23, n. 20, page 2962.
[26] Stanley's influence was not limited to Market Street: Hoffman and/or Henon designed several theaters for the company along Chestnut Street, one of Philadelphia's other theater corridors, including the Arcadia Theatre (1529-31 Chestnut St, Henon & Boyle, 1914), Karlton Theatre (1412-24 Chestnut St, Hoffman-Henon, 1921).
[27] It is unclear the extent of Henon & Boyle's alterations to the Palace Theatre and the Regent Theatre, both of which were built earlier (1907 and 1913, respectively). Technically, the Globe Theatre (Stanley) at the northeast corner of Market and Juniper was still standing for a portion of 1930—Hoffman had received a contract for alterations to it in 1913. The Market Street theaters not operated by Stanley: The Fox Theatre (1600 Market), the Family Theatre in the Gibson Building (1307-11 Market St), and the Savoy Theatre (1211 Market, stage plays only).
[28] "Princess Theatre," *Philadelphia Architects and Buildings,* Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

The four Market Street theaters commissioned by the Stanley Company after the Hoffman-Henon merger are among their most ambitious. These four buildings may be considered what "movie palaces," characterized by a large seating capacity and opulent interiors:

- The Stanley Theatre at 19th and Market (built 1921, demolished 1973)[29]
- The Earle Theatre at 11th and Market (built 1924, demolished 1953, also known as the Elrae)
- The Erlanger Theatre at 21st and Market (built 1927, demolished 1978).
- The Mastbaum Theatre at 20th and Market (built 1929, demolished 1958)[30]

These four theaters, constructed within a single decade, display a range of scales and architectural styles while working from a common palette. They all included street-level commercial spaces, and the façades were primarily made of limestone, terracotta, and buff brick, giving a unified appearance to the whole.

Figure 22: Photo of the Earle Theatre (then called the Elrae) under construction shows the steel skeleton under the masonry façades. Photo from the Glazer Theater Collection.

[29] One claim to fame of the Stanley Theatre at 19th and Market Streets: it was there that Al Capone was arrested in 1929 while traveling through Philadelphia. Shawn Evans, "Historic Movie Theaters of Center City," *PhillyHistory Blog,* February 9, 2011.

[30] The Mastbaum was constructed after the 1928 acquisition of the Stanley Company by Warner Brothers, which may explain the somewhat expanded design palette compared to the previous three theaters.

Figure 23: Stanley Theatre at 19th and Market Streets built 1921, demolished 1973. Photo from the Glazer Theater Collection.


Figure 24: Earle Theatre at 11th and Market Streets, built 1924, demolished 1953. Photo from the Glazer Theater Collection.

Figure 25: The Erlanger Theatre at 21st and Market Streets, built 1927, demolished 1978. Photo from the Glazer Theater Collection.

Figure 26: The Mastbaum Theatre at 20th and Market Streets built 1929, demolished 1958, was the largest of the four at 4700 seats. Photo from the Glazer Theater Collection.

Figure 27: Side elevation of the Earle Theatre along 11th Street. Photo from the Glazer Theater Collection.

Even with the largest and grandest of these theaters, Hoffman-Henon practiced economy, reserving more expensive materials for the dominant elevations: the Mastbaum Theatre's upper reaches appear to have been executed in stucco with limestone quoins. On the other hand, even the most modest of theaters had terracotta ornament. For instance, the side elevation of the Earle Theatre (Figure 27), which stepped down from the primary façade and largely traded limestone for brick, featured significant ornament. Above the limestone first floor's exit doors, a large colonnade motif, false doors, and medallions depicting artists at work filled what would otherwise be a blank space.

By the late 1920s, movie theater architecture was moving away from Neoclassical finishes and toward styles including the Egyptian Revival, Spanish or Moorish Revival, and the styles later called Art Deco. While Hoffman-Henon had developed a consistent stylistic palette for most of their Stanley Company commissions, the firm proved capable of evolving with the times, completing commissions for Warner Brothers including the Egyptian Theatre in Bala Cynwyd (ca. 1926, Figure 28) in the Egyptian Revival style, and the Enright Theatre (1928, Figure 29) in Pittsburgh, PA, with Art Deco influences.[31]

[31] Gerry Senker, "The Long Sad Story of the Bala (nee Egyptian) Theater – 1927-2014," *This is Lower Merion and Narberth,* January 16, 2022. In his December 1928 essay in *Motion Picture News,* Paul J. Henon called the Enright

Figure 28: Egyptian Theatre, opened in 1927, survives as the Bala Theatre. Photo from the Glazer Theater Collection.

Figure 29: Enright Theatre, built 1928 in Pittsburgh, PA. Pittsburgh City Photographer Collection, Historic Pittsburgh.

In 1926-27, it appears that Hoffman-Henon may have collaborated with the firm of Magaziner, Eberhard & Harris on the Ogontz Theatre (6033-35 Ogontz Ave, demolished 1985).[32] The resulting theater (Figure 30) was designed in the "Spanish Style" which Hoffman-Henon would later employ on the Circle Theatre and Warner (Embassy)

("the East Liberty Theatre") as "one of the most technically correct theatres in the world" given the large seating capacity and excellent acoustics despite a low balcony and ceiling.

[32] Irvin R. Glazer attributed the Ogontz Theatre to Magaziner, et al, and the drawings in the Glazer collection are attributed to that firm. The *Builders' Guide* announcement, however, mentions both firms and one photo in the Glazer collection includes an annotation of "Hoffman-Henon Architects."

Theatre. The Ogontz was not commissioned by a major theater chain, but the Stanley Company acquired it within two weeks of its opening.[33]

Figure 30: A photo of the Ogontz Theatre under construction in 1926. Photo from Irvin R. Glazer Theater Collection.

After the 1928 acquisition of the Stanley Company by Warner Brothers, Hoffman-Henon continued to design buildings for the conglomerate, having worked with both organizations previously. In 1929, the Mastbaum Theatre was completed as a tribute to Jules Mastbaum and perhaps put an exclamation point on the architectural legacy of the late theater magnate's collaborations with Hoffman-Henon.

Three Stanley/Warner theaters opened that year which were more responsive to developing trends in theater architecture. The Circle Theatre (subject of this nomination) and the Warner Theatre (on the Atlantic City boardwalk, sometimes called the Embassy Theatre) embraced the Spanish Revival style and included the most flamboyant interiors in the firm's catalog. Both theaters were characterized as "atmospheric" theaters, a trend which emerged in the late 1920s, largely driven by the work of theater architect John Eberson.[34] Another commission by Warner/Stanley which opened in 1929, the State Theatre at 52nd and Chestnut Streets, was executed in an elaborate Art Deco style by noted architect Ralph Bencker.[35]

[33] "Gets Ogontz Theatre," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* Feb. 22, 1927, p 13.

[34] Thomas J. Mathieson, "'Projects Everything but the Picture,' The Brenograph and the Brenkert Light Projection Company," (2017 booklet), Embassy Theatre Foundation, Fort Wayne, IN, 54. Additional information about Eberson and atmospheric theaters appears later in this nomination.

[35] "The Modernistic Design of The State in Philadelphia," *Exhibitors Herald-World,* Oct. 26, 1929, p 132-133.

Warner Theatre Section

ATLANTIC CITY DAILY PRESS

Warner Theatre Section

ATLANTIC CITY, N. J., WEDNESDAY, JUNE 19, 1929

Beautiful Warner Theatre Distinctive Addition To City's Amusement Life

New Warner Rich In Art And Beauty

Interior Resembles Colorful Courtyard in Spanish Atmosphere

COST $3,000,000; WILL SEAT 5000

Equipped With Most Modern Type of Disappearing Orchestra Pit

WILL OPEN TODAY

Magnificence Unparalleled in History of American Theatre Construction

HARRY M. WARNER PRESIDENT WARNER BROS.

MAJOR ALBERT WARNER TREASURER WARNER BROS.

JACK L. WARNER DIRECTOR GENERAL OF PRODUCTION

WARNER

Two Parades Mark Opening

Notables Will Attend Impressive Dedicatory Ceremonies at Warner Today

Rapid Rise Of Warners Is Romantic

Careers of Three Warner Brothers Read Like Magic Fairy Tale

TRIO NOW CONTROL LARGE MOVIE CHAIN

First To Discover Wonderful Possibilities in Sound Pictures

WERE EARLY PIONEERS

Initiative, Foresight and Perseverance Main Factors for Success

Opening Show Is Attractive

'On With the Show' Here as Feature Film for Warner Inaugural

Figure 31, Left: Warner Theaters promoted the construction of their new theater on the boardwalk with a whole section of the Atlantic City Daily Press. *Atlantic City Daily Press,* June 19, 1929, page 17.

Figure 32, Right: The theater as it appeared in 1978. Library of Congress, John Margolies Roadside America photograph archive.

By the end of the decade, several forces, including the Great Depression and the advent of talking pictures, which did not require musical accompaniment, once again led to a slowdown of theater construction, and the Hoffman-Henon name was retired by the mid-1930s.[36]

Most of Hoffman-Henon's movie theaters do not survive or are significantly altered, but several are historically designated at various levels, including the Bala Theatre (163 Bala Ave, Bala Cynwyd, PA), listed as a Class 1 structure in the Township of Lower Merion and the Stanley Theatre (237 Seventh St, Pittsburgh, PA), designated a City Landmark.[37] The Warner/Embassy Theatre (Atlantic City, NJ boardwalk) is considered eligible for listing on the National Register.[38] The Bolivar Theatre in Quito, Ecuador, one of Hoffman-Henon's last theaters, built in 1933, was recently renovated with the assistance of the World Monuments fund.[39]

Within Philadelphia, the Logan Theatre (4732-42 N Broad St), the Boyd Theatre (1910 Chestnut St) and the Locust Theatre (228-36 S 52nd St, alterations by Hoffman-Henon in 1922) are listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

Compared with Hoffman-Henon's theaters, the firm's work for Catholic churches, schools, and institutions has survived better. Several of these structures have been

[36] *Philadelphia Architects and Buildings* suggests Paul Henon retired the name in 1930, but materials about the Bolivar Theatre in Quito, Ecuador, built 1933 mention "Hoffman and Henon."

[37] Township of Lower Merion Historic Resource Inventory; "Properties that are Designated as City Landmarks or are Located in City Designated Historic Districts," Historic Review Commission of Pittsburgh.

[38] Atlantic City Master Plan, 2008.

[39] "Bolivar Theater," World Monuments Fund, accessed November 2024.

historically designated, including the St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi Catholic School (625-33 Christian St) and Ascension of Our Lord Roman Catholic Church (701-65 E Westmoreland St), both on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, and the St. Joseph's House for Homeless Industrious Boys (1511 and 1515-27 Allegheny Ave) on the National Register of Historic Places.

Every one of the five nominations which resulted in the above properties being listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places cited the work of Hoffman-Henon and the firm's stature as satisfying Criterion E for designation.[40]

Criterion C: The Neighborhood Movie Theater

One estimate puts the number of movie theaters built in Philadelphia since the 1890s at 468, with the majority constructed between 1910 and 1930. Of those, 396 were located outside of Center City, on commercial corridors in residential neighborhoods.[41] Of those hundreds, HiddenCity estimated that 135 survived in some form in 2013, and fewer survive today.[42] Some have become commercial spaces and others have become worship spaces for religious communities. While many of these former movie theaters are significantly altered, some of these retain a great deal of historical integrity and architectural interest.

The Circle Theatre is a significant surviving example of a neighborhood theater from a period when many were built, contributing to the built environment of Philadelphia. These theaters took a variety of forms in response to economic conditions and aesthetic trends. The Circle Theatres siting, scale, and style reflect these historic forces.

American Theater Architecture

Theater architecture in the United States, from colonial times through the early 20th century was dominated by monumental forms, often drawing inspiration from Greek and Roman forms through the works of Palladio. Two early examples in Philadelphia, the early Chestnut Street Theatre (built 1791-1794 and portrayed in Birch's Views of Philadelphia) and the Walnut Street Theatre (remodeled by John Haviland 1828-29), both feature Palladian principles of symmetry and employ elements such as columns, arched windows, a pediment, and a cornice with dentils.[43]

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[40] The nomination form for "Ascension of Our Lord Church" does not have Criterion E checked, but the Statement of Significance includes a heading citing Criterion E and a summary of the career of Paul Henon Jr., who worked on the church as a partner in both Henon & Boyle and Hoffman-Henon. The National Register nomination for the St. Joseph's House for Homeless Industrious Boys cites Criterion C and describes Henon's work with Catholic organizations as "outstanding credentials" for his commission for the orphanage.

[41] Shawn Evans, "Neighborhood Movie Theaters," *PhillyHistory Blog,* June 7, 2011.

[42] Rachel Hildebrandt, "How to Spot a Theater," *HiddenCity,* May 14, 2013.

[43] For further exploration of neoclassical styles in theater design, see Oscar Beisert, "Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places: 2117-23 Germantown Ave," designated November 8, 2024, page 16.

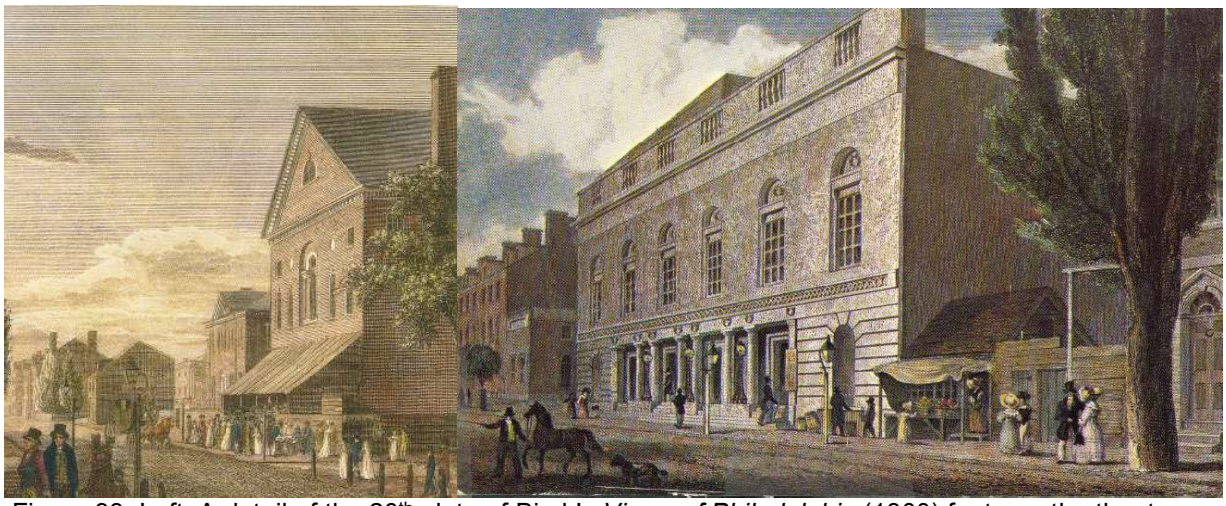

Figure 33, Left: A detail of the 20th plate of Birch's *Views of Philadelphia* (1800) features the theater on the north side of the 600 block of Chestnut Street.

Figure 34, Right: Walnut Street Theatre after its 1827-28 renovation by architect John Haviland. Image from the Glazer Theater Collection.

American architects continued to evoke classical forms throughout the 19th century with work often classified as “Federal,” “Greek Revival,” and even “Jeffersonian.” These styles proved especially popular for public buildings such as banks, houses of worship, government buildings, and theaters.

The architecture at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago brought renewed interest in classical architecture. The exposition included displays of the Beaux-Arts style—which added later Italian influences to classical forms and placed an emphasis on grandiose ornament—sitting along a less flamboyant strain of architecture, which came to be known as the Classical Revival— which was often characterized by prominent columns in front of a central entrance.

When the first purpose-built movie theaters were constructed, their designers drew freely from the variety of these various neoclassical styles, often combining them with other emerging architectural palettes, including the Commercial style.

In his 1928 essay in *Motion Picture News,* Paul J. Henon, Jr., presented a brief history of the movie theater to that date:

> I recall the first of the theatres erected for the sole purpose of exhibiting movies. These buildings with their few hundred seats, a small organ and no orchestra or surrounding program, were the fore-runners of a series of increasingly important enterprises… It became necessary to add orchestra pits to the movie theatre. Full stages became part of their equipment. Larger capacity naturally became a necessity. The movies were here to stay and they began to make an impression on the legitimate stage. Then the temple of the cinema began to rival in beauty, solidity, utility and capacity the home of drama, the scene of the light opera and musical comedy, the setting of the extravaganza and the home of the melodrama. The elaborate stages presented specialties, vaudeville acts and other attractions to surround the motion picture and lay the foundation for what has since become a distinct and distinctive type of entertainment…*While these developments were taking place in what might be termed the theatrical centers, smaller theatres were being*

> *erected in the neighborhoods and the smaller towns. These, on a reduced scale, emulated the palatial cinemas of the metropolises in so far as luxury and completeness of detail are concerned.*[44]

This philosophy can be seen in Henon's firm's design for the Logan Theatre, perhaps the largest of Philadelphia's surviving neighborhood movie theaters, which drew heavily on their design for the Stanley Theatre at 19th and Market (Figure 23), adapting the elements of the façade for a different siting.[45]

However, the designers of many neighborhood theaters took a different approach, adopting more flamboyant styles than those of the larger movie palaces of Center City. In his nomination of the Locust Theatre (228-36 S 52nd Street) to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, Noah Yoder notes that many of these theaters were designed to stand out from their surroundings, with some of the most ornate located in Philadelphia's poorest neighborhoods.[46] Yoder identifies the Beaux-Arts, the Moorish Revival and the Egyptian Revival as architectural modes which read as especially lavish, but even more restrained neoclassical designs drew visual attention along commercial corridors in largely residential areas.

The producers of architectural ornament were only too happy to provide theater architects with options. The 1930 catalogue of the Conkling-Armstrong Terra Cotta Company features images of several theaters in Philadelphia and beyond, including the Stanley Theatre at 19th and Market Streets and the Ambassador Theatre (see below, Figure 38), contending that terracotta was uniquely able to achieve the aesthetic aims of theaters:

> Theatres demand an architectural treatment that expresses their purpose. Color, modeling and attractive ornament are distinctly an asset and a necessity. Architectural Terra Cotta with all its decorative color and surface treatment possibilities has become the universal material for the facing and trimming of theatres.[47]

Trends in Neighborhood Theater Design

Looking at some of the surviving neighborhood theaters built in the 1910s and 1920s offers a sense of how evolving business strategies and taste affected the designs of these buildings.

Throughout this period there are some broadly common traits—neighborhood theaters were generally built out of masonry and faced with brick, limestone, and architectural terracotta. They broadly employ neoclassical proportions built around symmetry and often tripartite organization. While these buildings are sited directly on the sidewalk, many utilize minor variations in plane to suggest façades which protrude or recede at the center, drawing focus to the marquee and the entrance. Pilasters, piers, or columns

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[44] Paul J. Henon, Jr., "The Architect's Service to the Industry," *Motion Picture News,* December 29, 1928, Section 2, (no pages), emphasis added.

[45] "Philadelphia," *Motion Picture News,* February 9, 1924, page 662.

[46] Noah Yoder, "Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places: 228-36 S 52nd St, Locust Theatre," designated November 9, 2018, page 18.

[47] *Conkling-Armstrong Terra Cotta Company, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania,* (catalogue), 1930, no page numbers. Accessed via Archive.org

generally break up the elevation and arches are a recurring element, especially around windows or doors, as are prominent cornices which vary from relatively simple to elaborate.

Yet within these two decades, there are three general subtypes which emerged, chronologically but gradually.

Figure 35, Left: The Locust Theatre (228-36 S 52nd St, built 1913), 1970. Glazer Theater Collection.

Figure 36, Right: The Jefferson Theatre (2217-2223 North 29th Street, built 1913), circa 1950. Glazer Theater Collection.

Many of the earliest Philadelphia neighborhood theaters occupied relatively small footprints both in terms of street frontage and depth into the block. The Jefferson Theatre (2217-2223 North 29th Street), the Locust Theatre, and the Apollo Theatre (1237-45 North 52nd Street, later the Capital Theater) were all built during the theater boom of 1913-14 and while they lean into different styles (Beaux Arts, Moorish Revival) they are all really constrained to a modest scale. The Ambassador Theatre (5538-50 Baltimore Avenue) opened 1921 with a slightly longer street frontage but shallower depth.

Figure 37, Left: The Apollo Theatre (1237-45 North 52nd St, built 1915), 1971. Glazer Theater Collection.

Figure 38, Right: The Ambassador Theatre (5538-50 Baltimore Ave, built 1921), 1953. Glazer Theater Collection

The Diamond Theatre (2117-23 Germantown Avenue, built 1922-23), the Logan Theatre (4732-42 N Broad Street, built 1924), and the Colney Theatre (5619-33 North 5th Street, built 1924-25) represent a second subtype in movie theater trends.[48] These theaters incorporated commercial spaces as part of their designs. This was not a new concept—the Music Hall which opened on the site of the Circle Theatre in 1892 incorporated a rental storefront—but seems to have become more common practice especially as movie theaters swelled to larger sizes.

Figure 39, Left: The Diamond Theatre (2117-23 Germantown Ave, built 1922-23), 1945. Glazer Theater Collection.

Figure 40, Right: The Colney Theatre (5619-33 North 5th St, built 1924-25), 1945. Glazer Theater Collection.

Figure 41: The Logan Theatre (4732-42 N Broad Street, built 1924), shortly after it opened. Glazer Theater Collection.

[48] The Diamond Theatre was recently added to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Minutes of the 747th Meeting of the Philadelphia Historical Commission, November 8, 2024, page 15.

The third subtype began to express itself sometime around 1926, when the stylistic palette available to theater architects dramatically expanded. Flamboyant styles like the Egyptian Revival, the Spanish Style (Ogontz Theatre and Circle Theatre), and the "Modernistic" or "French" style (much of which would later be called Art Deco) displaced more traditional neoclassical schools. The Sedgewick (7133-43 Germantown Avenue, built 1928) is probably the most elaborate surviving theatre of this latter style. While its primary elevation is organized with an essentially symmetrical, tripartite façade with prominent arches, the detailing offers a significant departure. Theaters such the State Theatre (52nd and Chestnut Streets, built 1929) pushed this disjuncture further, and the Art Deco style would remain a popular palette for movie theaters when the Great Depression waned.

In *Motion Picture News,* Paul Henon commented on this new style:

> What we might term the Theatre Modernistic is a new type which is now with us, as can be seen by the new Boyd Theatre in Philadelphia. It is the newest thing, and is very refreshing in contrast with the heavier style of theatre which we find in many cities in this country. The modernistic style brings a much lighter touch, a gayer note harking back to the French again — the originators of the best taste in theatres and theatrical life.
>
> The modernistic style is here to stay in theatres and theatrical life. It sparkles with life and color.[49]

Figure 42: The Sedgwick Theatre (7133-43 Germantown Ave, built 1928), around the time of its opening. Glazer Theater Collection.

The Admiral Theatre (2806 North 5th Street) doesn't neatly fit into these categories. Built in 1928, it does not appear to have included exterior commercial spaces. While the design features arches and columns, it eschews the architectural terracotta of most of

[49] Henon, "The Architect's Service to the Industry," *Motion Picture News,* Dec. 29, 1928, n.p.

its contemporaries. Irvin R. Glazer considered the Admiral to be designed in the Italian Renaissance style. Glazer notes that, like the Circle Theatre, the Admiral was designed to be an "atmospheric" theater, though the effects seem to have been limited to a sky-like ceiling, without the elaborate architecture of other theaters.[50]

Figure 43: The Admiral Theatre (2806 North 5th St, built 1928), around the time of its opening. Glazer Theater Collection.

The Circle Theatre

The Circle Theatre belongs firmly to the last phase of this building period. An existing theater, The Empire, previously sat on the site, and while parts of that building dated to 1892, it was a functioning building with a commercial space and interior amenities including a banquet hall.[51] The Stanley Company, however, had a vision for a bigger, newer theater on the site.

In 1925, Jules Mastbaum announced that the Stanley Company would build a new theater on the site and had purchased the Empire as well as nine other buildings for a total sum of "more than half a million dollars." Mastbaum reported that demolition was imminent, and that plans were in place for "ornate architecture" and an interior to be "furnished elaborately."[52] That summer, *Motion Picture News* reported that regular collaborators Sablosky & McGuirk would develop the theater for operation under a long-term lease by the Stanley Company.[53]

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[50] Glazer, *A-Z,* 55.

[51] See **Appendix B** for more information about the Empire and the earlier history of the site.

[52] "Stanley Company to Build Big Picture Theatre in Frankford," *Moving Picture World,* January 10, 1925, page 189. This announcement describes the footprint of the proposed theater as occupying 106 feet along Frankford Ave, extending the 245 feet to Griscom St, and fronting 25 feet of Overington St. The Overington St frontage was likely the building addressed as 1539 Overington St (see Figure 38) which was connected to the Empire Theatre. It is unclear if that building was ever incorporated into the property which is the subject of this nomination.

[53] "Philadelphia," *Motion Picture News,* Jul-Aug 1925, page 964. John McGuirk's name is sometimes spelled (as in this article) as "McGurk."

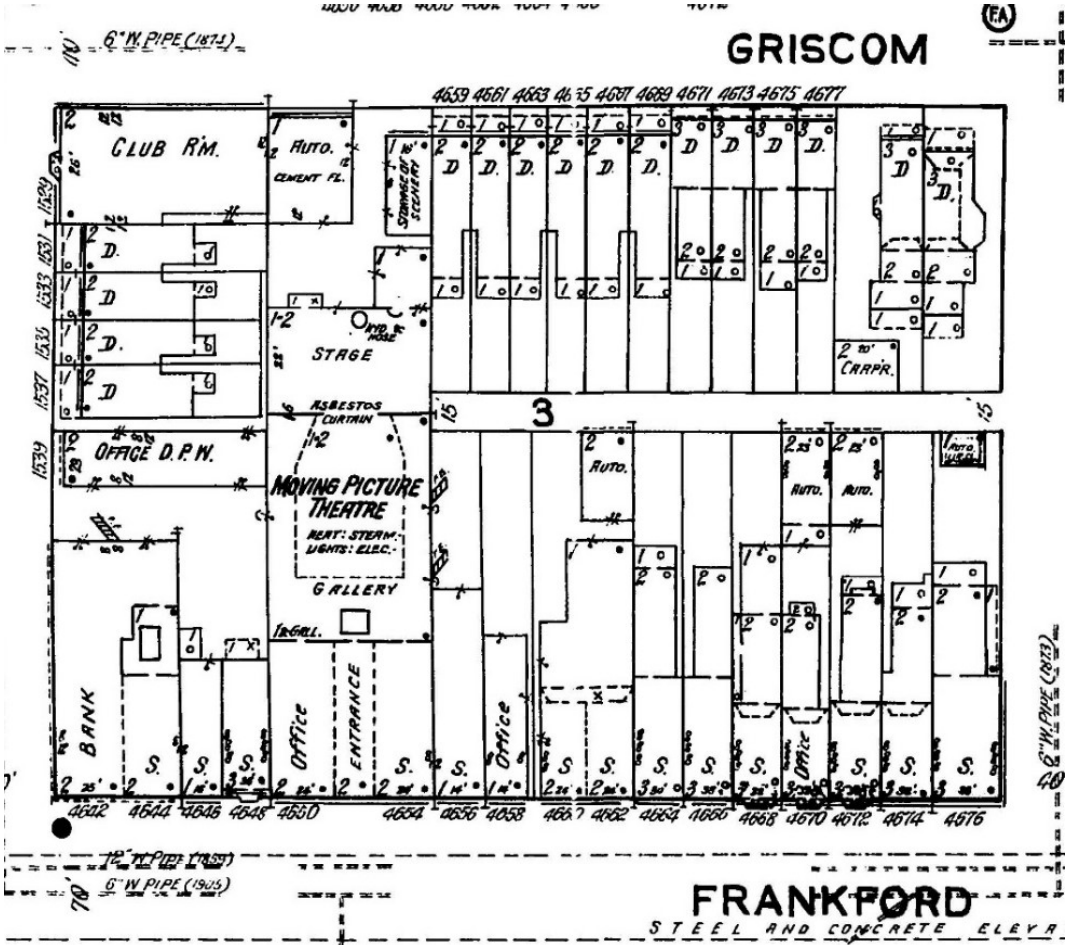

Figure 44: The Empire Theatre shown in the Sanborn Fire Insurance map of 1920. Volume 11, Plate 1057.

The development then stalled, and the theater continued operation as the Northwood Theatre from 1925 until it finally closed in 1928.[54]

In January 1928, three years after the initial announcement of what would be the Circle Theatre, Hoffman-Henon solicited bids from builders, before revising their plans in April and again accepting bids in August.[55] In September, it was announced that the contract had been awarded to Day & Zimmerman.[56] In response to this flurry of activity, a brief story ran in *The Film Daily*:

> What is expected to cause a building race between Stanley and William Freihofer is contained in announcement that Stanley is going through with building of the Circle, 4652 Frankford Ave., a territory long controlled by Freihofer. The ten year agreement of the two companies under which they jointly operate theatres on

[54] "Janitor for motion picture theatre" (Advertisement), *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* April 9, 1925, page 32.
[55] *Builders' Guide,* Vol XLIII, no. 2, Jan. 11, 1928, p 21; *Builders' Guide,* Vol XLIII, no. 17, Apr. 25, 1928, p 259; *Builders' Guide,* Vol XLIII, no. 34, Aug. 22, 1928, p. 531.
[56] *Builders' Guide,* Vol XLIII, no. 38, Sep. 19, 1928, p 597.

52nd St., is to expire in Sept. 1929. Meanwhile, Freihofer is planning construction of a number of theaters in retaliation for the Stanley move.[57]

It is possible that the truce with William Freihofer delayed the plans announced in 1925. But it was another announcement on September 13, 1928—that Warner Brothers had acquired the Stanley Company—which seems to have gotten the development back in motion. The Circle Theatre finally opened on August 30, 1929, seemingly violating the pact between the Stanley Company and William Freihofer by two days.[58]

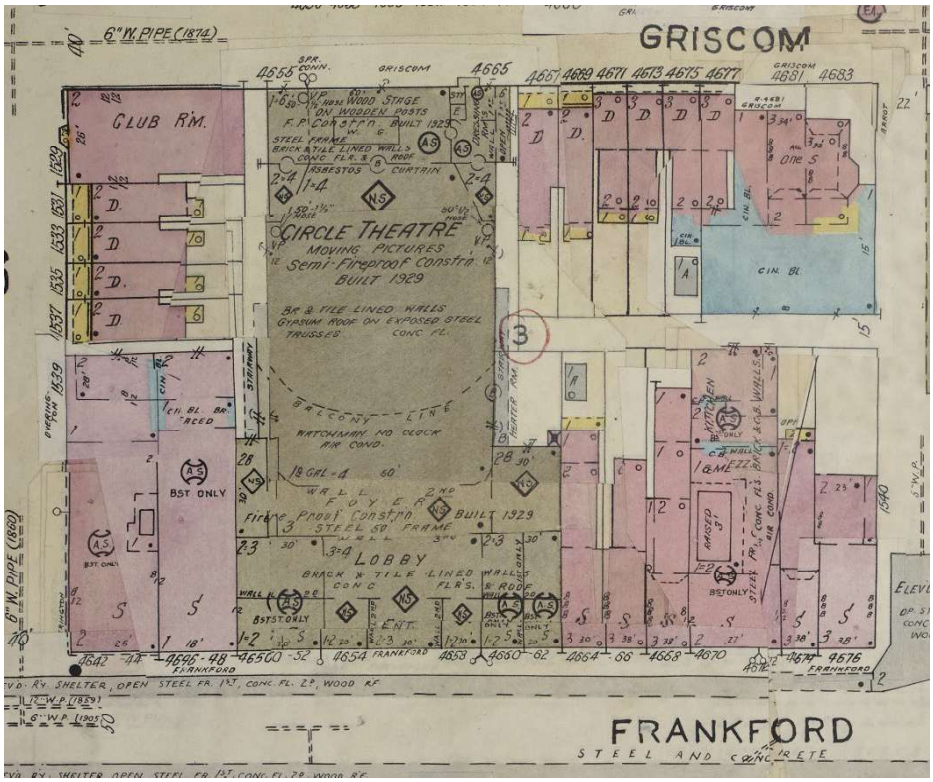

Figure 45: Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Philadelphia*, 1920, updated to 1951, Vol. 11, Plate 1057. Library of Congress.

Architectural Styles of the Theater Entrance and Storefront Wings

The delay in construction meant that whatever architectural flourishes Jules Mastbaum had envisioned for the site, theater trends had shifted drastically into the Art Deco and similar styles. The resulting design was in the "Spanish Style" executed in brick from the Atlas White Brick Co. (Atlantic City) and the Cox-Janeway Company (Philadelphia) and architectural terracotta from the Federal Seaboard Terra Cotta Corporation (factories throughout New Jersey).[59]

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[57] "Building Race Expected by Philadelphia Firms," *The Film Daily,* Vol. XLV, no. 67, September 18, 1928, page 2. For more on William Freihofer's investments in movie theaters, see Noah Yoder's nomination of the Locust Theatre to the PRHP.

[58] "Theatre Dedication," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* August 30, 1929, p. 15.

[59] "Atlas White Brick Co." (Advertisement), *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* Feb. 28, 1929, p. 6 (Mastbaum Special Edition). The same company provided bricks for the Warner (Embassy) Theatre and the Mastbaum Theatre; "All Face Brick" (Advertisement), *Motion Picture News,* Dec. 29, 1928 (Hoffman-Henon special issue), p 65; "Federal

Theatre (Circle Theatre), 4648-58 Frankford avenue, Philadelphia. Architects, Hoffman-Henon, Finance Building, Philadelphia. Owners, Mercantile & Theatre Corporation, Inc., Joseph Bernhard, Thirteenth and Chestnut streets, Philadelphia. Lessees, The Stanley Company, Eleventh and Market streets, Philadelphia. Seating capacity 3,500, brick, granite, concrete, steel, 1 story, balcony and basement, 243x121 feet, gypsum and slag roof, cement and pine floors, roof ventilators, metal weather strip, membrane waterproofing, architectural terra cotta, cast stone, steam heat, electric light, metal lath, tile work, marble and terrazzo work, rolled steel sash and skylights, kalamein and hollow metal doors, bond, iron stairs, ornamental iron work, bronze work, caulking, metal toilet partitions, plumbing, sprinkler system. Contract awarded Day & Zimmerman, 112 North Broad street, Philadelphia.

Service Building, Ridge avenue and Pechin street, Philadelphia. Architect, P. S. Tyre, 114 South Fifteenth street, Philadelphia.

Figure 46: A notice in the *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* in September, 1928, lists some of the materials used in the construction of the Circle Theatre, including architectural terracotta, cast stone, and marble. Vol xliii no 38 Sept. 19, 1928, p 597.

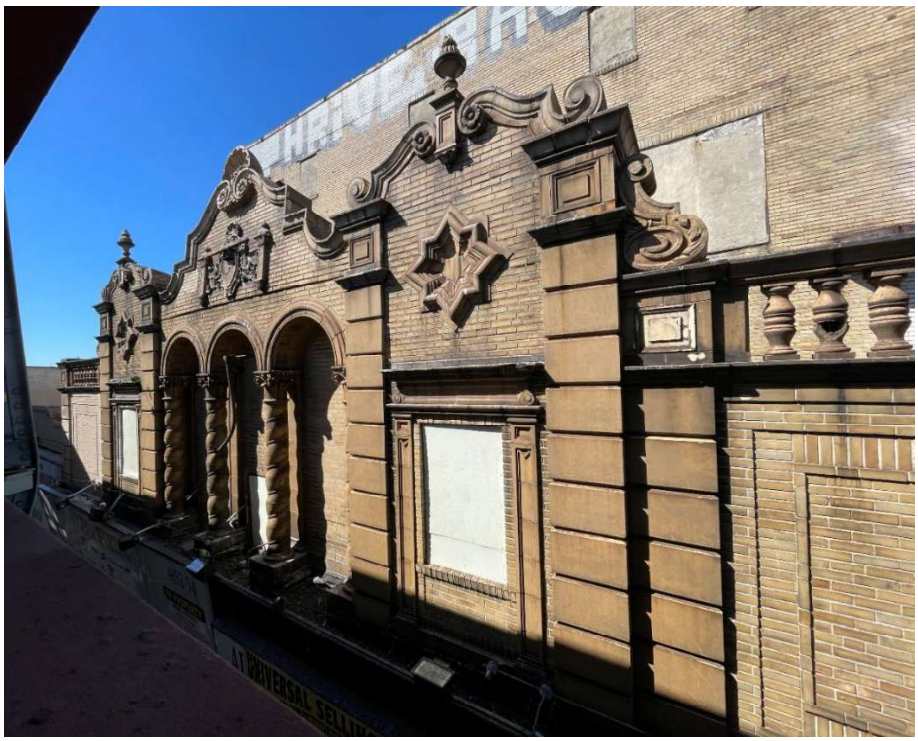

Figure 47: The ornamented façade, viewed from the Eastbound platform of the Market-Frankford Line at Arrott Transportation Center.

Hoffman-Henon complemented the Spanish Style of the façade above the theater entrance with more subtle designs for the storefront wings. These wings might be broadly considered as embodying the Commercial Style, but the detailing of each in architectural terracotta also reflects the influence of what Paul Henon understood to be the Modernistic Style, and which might be considered Art Deco today. While the wings are differentiated in their specifics, they are similar in scale and create a balanced, though not strictly symmetrical, façade.

The southern wing, seen to the left when facing the theater entrance from Frankford Avenue, initially featured a central entrance and may have been intended to serve as a

Seabord Terra Cotta Company" (Advertisement), *Motion Picture News,* Dec. 1928, p 96. A merger of the New Jersey Terra Cotta Company, the Federal Terra Cotta Company, and the South Amboy Terra Cotta Company.

single commercial space, but it has accommodated two stores since the mid-twentieth century

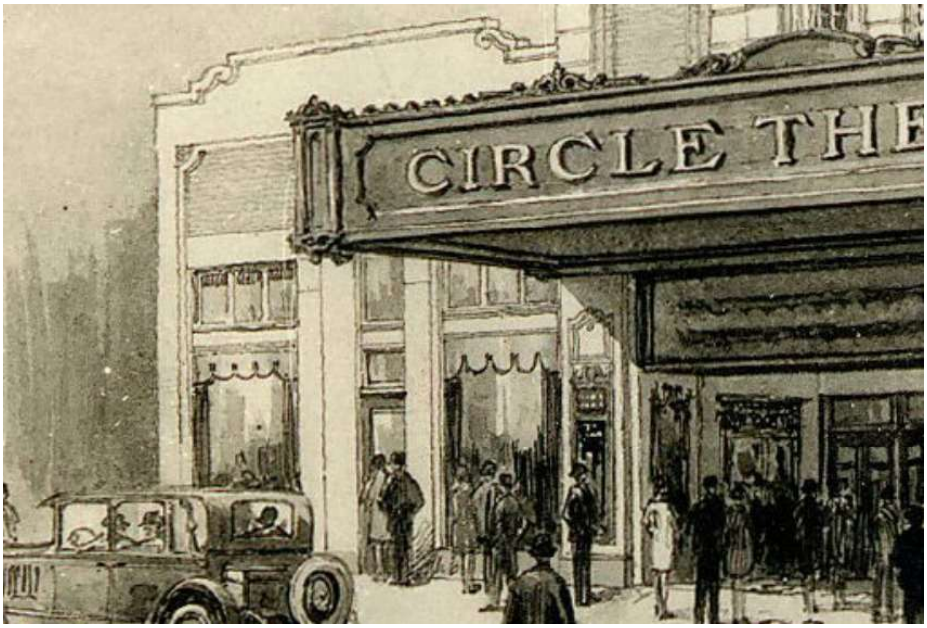

Figure 48: Detail of rendering showing the left (south) storefront wing. Irvin R. Glazer Theater Collection.

Figure 49, Left: The left (south) commercial wing, 1929. The recessed area above the storefront appears unfinished and the storefronts are vacant. Photo posted to CinemaTreasures.com by user elmorovivo.

Figure 50, Right: Detail of a photo from the same photo set. Irvin R. Glazer Theater Collection.

Figure 51: Detail of a 1952 photo shows Barr's Jewelers in one of the south storefronts. The relief panel above the transom windows appears to have been finished with architectural terracotta and the storefronts have been reconfigured. Parker and Mullikin Collection, Free Library of Philadelphia Print and Picture Collection.

Whereas the southern wing incorporates curved elements, the northern wing, to the right when facing the theater entrance, is characterized by right angles. Yet this wing is also elegant, and originally featured transoms of glass prism tiles, which let in diffused daylight.[60] By 1952, the left storefront in this wing had undergone a reconfiguration (Figure 55) and by 1978 (if not before) the right storefront was also reconfigured (Figure 56). It is unclear whether any trace of the original transoms remains.

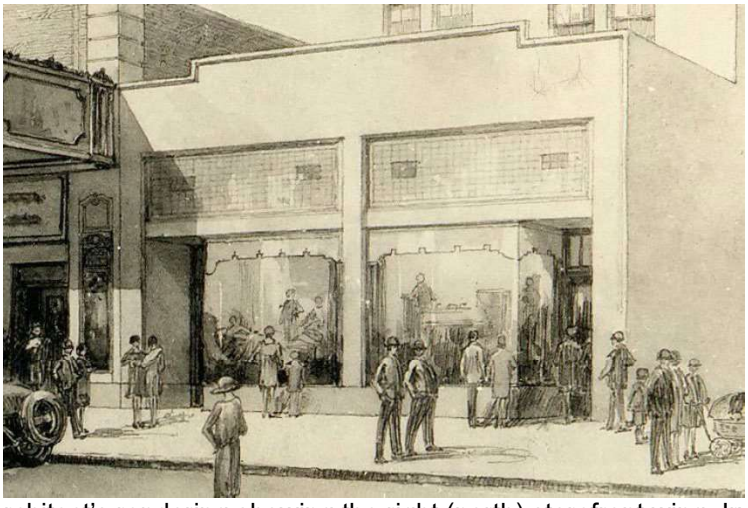

Figure 52: Detail of architect's rendering showing the right (north) storefront wing. Irvin R. Glazer Theater Collection.

[60] For more information about this kind of transom, see Chad Randl, "Historic Glass, Number 1: Repair and Reproduction of Prismatic Glass Transoms," *Preservation Tech Notes,* National Park Service, September 2001.

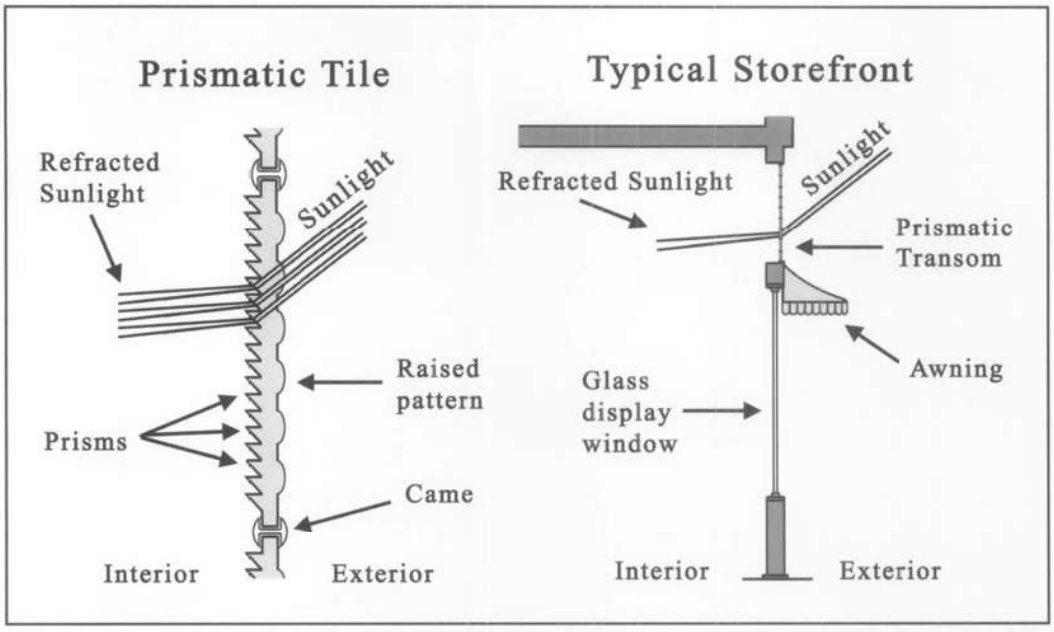

Figure 53: Diagram showing how prismatic glass (sometimes called prism glass or prism tiles) works to diffuse natural light into a storefront interior. Image by Chad Randl, in National Park Service Tech Notes (see a full citation in note 60).

Figure 54, Left: The right (north) storefront, seen in 1929. Detail of a photo from the Irvin R. Glazer Theater Collection.

Figure 55, Right: A 1952 photo shows both storefronts somewhat reconfigured. Parker and Mullikin Collection, Free Library of Philadelphia Print and Picture Collection.

Figure 56: The northern storefronts seen in 1978. Departments of Records Collection, Philadelphia City Archives.

The design of the exterior of the Circle Theatre beyond the primary elevation reflects the functional architectural typical of movie theaters of the period. It is distinctive for its large scale in contrast to the residential buildings along Griscom St, and Hoffman-Henon were a firm accomplished in working within practical parameters. However, the details of its construction, including openings for windows and doors and vestiges of fire stairs, reflect historical code requirements and functional constraints rather than architectural style, and are not character defining to the building.

The Atmospheric Theater

In his 1928 essay, written around the time Hoffman-Henon was designing the Circle Theatre, Paul Henon offered a simple answer as to why theater entrepreneurs and architects were embracing the more dramatic architectural styles: competition. “[M]ore and more is it becoming apparent,” he wrote, “that the success of a new theatre is importantly connected with that theatre's contrast, especially in its atmosphere, to the other cinemas in its locality.”[61]

When it came to creating atmosphere, theater architect John Eberson was the leading voice (Figure 57).[62] Whatever Eberson could do in the Midwest, however, others could

[61] Henon, “The Architect’s Service to the Industry,” *Motion Picture News,* Dec. 29, 1928, n.p.
[62] John Eberson, “Architectural Tradition Is Defied in Houston Theatre Design,” *Exhibitors Herald,* May 26, 1923, page vii.

do elsewhere. Perhaps Warner Brothers asked Hoffman-Henon to emulate Eberson or perhaps the architects simply saw Eberson's work as just another architectural style to be emulated. In any case, the Warner Theatre (Embassy), located on the Atlantic City boardwalk, and the Circle Theatre strongly resemble the atmospheric theaters springing up all over the United States.

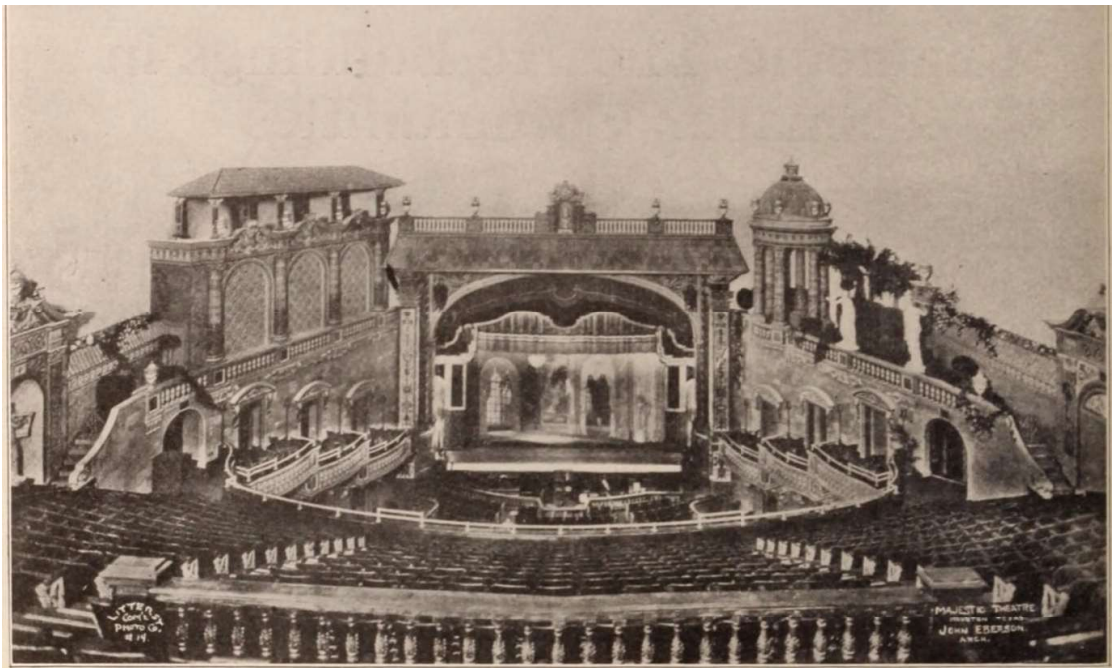

Figure 57: The Majestic Theatre (Houston, TX), built 1923, was one of John Eberson's first atmospheric theaters. "Defies Ancient Theatre Building Tradition," *Exhibitors Herald,* May 26, 1923, page vi.

Figure 58: Illustration of one side of the Warner/Embassy Theatre auditorium, published as part of the Hoffman-Henon feature in *Motion Picture News.*

"Last night a large portion of the population of Frankford jammed the doors of the new Circle Theatre," reported *The Philadelphia Inquirer* on August 31st, 1929, "not mainly to see 'The Argyle Case,' the headliner of the evening's entertainment, but first of all to view the latest example of movie house interior decoration. And they weren't disappointed."[63]

In his book *Philadelphia Theaters, A-Z* Irvin R. Glazer describes the atmosphere created within the Circle Theatre:

> The auditorium, in Spanish design, is Philadelphia's only completely atmospheric theatre. The ceiling is painted dark blue with an especially designed electric star lighting scheme which follows the constellations. Moving cloud effects supplied by Brenograph machines complete the effect of an open air courtyard. The side wall scenic effects project five feet from the main side walls, each wall being of different design and detail. Sides of buildings, illuminated stained glass windows, imported Italian classic statues, plants, flowers and birds add to the realism. [64]

A feature in *Exhibitors Herald-World* described it thus:

> The Circle is Spanish in design and artists of high repute in Spain and Italy worked in conjunction with the architects, the Hoffman-Henon Company of Philadelphia, to adapt Spanish creative art to the needs of the modern motion picture theatre. The design is atmospheric, with the auditorium representing a formal garden, with vases, clipped trees and trailing vines surmounting the marble balustrade, while overhead a sky of midnight blue across which fleecy clouds float from the sides of the proscenium arch. Interesting features of the side wall treatment are Spanish stained glass windows and small niches containing classic statues selected in Italy, with indirect lighting from the rear.
>
> While the two sides of the auditorium are in perfect harmony, monotony is avoided by the dissimilarity of the decorations on either side, according to the usual practice in atmospheric design. The utmost care has been taken to adhere to the Spanish atmosphere throughout, and with this in mind, M. Gibelli, who designed the decorations of the theatre, selected art material for its decoration in Europe.
>
> The lighting fixtures of wrought iron, made in both the United States and Spain, were designed by a Spanish artist. The iron work throughout the theatre is hand-hammered and hand-wrought, and each piece is a fine example of the ironworker's craft. Unusual attention was paid to artistic tiling, and as will be noted in one of the photographs, the fountains of tiling with Venetian mirrors are of most attractive and unusual design. Some of the most effective pieces were contributed by Spain, and in some instances a period of nine months was required to complete the more elaborate designs. In the effort to adhere to the Spanish idea, hand-made furniture, designed by the architects especially for this theatre, with coverings in Spanish effects, has been provided. Hangings and draperies of imported Spanish damask are everywhere in evidence.[65]

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[63] "New Circle Theatre Formally Opened," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* Aug 31, 1929, p 16.

[64] Irvin R. Glazer, *Philadelphia Theatres, A-Z,* Greenwood Press, 1986, page 86. The cloud machine was likely a "Brenograph Jr." produced by the Brenkert Light Projection Company, which produced a variety of "magic lantern" projectors for use in theaters, both for theatrical productions and film screenings. Released in December 1927, the "Jr." was a smaller projector which could be deployed in a variety of settings, but which was primarily advertised for atmospheric projection on ceilings and walls. Mathieson, "'Projects Everything but the Picture," 54-56.

[65] "The Circle Theatre in Philadelphia, A New Warner House," *Exhibitors Herald-World,* Oct. 26, 1929, p 134-34.

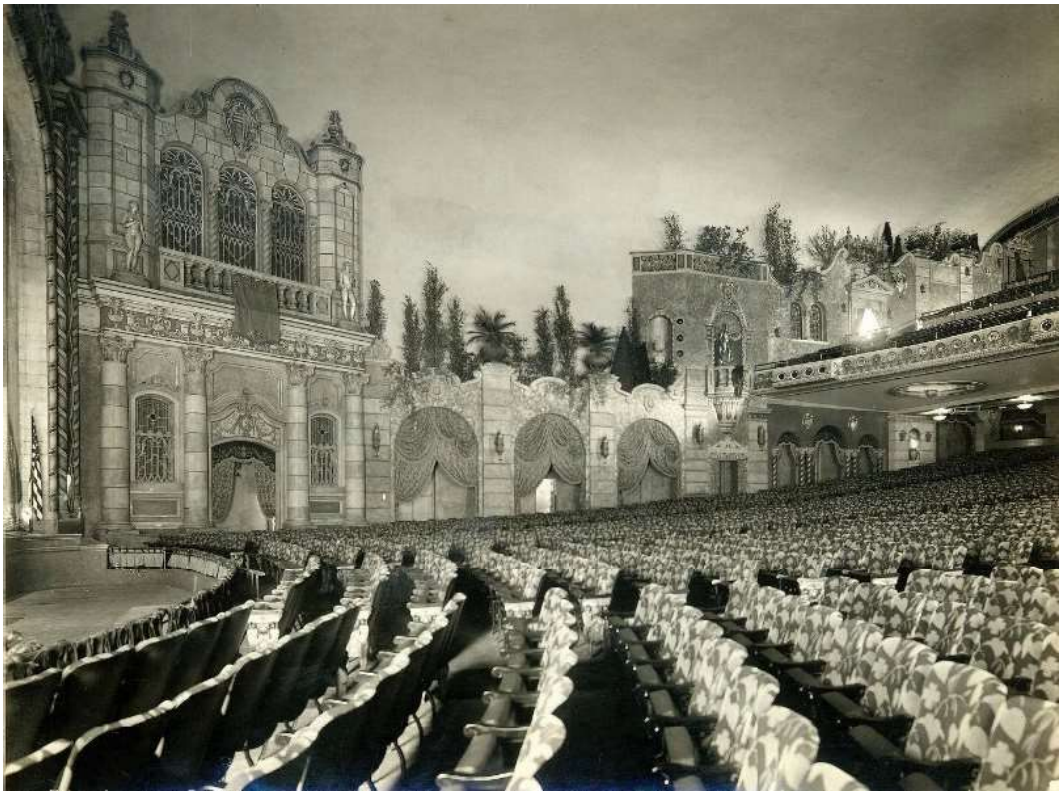

Figure 59: “Atmospheric” interior of the Circle Theatre. Photo from the Glazer Theater Collection.

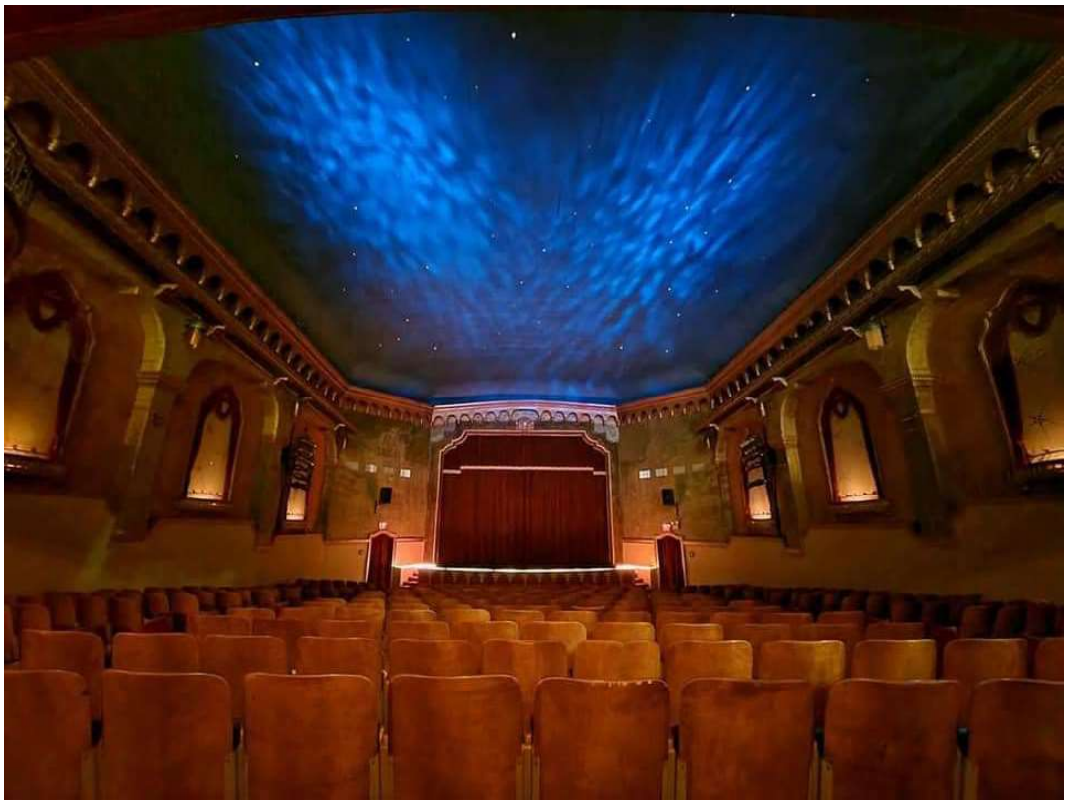

Figure 60:The Ramona Theatre in Frederick, Oklahoma, with the “sky” lit by a Brenograph machine. Image from Ramonatheatre.com

Changing Business

The Great Depression brought an end to the boom in movie theater construction and the following decades saw the movie theater business undergo a variety of transformations which rendered many of the "palaces" designed by Hoffman-Henon obsolete and which threatened the survival of Philadelphia's neighborhood theaters.

The theater holdings of Warner Brothers were spun off as the Stanley Warner corporation in 1953 to comply with antitrust legislation.[66] In coverage of the creation of Stanley Warner that March, the new president, Simon H. Fabian, highlighted the potential growth of formats such as widescreen and 3-D pictures, neither of which the Circle was equipped for. Fabian assured the press that the receipts for 1953 would surely outdo the previous year and that he did not anticipate any imminent reductions in personnel.[67] By November, however, it was announced that the Circle had been sold and would be converted for use as a five-and-dime.[68] The property, comprising five stores and the theater, sold for $567,500.[69] Movies continued to be shown through early December before the screen went dark.[70]

Figure 61: A 1943 advertisement touts the ease of using public transportation to get to a movie at the Circle or on of Stanley-Warner's two other theaters. "Showmen Emphasize Use of Local Bus, Car Routes," Motion Picture Herald, Apr. 3, 1943, p 46.

Though companies such as Stanley-Warner tried to stay up to date with the newest innovations in film projection—upgrading the projection lamps at the Logan Theatre in 1963—the model of the single-room, large scale theater was on its way out.[71] Whereas in the 1940s the average American went to one movie a week, by the 1950s and 1960s television was cutting into theatergoing. While the most luxurious theaters maintained their appeal by catering to the elite, neighborhood theaters had it harder and by the 1970s a common solution was to cut one big theater into smaller ones to offer a wider range of pictures.[72]

Philadelphia's Center City movie palaces were all demolished by 1978, and the neighborhood theaters which survived were mostly adapted to other uses. Many, including the Jefferson, the Diamond, the Logan, and the Admiral became churches. In addition to the Circle, theaters

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[66] "Boston to Hollywood". *Time*. May 21, 1956.
[67] "New Stanley Warner has 300 Units; Head Sees Gross Over Last Year," *Motion Picture Herald,* Mar. 7, 1953, p 13.
[68] "Philadelphia," *The Independent Film Journal,* Nov. 14, 1953, p 54.
[69] "10-Story Heymann Building Sold," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* Dec. 13, 1953, p 55.
[70] "Stanley-Warner Neighborhood Theatres" (Advertisement), *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* Dec. 6, 1953, p 135.
[71] "Core-Lite Lamps Cut Costs In Stanley Warner's Logan," *The Exhibitor* May 8, 1963, Vol. 69, no. 19, page PE-10.
[72] "The Megaplex," *99 Percent Invisible*, March 15, 2021.

including the Apollo, the Ambassador, the Colney, and the Sedgwick were put to commercial purposes, often utilizing the auditoria as warehouse space. The Locust Theatre was converted to a stage theater in 1980, and more recently the lobby of the Sedgwick Theatre has been reopened as a stage theater.

In 2010, photographer Peter Woodall captured photos of what remained of the atmospheric interior of the Circle. Behind the masonry block store built into the auditorium, the front portion of the theater survived. The plaster and terracotta architectural façades glinted with efflorescence rather than theater lights, and the night sky of the ceiling—still blue!—was dotted with water damage rather than the lights of the Brenograph. A few curtains held on in archways leading to emergency exits, though at least one exit appeared to be filled with cement blocks.[73]

Figure 62: The interior of the Circle Theatre, photographed by Peter Woodall in 2010. See addition photos from Woodall's visit in **Appendix E**. *HiddenCity.*

[73] John Vidumsky, "Inside the Circle," *HiddenCity,* August 29, 2012.

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Vidumsky, John, "Inside the Circle," *HiddenCity,* August 29, 2012.

Acknowledgements

This nomination is indebted to other nominations of buildings to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, especially those written for the Diamond Theatre, the Boyd Theatre, and the Locust Theatre. In **Appendix G**, find a list of these and other nominations which pertain to movie theater history.

The author is further indebted to Peter Woodall and John Vidumsky for "Inside the Circle" published in *HiddenCity*, and Shawn Evans for his essays on notable movie theaters on the *PhillyHistory* blog.

Much of this research would have been impossible without access to the Irvin R. Glazer Theater Collection at the Athenaeum of Philadelphia and Mr. Glazer's books, *Philadelphia Theaters, A-Z: A Comprehensive, Descriptive Record of 813 Theatres Constructed since 1724* (1986) and *Philadelphia Theaters: A Pictorial Architectural History* (1994). The Glazer Theater Collection provided many of the images in this nomination and pointed me to many citations in the *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* (also maintained by the Athenaeum), without which another considerable share of this research would not exist.

The author was able to dive into the movie theater's industry periodicals of the 20th century through Lantern, the search portal for the Media History Digital Library, an open access initiative of the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research. Learn more and use the portal yourself at: https://lantern.mediahist.org/about

Resources which are often useful in visualizing change in Philadelphia were also supremely valuable: Map collections of the Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network, Penn State University, and the Free Library of Philadelphia and the Dallin Aerial Survey Company Collection at the Hagley Museum and Library.

The author also thanks the Historical Society of Frankford for conversations and resources about the history of the neighborhood. Readers who would like to expand the stories in **Appendix B** would be well-served by a visit to the Society.

Finally, while only rarely cited in image credits and footnotes within this nomination, the user-generated website CinemaTreasures.org was often an essential resource which filled in gaps in the evidence and assisted efforts to connect references in the *Builders' Guide* to theaters built outside of the city of Philadelphia. The author thanks the many passionate users of the site and the administrators who maintain it.

Table of Appendices

Appendix A: Historic Context: The Stanley Company of America and Warner Brothers Pictures, Incorporated

The Stanley Company had its origins in the real estate investments of brothers Jules and Stanley Mastbaum, who began acquiring early movie theaters, around 1910, under the name of the Motion Picture Company of America, later changed to the Central Market Street Company. In 1914, the Mastbaums commissioned a new theatre at 16th and Market Streets, designed by William H. Hoffman, originally named the Stanley (later the Stanton).[74] In 1918, Stanley Mastbaum, the younger of the brothers, died suddenly.[75]

Jules reincorporated their company in 1919, by then known as the Stanley Company, as the Stanley Company of America, and announced recent acquisitions as well as significant plans for expansion. After a couple of mergers, the new corporation was operating twenty-two movie theaters in Philadelphia, three local theaters exclusively hosting vaudeville acts, and a handful of theaters spread between New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. The merger included two existing Stanley ventures—The Stanley Booking Company and The Central Market Street Company—as well as Sablosky & McGuirk Enterprises (vaudeville theater operators), and Alexander R. Boyd (another theater operator who would go on to commission the Boyd Theatre, built 1928, from Hoffman-Henon). As he announced this merger, Jules Mastbaum also shared the news that the Capitol Theatre at 724 Market Street, designed by Paul J. Henon, Jr., was nearing completion, that ground had been broken for a new theater, to be named the Stanley, at 19th and Market Streets, and that new theaters were being planned for both 52nd and Chestnut Streets and the Logan neighborhood.[76]

While commissioning several more significant new theaters in the early 1920s, the Stanley Company continued to acquire competitors' theaters. In August of 1922, Stanley bought the Aldine Theatre, an independent film theater opened only one year prior, from the Felt brothers. According to *Motion Picture World*, this acquisition established "absolute control of the first run situation in the Philadelphia territory." The article went on to suggest that the Stanley Company was in a good position to both expand its geographic reach and hold its strong position. As to how the company was able to achieve this, the author shared a frank assessment: "Incidentally, the most powerful weapon of the Stanley company is the Jules Mastbaum Real Estate Corporation, through which most of the theatre deals have been consummated."[77]

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[74] Irvin R. Glazer, *Philadelphia Theaters, A Pictorial Architectural History,* Athenaeum of Philadelphia and Dover Press, 1994, pages 17, 86.

[75] "Jules E. Mastbaum, Phila. Jewish Leader and Philanthropist, Dies at 54," *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, December 9, 1926, pages 3-4.

[76] "Theatre Firms Here Merge with Stanley," *Evening Public Ledger,* Philadelphia, PA, June 3, 1919, page 11; John Andrew Gallery, "Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places: 1910 Chestnut St, Boyd Theatre," designated August 9, 2008. McGuirk is also spelled "McGurk" in some records. The Stanley Theatre at 19th and Market Sts and the Logan Theatre are discussed below. It appears that the planned theater at 52nd and Chestnut Sts was the State Theatre, designed by Ralph Bencker, which opened at the same time as the Circle Theatre in 1929.

[77] "Stanley Gets Strangle Hold on First-Run Situation: Aldine Acquisition Said to Have Resulted in Settlement with Fox," *Moving Picture World*, August 19, 1922, 561.

In May 1926, the Stanley Company completed another series of mergers, consolidating 225 more theaters and becoming the largest theater chain in the world.[78] Jules Mastbaum did not live to enjoy this superlative very long, passing away in December 1926 at the age of 54. In the years before his death, Jules Mastbaum had been involved with the planning of the Sesquicentennial celebration in Philadelphia, purchasing 98 works of the sculptor Auguste Rodin for display at the exposition, and he included a bequest in his will to create a museum to display these works permanently.[79]

Before the brothers Mastbaum had bought their first theater in Philadelphia, other brothers began a career in the movies in Youngstown, Ohio. The two family companies took different routes, but their paths crossed permanently in 1928, when the Warner Brothers company bought out the Stanley Company.

In 1903, less than two decades after the first moving picture had been produced, two young Polish-American men Albert and Sam Warner (nineteen and sixteen years of age, respectively) bought a movie projector and a print of the newly-released film *The Great Train Robbery* and began screening it in communities throughout Ohio and Pennsylvania. The endeavor was successful enough that the brothers, with two other brothers, Harry and Jack, secured a store in New Castle, Pennsylvania and opened it as a theater in the winter of 1903-04.[80]

By the end of 1904, the brothers dove into the torrid waters of film distribution just as the film industry was developing rigid monopolies. Independent operators such as the Warners had to find opportunities at the margins. After founding and selling several small distribution companies, the Warners pivoted again in 1912 and began to produce their own movies. A turbulent decade followed, during which the brothers made modest profits with cheaply made films which rarely earned plaudits. The brothers learned the business and acquired prime property in Hollywood just in time to ride the boom which followed World War I.[81]

While the Mastbaums were putting their real estate expertise expanding an empire of brick and mortar, the Warners found themselves making decent films without a consistent market, squeezed out by the other movie companies. In 1925, facing looming expiration of many of their distribution contracts and running out of money, Warner Brothers brought in $2,000,000 through a stock offering and bought out Vitagraph, one of the more established motion picture companies. Vitagraph was hemorrhaging money and Warner Brothers was able to leverage their new cash infusion to pay off their new acquisition's debts and convince its owners to sell. In one risky move, the Warners had acquired a distribution network and convinced lenders and investors that they were the real deal.[82]

In 1926, Warner Brothers took another huge risk, investing heavily in movies with sound when the rest of the industry was skeptical of the emerging technology. In 1927, Warner

[78] "Jules E. Mastbaum, Phila. Jewish Leader and Philanthropist, Dies at 54," *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, page 4.
[79] "J. E. Mastbaum, Movie Magnate, Dies in Hospital," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* December 8, 1926, pages 1, 12.
[80] Fitzhugh Green, *The Film Finds its Tongue,* 1929, pages 17-21.
[81] Green, 24-31.
[82] Green, 33-37.

Brothers debuted *The Jazz Singer,* starring Al Jolson, which was a smash hit (and heavily featured blackface). On the eve of the film's premiere (October 6, 1927), Sam Warner died at the age of forty.[83]

Less than a year later, Warner Brothers announced the acquisition of a controlling share of the Stanley Company and its 250 theaters.[84] The merger also included First National, a production company of which Stanley had owned one third and of which Warner Brothers quickly purchased the remainder. When the dust had settled, the company announced that all the merging organizations would retain their personnel.[85]

Consolidation continued and, by 1943, Warner owned three movie theaters within a block and a half along Frankford Ave (Figure 61). As described above, breakup of the Warner company in 1953 to comply with antitrust legislation had immediate consequences for the Circle Theatre. Fragments of Stanley-Warner continued to operate movie theaters for several decades, but the vast majority of Philadelphia's movie theaters were no longer operating by the 1980s.

[83] Green, 44-94.

[84] "Warners-Stanley Merge," *Exhibitors' Daily Review,* Vol. 24, no. 61, Sep. 13, 1928.

[85] "Warner—First Nat'l.—Stanley Merger Announced," *Motion Picture News,* Oct 13, 1928, p 1141.

Appendix B: Historic Context: Subject Property Before the Circle Theatre

*Historic maps of the subject property can be found in **Appendix C**.*

The block bounded by Frankford Ave (Main St), Overington St (Allen St), Griscom St (Franklin St), and Arrott St was a rare sight in Frankford in 1849—a largely undeveloped site (Figure 63, detail Figure 69). By 1861, industrial buildings had sprung up, including the Thomas Castor Coach and Carriage Works and the Hayes & Ellis Steam Planing operation (Figure 70). The lumber company, now officially Hayes, Ellis, & White, occupied most of the block by 1876 (Figure 72) and was succeeded by Ellwood Allen by 1887 (Figure 73).

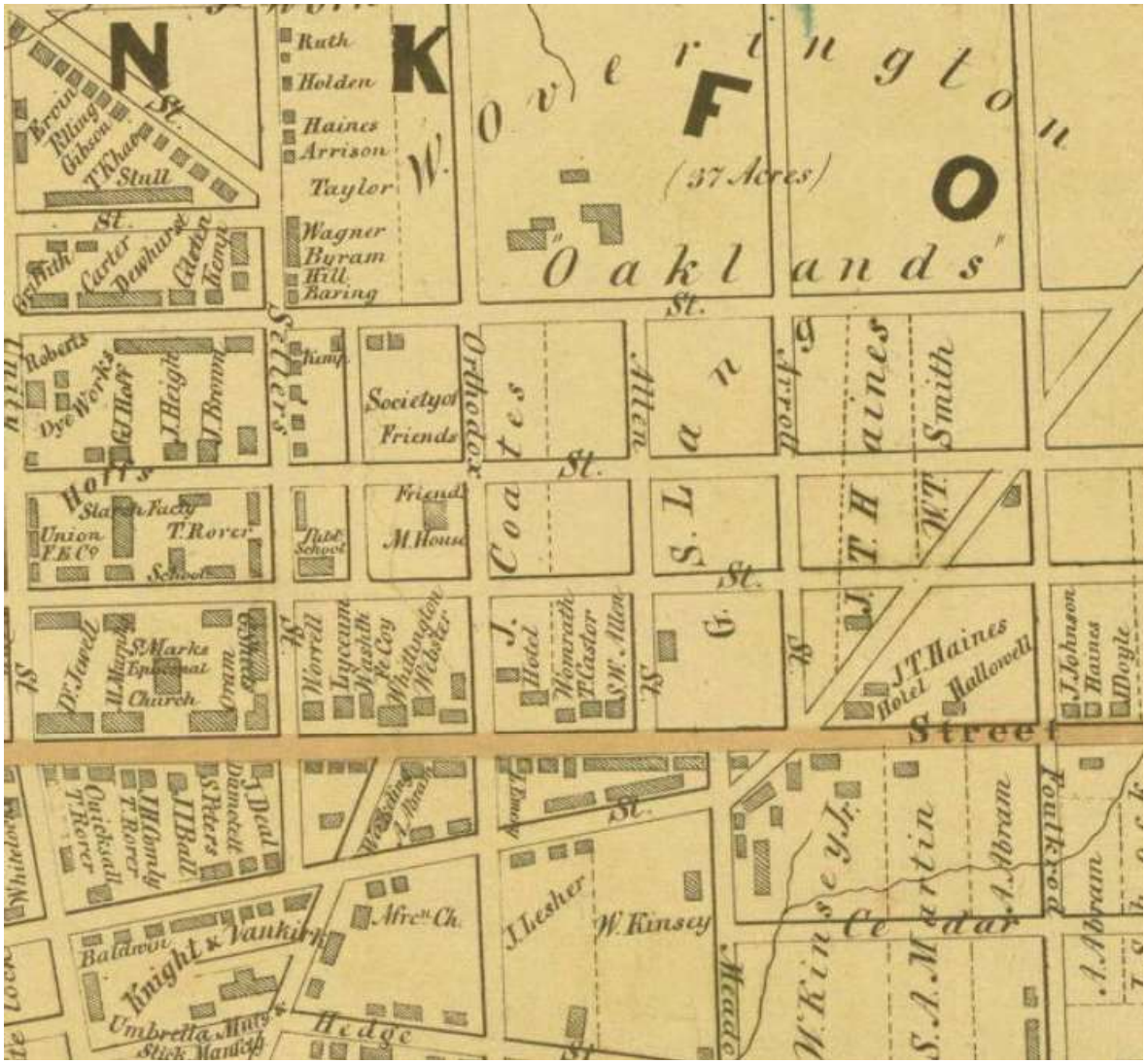
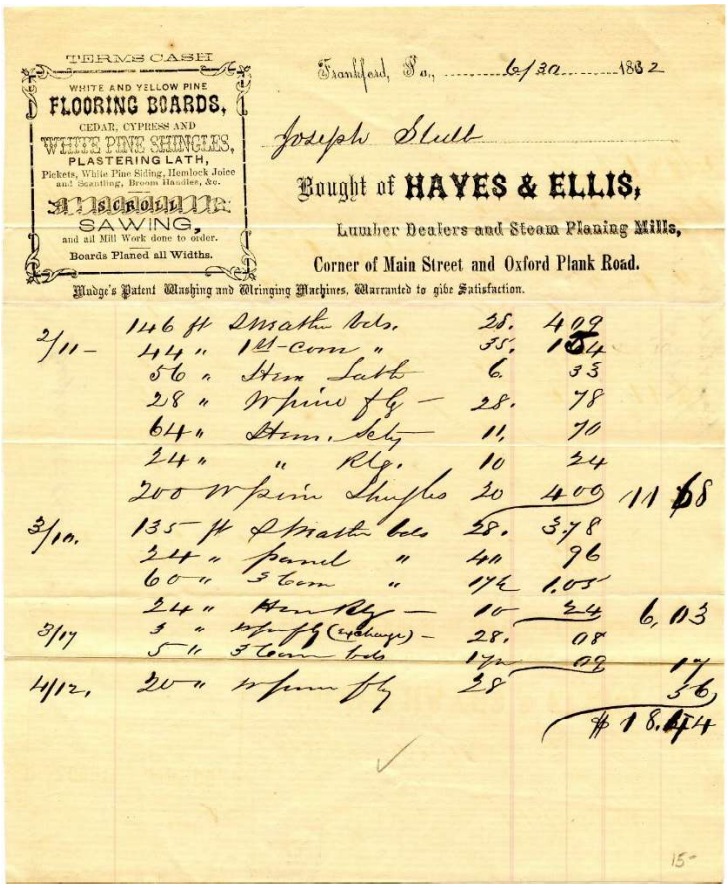


Figure 63: James C. Sidney, *Map of the Township of Oxford, Boroughs of Frankford and Bridesburg*, 1849. PhilaGeoHistory.org.


TERMS CASH

WHITE AND YELLOW PINE
FLOORING BOARDS,
CEDAR, CYPRESS AND
WHITE PINE SHINGLES,
PLASTERING LATH,
Pickets, White Pine Siding, Hemlock Joice and Scantling, Broom Handles, &c.
SCROLL
SAWING,
and all Mill Work done to order.
Boards Planed all Widths.

Mudge's Patent Washing and Wringing Machines, Warranted to give Satisfaction.

Frankford, Pa., 6/30 1862

Joseph Slutt

Bought of HAYES & ELLIS,

Lumber Dealers and Steam Planing Mills,

Corner of Main Street and Oxford Plank Road.

Figure 64: 1862 bill from Hayes & Ellis. Printed bills collection, 1727-1937, Winterthur Library.

As early as 1885, one of the buildings owned by Ellwood Allen began to be used as a skating rink.[86] By 1890, that same building was known as Garfield Hall and was the site of political gatherings, union rallies, and musical performances.[87]

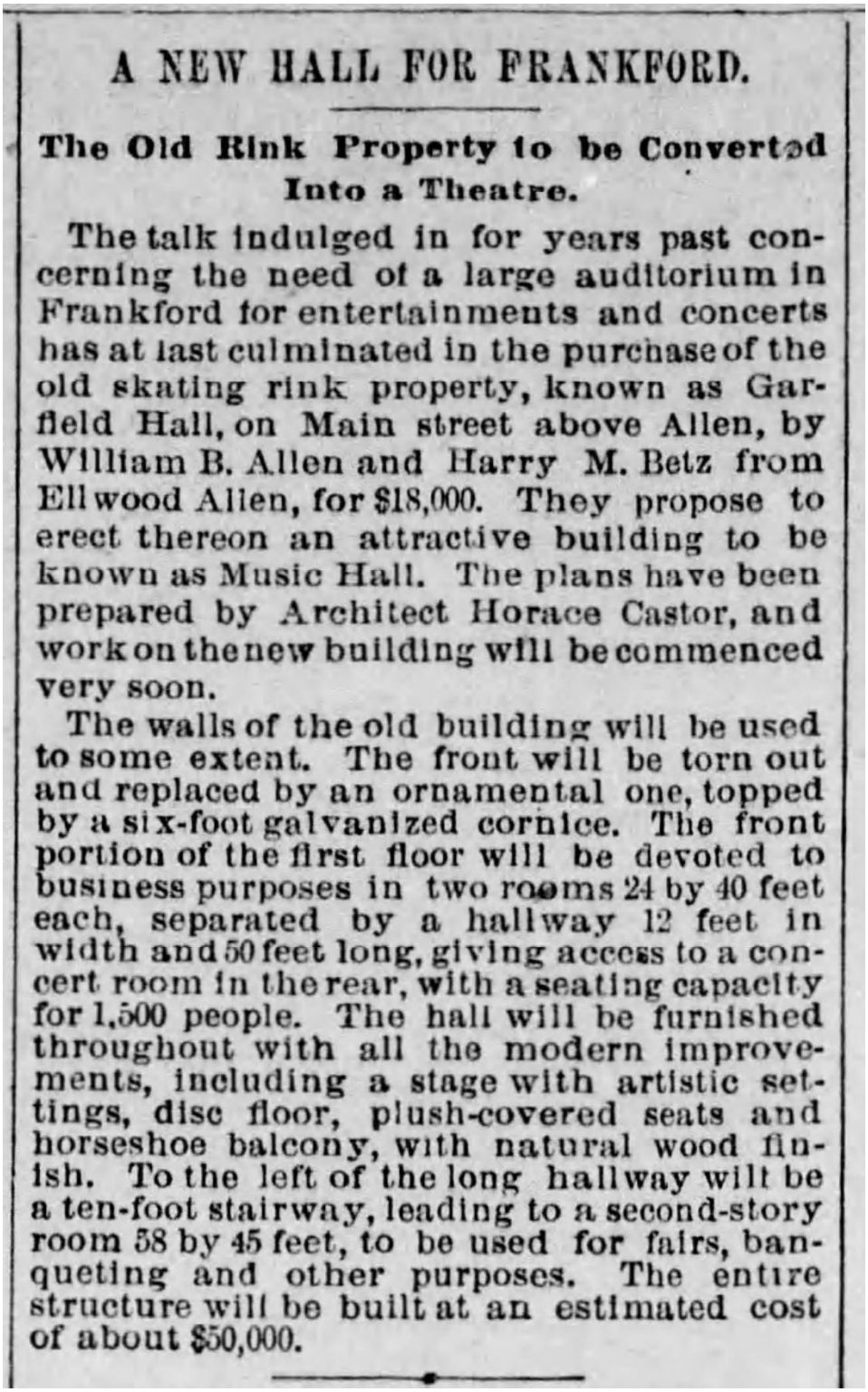
In 1892, William B. Allen, son of Ellwood Allen, and Harry M. Betz purchased the building from the elder Allen, with the aim of renovating it into a music hall which would seat 1,500 (Figure 65), at the cost of $50,000. The building would incorporate rooms for commercial use as well as for society meetings and banquets.[88] They commissioned the design, which would feature walls “two inches thicker than the law requires” and an elaborate front façade topped with a cast iron cornice and featuring a central harp motif, from architect Horace W. Castor, the twenty-two-year-old grandson of Thomas Castor, later a principal in the firm Stearns & Castor.[89]

[86] “Rink Managers Unit in Fighting the License Bill,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* May 9, 1885, p 2. Articles published in 1896 describe this earlier building as purpose-built for a skating rink, e.g. “Music Hall Burned,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Jul. 29, 1896, page 1.

[87] “Up in Frankford,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* Jun. 20, 1890, p 5; “The Colored Man in Politics,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* Sep. 26, 1890, p 3; “Strikers Sing and Declaim,” *The Philadelphia Times,* Jan. 18, 1900, p 5.

[88] “Architect Notes,” *Builder’s Guide,* Feb. 24, 1892, Vol., no. 8, p. i. ; “Architect Notes,” *Builder’s Guide,* May 4, 1892, Vol. VII, no. 18, p. i; “Stables for the New Omnibus Company,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* Feb. 26, 1892, p 7.

[89] Sandra L. Tatman, “Castor, Horace William (1870 - 1966)”, *Philadelphia Architects and Buildings,* The Athenaeum of Philadelphia; “Real Estate,” *The Philadelphia Times,* Apr. 1, 1892, p 2.



A NEW HALL FOR FRANKFORD.

The Old Rink Property to be Converted Into a Theatre.

The talk indulged in for years past concerning the need of a large auditorium in Frankford for entertainments and concerts has at last culminated in the purchase of the old skating rink property, known as Garfield Hall, on Main street above Allen, by William B. Allen and Harry M. Betz from Ellwood Allen, for $18,000. They propose to erect thereon an attractive building to be known as Music Hall. The plans have been prepared by Architect Horace Castor, and work on the new building will be commenced very soon.

The walls of the old building will be used to some extent. The front will be torn out and replaced by an ornamental one, topped by a six-foot galvanized cornice. The front portion of the first floor will be devoted to business purposes in two rooms 24 by 40 feet each, separated by a hallway 12 feet in width and 50 feet long, giving access to a concert room in the rear, with a seating capacity for 1,500 people. The hall will be furnished throughout with all the modern improvements, including a stage with artistic settings, disc floor, plush-covered seats and horseshoe balcony, with natural wood finish. To the left of the long hallway will be a ten-foot stairway, leading to a second-story room 58 by 45 feet, to be used for fairs, banqueting and other purposes. The entire structure will be built at an estimated cost of about $50,000.

Figure 65: Announcement of the new Music Hall, designed by Horace Castor. *The Philadelphia Times*, Feb. 25, 1892, page 6.

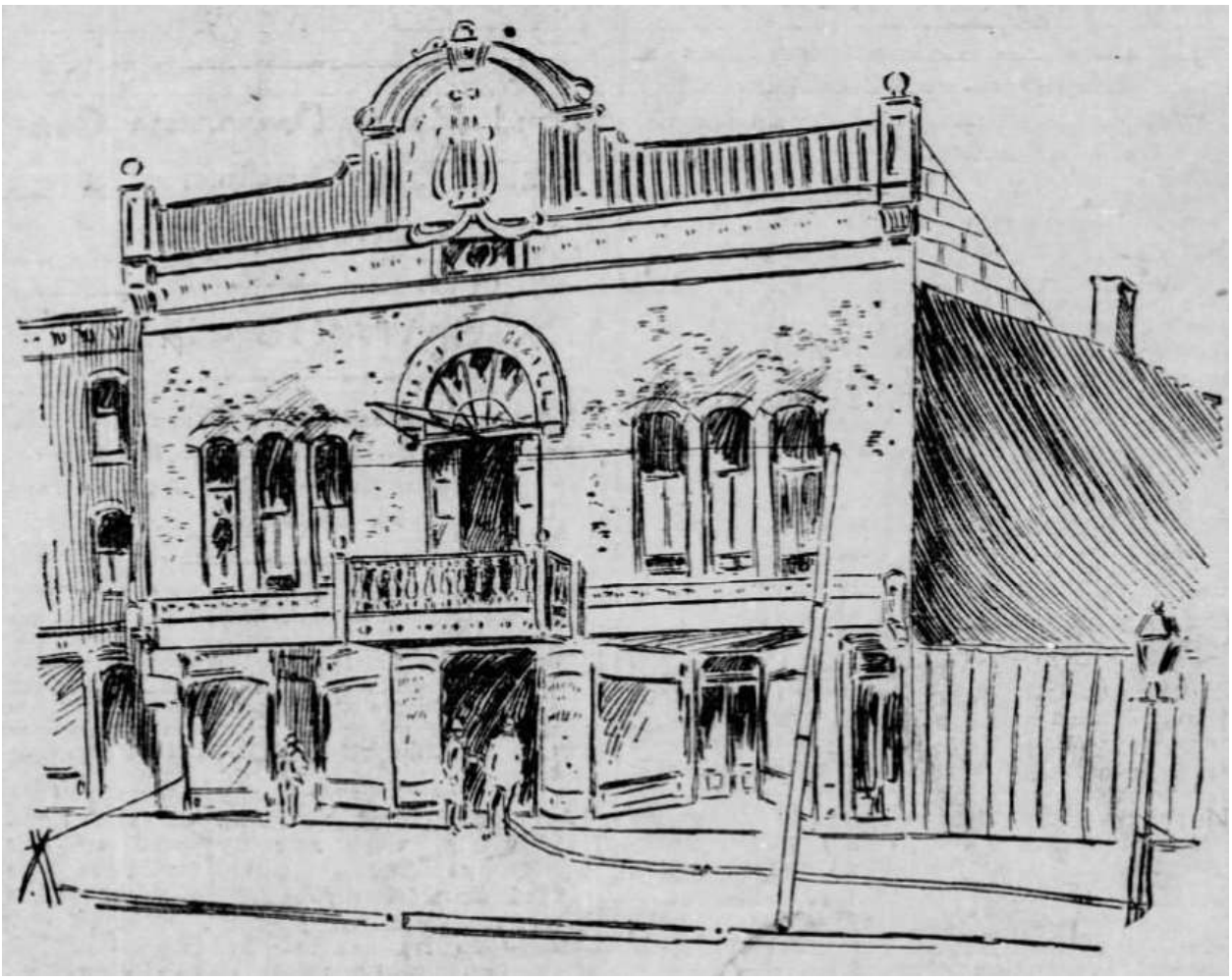


Figure 66: Newspaper illustration of the front facade, which survived the fire of 1896. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Jul. 29, 1896, page 1.

A 1895 project to add accommodations for visiting performers got the Music Hall's proprietors in hot water with the Bureau of Building Inspections. [90]

An 1896 fire gutted the building and nearly spread to the adjacent "Castor wagon works," but the front façade survived (Figure 66). The building had recently undergone renovations and the fire was attributed to trespassers.[91] Plans were swiftly announced for Stearns Castor to oversee rebuilding the hall, though construction bids were not solicited until nearly a year later.[92] The rebuilt hall did not reopen until November 1898, and even then the renovation was incomplete: *The Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that

[90] "The Latest News in Real Estate," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* Sep. 18, 1895, p 3.
[91] "Music Hall Burned," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Jul. 29, 1896, page 1.
[92] "Architect Notes," *Builders' Guide*, Sep. 2, 1896, Vol. XI, no. 36, p 715; "Architect Notes," *Builders' Guide*, Aug 4, 1897, Vol. XII, no. 31, p 493.

"the decorators will go to work later on."[93] A year later, William B. Allen secured permission for a balcony in the theater, with side and front emergency exits.[94]

From 1898 to 1900, some portion of the Music Hall, perhaps the banquet hall, was the venue for a novel new sport: basketball. The Frankford A.C. team called the Music Hall home, their game results first published in *The Philadelphia Times* on March 9, 1898, months before the first professional game of basketball was played nearby in Kensington between the Trenton Nationals and the Hancock Athletic Association.[95] In an era when non-standard equipment was common and gave home teams an advantage, some local teams found the Music Hall's "slippery floor."[96]

On February 18, 1901, the Hall reopened as the Empire Theatre with vaudeville performances and later also showed movies.[97] This new start for the building may have involved interior alterations, but it appears that the front façade remained much the same as it did in 1892 (Figure 67.). In addition to the theater, the building had a 60-foot by 60-foot room for cigars and pool, operated by a concessioner.[98]

Figure 67: Empire Theatre, 1912 (see ads for "Orpheum—Elite Vaudeville" show, Friday-Saturday, November 8-9); Hallowell Photograph Collection #G16, Historical Society of Frankford.

[93] "Real Estate News," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* Nov. 24, 1898, page 10.
[94] "Building and Real Estate Notes," *Builders' Guide,* Oct 25. 1899, Vol. XIV, no. 43, p 684; "Real Estate News," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* Oct. 20, 1899, p 12.
[95] "Frankford's Severe Drubbing," *The Philadelphia Times,* Mar. 9, 1898, page 9; "Opening Game of Basket Ball: National League Started Under Favorable Auspices," *The Philadelphia Times,* Dec. 2, 1898, p 8.
[96] "Nicetown was Handicapped," *The Philadelphia Times,* Jan. 27, 1899, page 6.
[97] "The Empire Opens," *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* Feb. 19, 1901, page 8. Glazer, *Philadelphia Theatres, A-Z,* 104.
[98] "For Rent—Large Store and Pool Room," (Advertisement) *The Philadelphia Inquirer,* June 12, 1904, page 26.

The Empire Theatre seems to have had a volatile chain of management, a symptom of the boom-and-bust nature of the business. In April 1903, A. T. James leased the operation and immediately embarked on an "extensive renovation."[99] By December, *The Billboard* reported that "[w]ith a dull sickening thud the bottom dropped out of the business this week except at one or two of our local [Philadelphia] houses." The author attributed the decline in business to Christmas shopping and stores offering "first-class vaudeville shows" to keep the shoppers' attention. As illustration of the desperate circumstances, the story reported that A. T. James had closed the Empire, but that a new operator was already ready to take over the lease.[100]

Just three years later in 1906, another manager placed a dramatic plea in *The New York Clipper*, looking to sell his lease after only ten days into his tenure, also having completed a renovation.[101]


WANTED A BUYER FOR LEASE OF EMPIRE THEATRE FRANKFORD, PA.
I have only had the theatre open one week and three days, and played to good business. $1,000 paid on first years' rent, with option of two more years' lease, if desired. Have expended $600 in renovating and improving theatre. Seating capacity, 1,400; population of Frankford, 40,000. Bridesburg, Kensington, Torresdale, Tioga, Tacony, Germantown and Fox-chase to draw from. Electric cars from all the above places pass theatre door. Must sell at once. Terms reasonable. Only parties with cash need apply. Call or address
MANAGER EMPIRE THEATRE, 4650 Frankford Ave., Frankford, Pa.

Figure 68: Advertisement from a desperate theater manager in *The New York Clipper* in January, 1906.

Further alterations and additions were completed in 1909, overseen by architects Naschold & Knutzen.[102]

[99] "Building and Real Estate Notes," *Builders' Guide,* Vol XVIII, no. 14, April 8, 1903, page 209.
[100] "Philadelphia," *The Billboard*, December 26, 1903, page 5.
[101] "Wanted: A Buyer for Lease of Empire Theatre," *The New York Clipper,* January 13, 1906, page 1205.
[102] "Architects' Notes," *Builders' Guide,* Vol. XXIV, no. 9, March 3, 1909, page 129.

Appendix C: Details of Historic Maps Showing the Immediate Vicinity

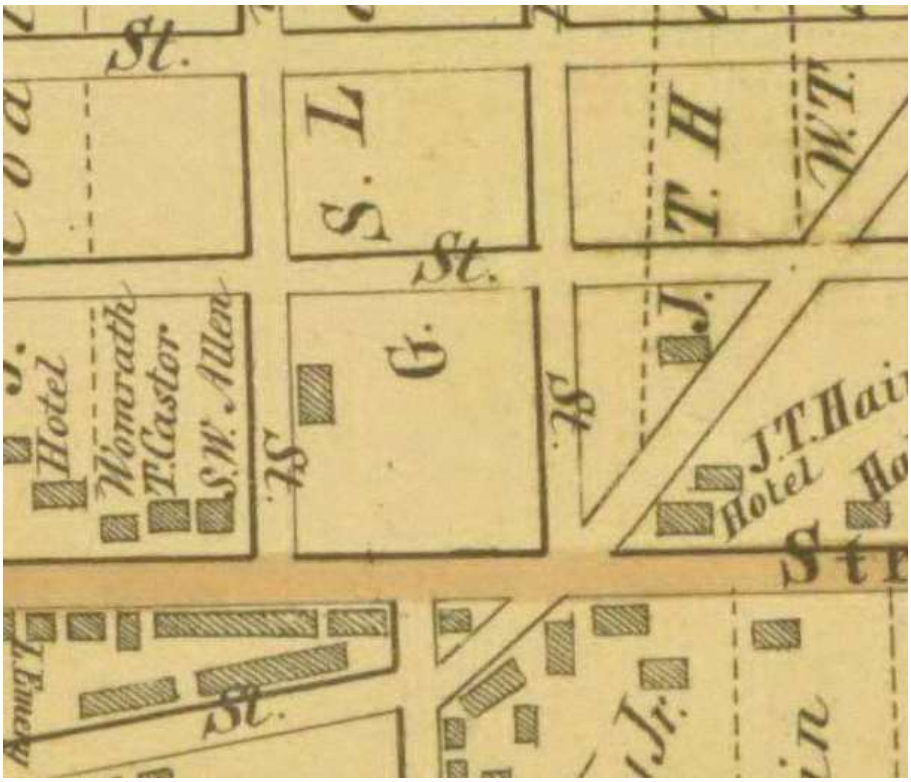


Figure 69: James C. Sidney, *Map of the Township of Oxford, Boroughs of Frankford and Bridesburg*, 1849. PhilaGeoHistory.org.

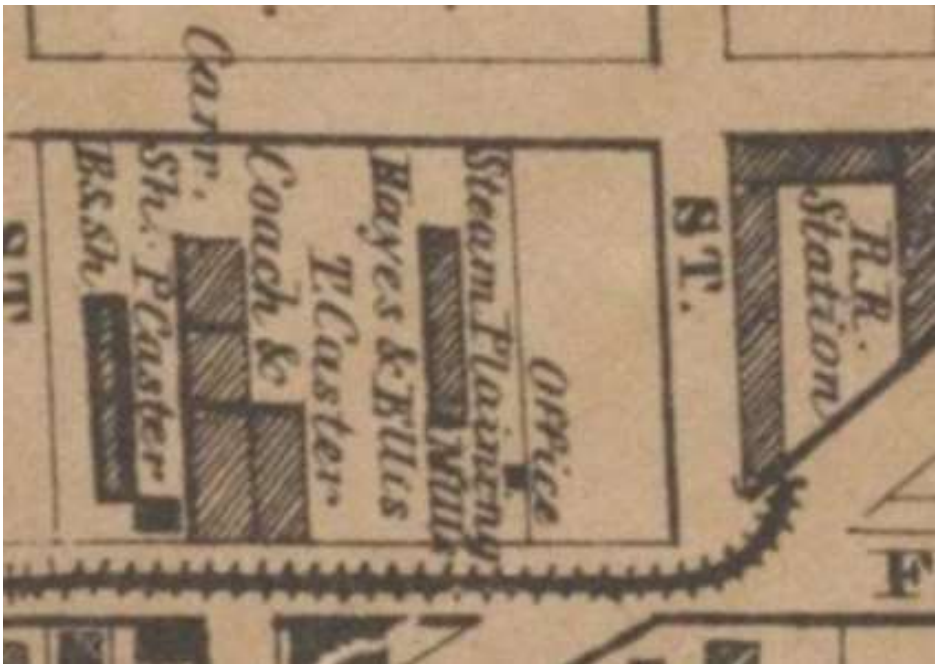


Figure 70: D. J. Lake and S. N. Beers, *Map of the Vicinity of Philadelphia, from Actual Surveys*, 1861, Plate 3-A. Free Library of Philadelphia.

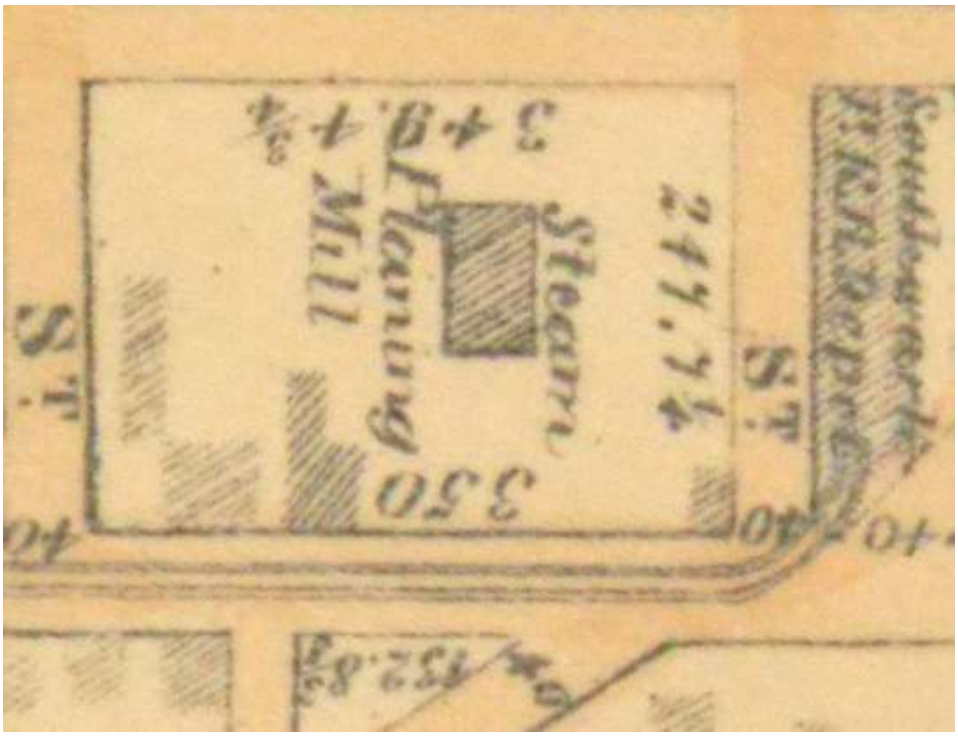


Figure 71: Samuel Smedley, *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia*, Section 24, 1862. Free Library of Philadelphia.

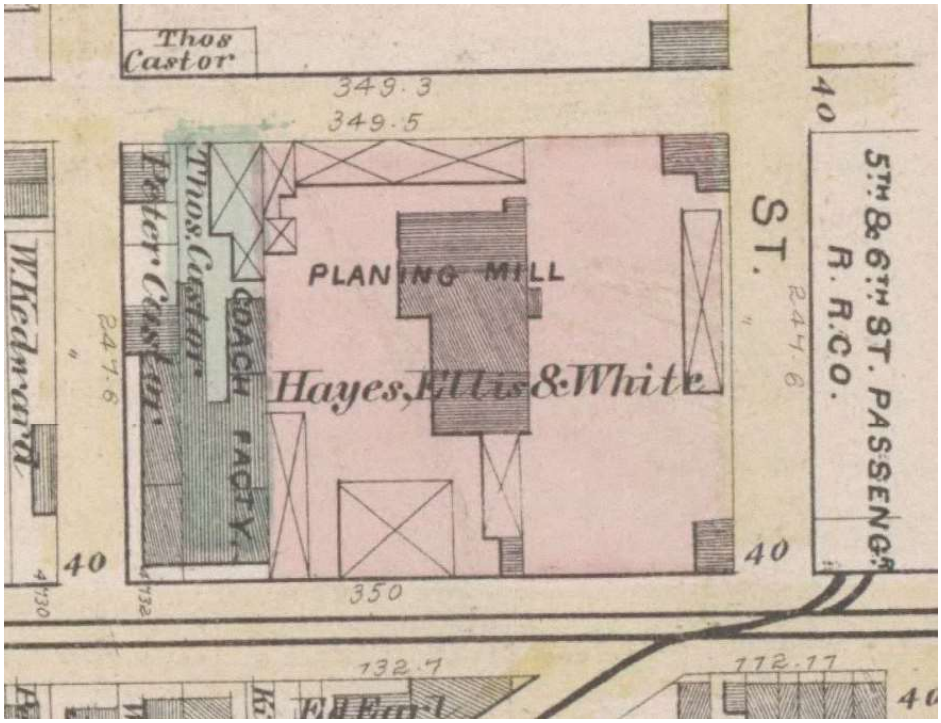


Figure 72: G. M. Hopkins, *City Atlas of Philadelphia, Vol. 3: 23rd Ward*, 1876, Plate A. Free Library of Philadelphia.

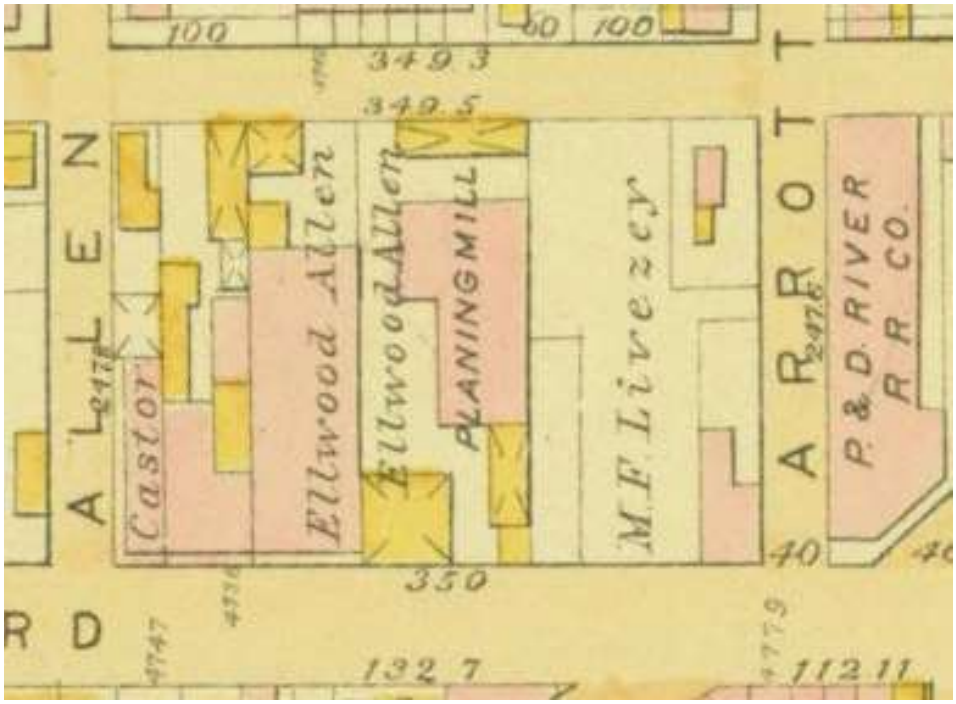


Figure 73: G. M. Hopkins, *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 23rd Ward*, 1887, Plate 3. PhilaGeoHistory.org.

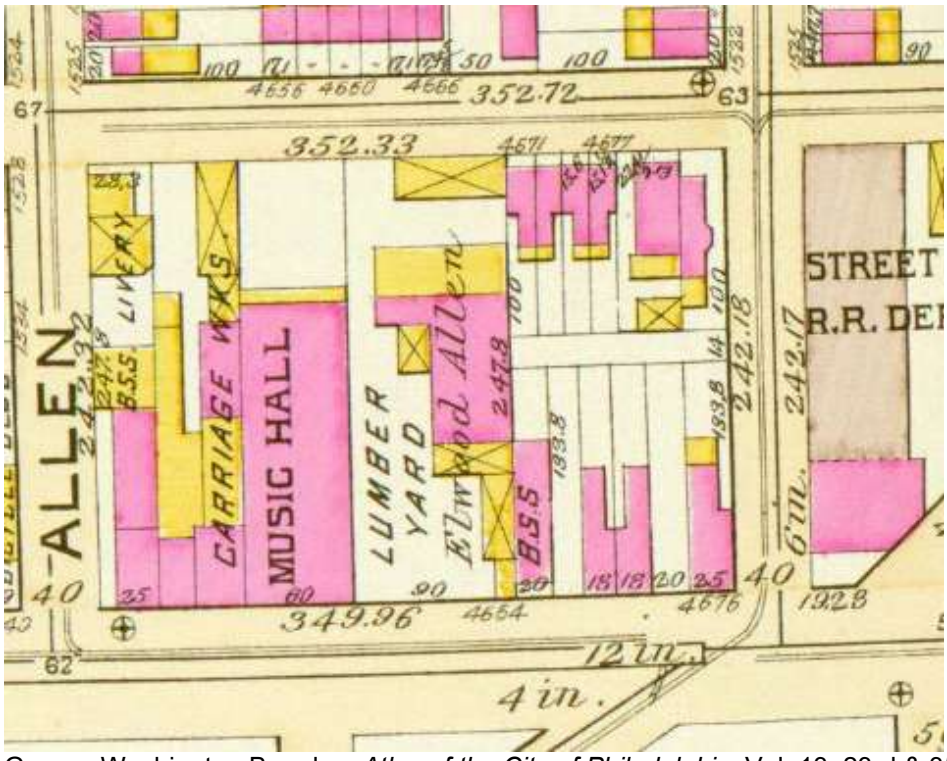


Figure 74: George Washington Bromley, *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia*, Vol. 13: 23rd & 35th Wards, 1894, Plate 3. PhilaGeoHistory.org.

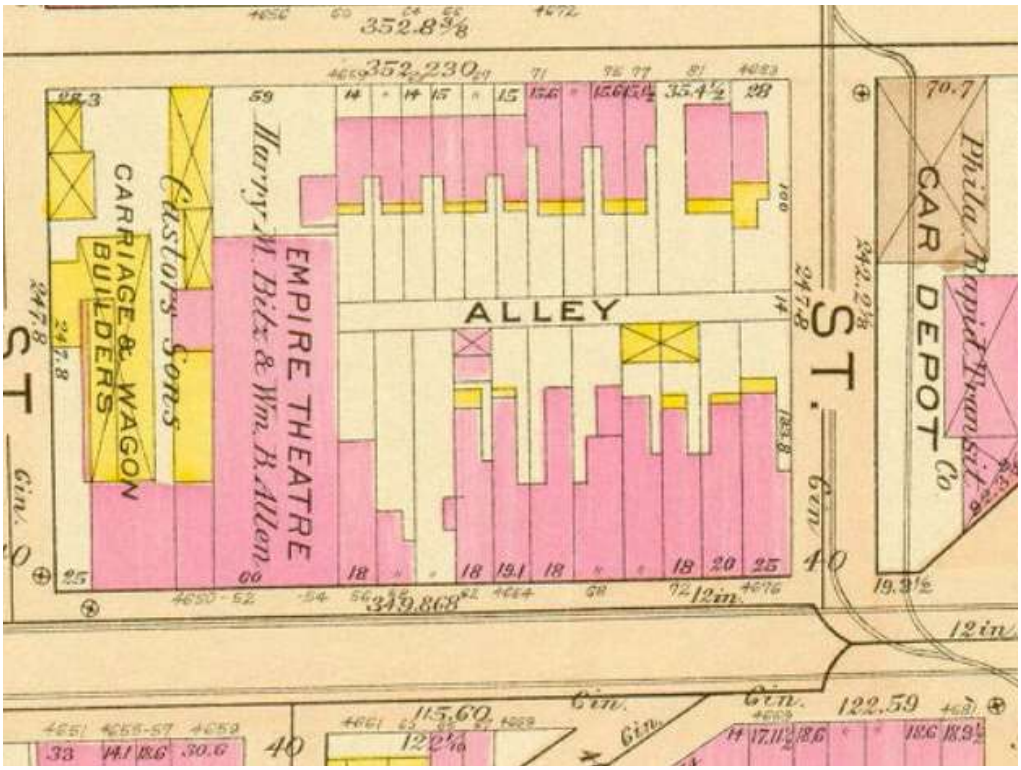


Figure 75: J. L. Smith, *Atlas of the 23rd, 35th & 41st Wards of the City of Philadelphia*, 1910, Plate 5. PhilaGeoHistory.org.

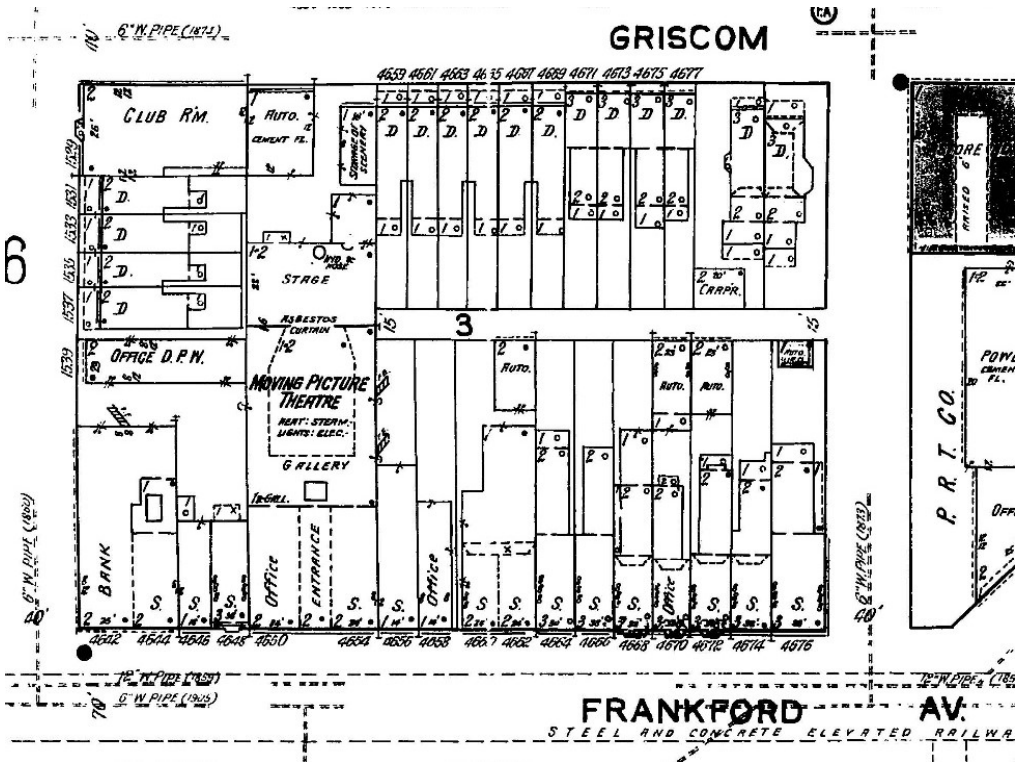


Figure 76: Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Philadelphia*, 1920, Vol. 11, Plate 1057. ProQuest: Digital Sanborn Maps, 1867-1970.

Figure 77: George Washington Bromley, *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia: 23rd & 41st Wards*, 1929, Plate 7. PhilaGeoHistory.org.

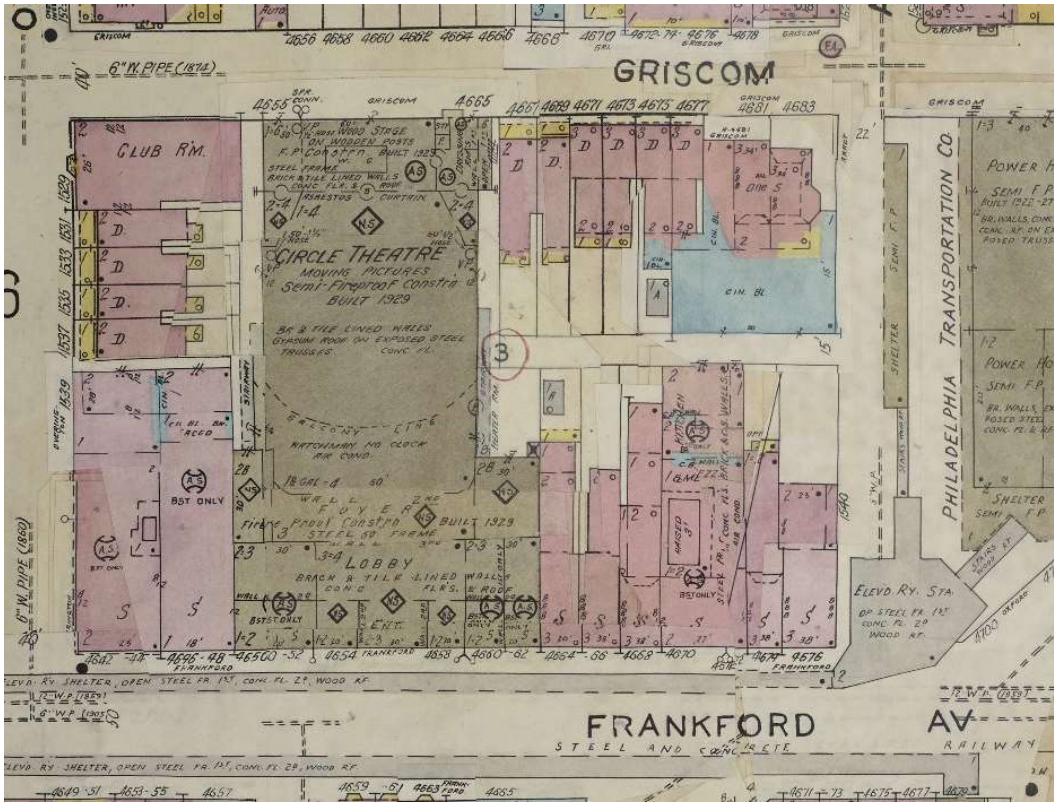


Figure 78: Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Philadelphia*, 1920, updated to 1951, Vol. 11, Plate 1057. Library of Congress.

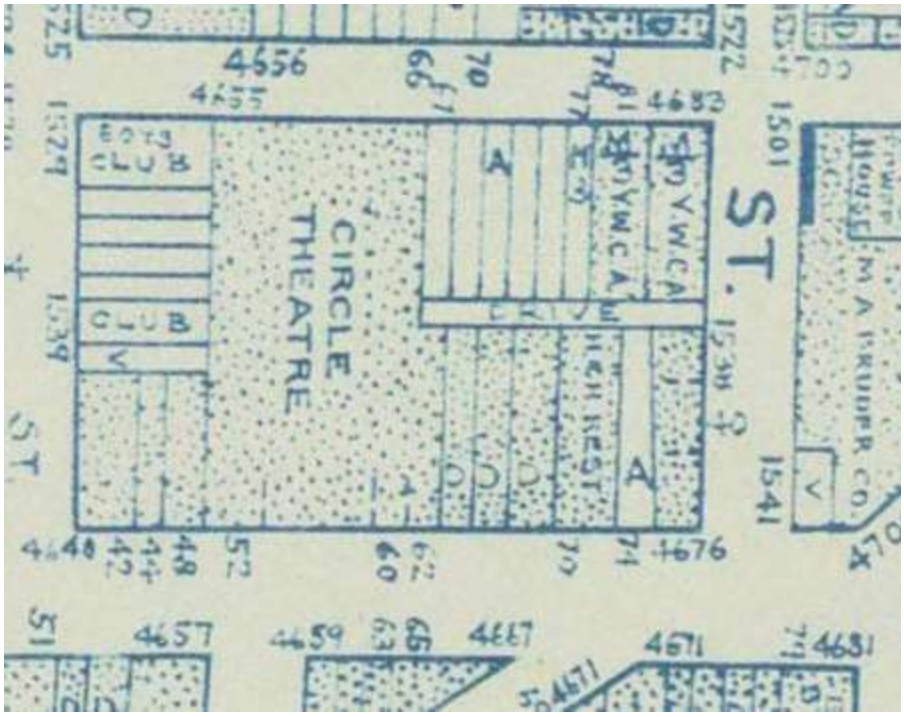


Figure 79: Federal Works Progress Administration, *Philadelphia Land Use Map*, 1962, Plate 6C-3. PhilaGeoHistory.org.

Appendix D: Photos of the Circle Theatre in the Glazer Theater Collection at the Athenaeum of Philadelphia


EE173 CIRCLE THEATRE-FRANKFORD PA. FOYER 9-11-29 "52E

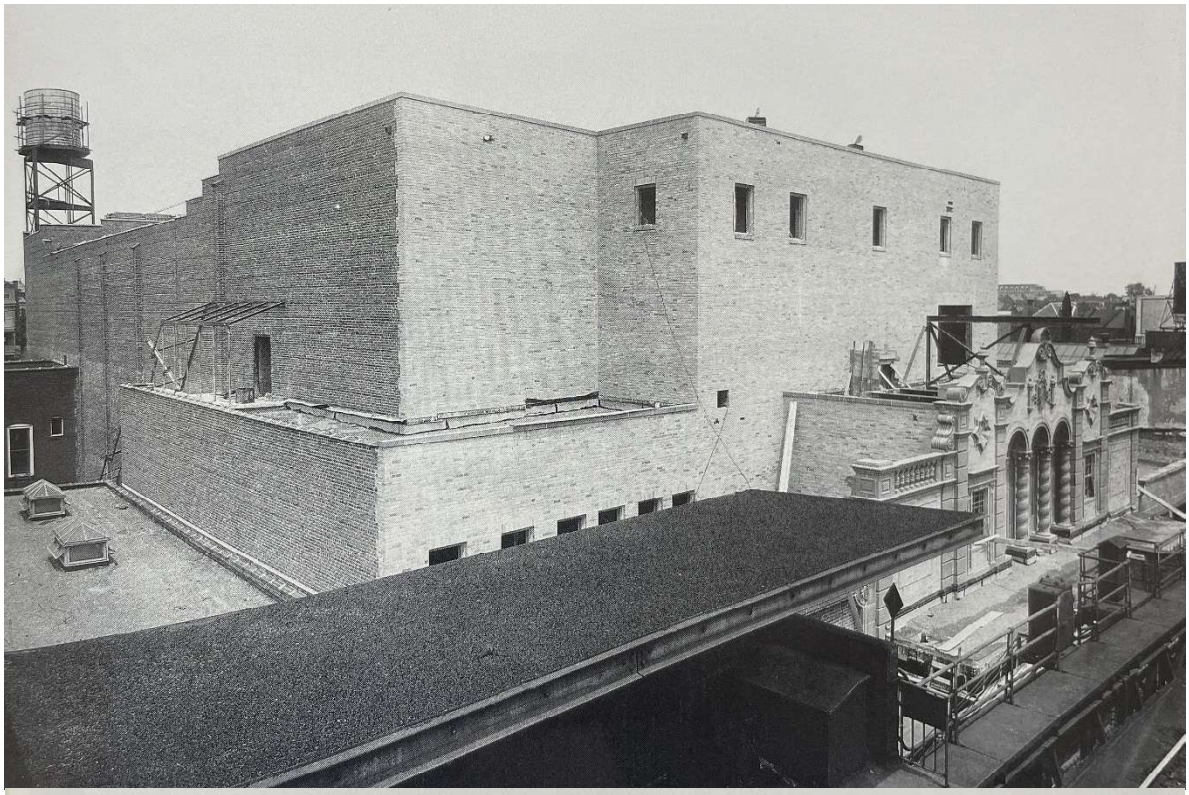

EE173 CIRCLE THEATRE-FRANKFORD PA. AUDITORIUM LOOKING EAST 9-10-29 "54E


EE 173
CIRCLE THEATRE - FRANKFORD
9-15-29
#58 E


EE173
CIRCLE THEATRE- FRANKFORD PA
LOBBY
9-9-29
51E

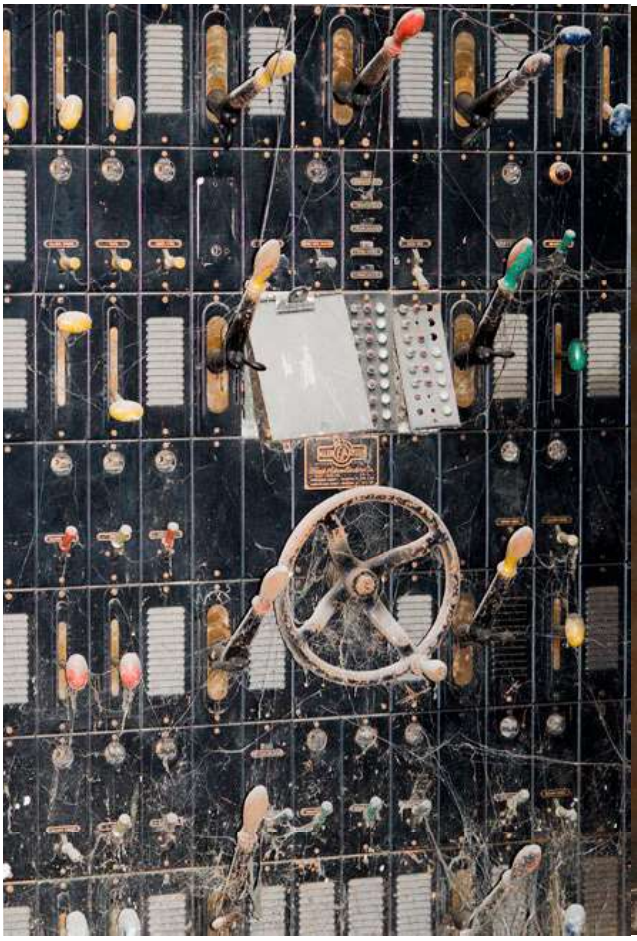

EE 173


EE 173 CIRCLE THEATRE -FRANKFORD PA. - PROMENADE - 9-10-29-#57E



Photos on this page were reproduced in Irvin R. Glazer*, Philadelphia Theaters: A Pictorial Architectural History*, 1994, Athenaeum of Philadelphia, page 67.

Appendix E: Interior Photos of the Circle Theatre by Peter Woodall, 2010



Appendix F: Data Regarding Selected Movie Theaters (in alphabetical order)

Theater Name	Address	Date	Architects	Status	Altered by H-H
Admiral Theatre	2806 North 5th St	1928	Hodgens & Hill	Standing	
Aldine Theatre	1826 Chestnut St	1921	W. F. Lotz	Standing	
Ambassador Theatre	5538-50 Baltimore Ave	1921	H. C. Hodgens	Standing	
Apollo Theatre (Capital)	1237-45 North 52nd St	1915	Thalheimer & Weitz	Standing	
Arcadia Theatre	1529-31 Chestnut St	1914	Henon & Boyle	Demolished	
Bolivar Theatre	Eugenio Espejo near Juan Jose Flores, Quito, Ecuador	1933	Hoffman-Henon	Standing	
Boyd Theatre	1910 Chestnut St	1928	Hoffman-Henon	Standing	
Capitol Theatre	724 Market St	1919	P. J. Henon	Demolished	
Circle Theatre	4648-62 Frankford Ave	1929	Hoffman-Henon	Standing	
Colney Theatre	5619-33 North 5th St	1924-25	Hodgens & Hill	Standing	
Cross Keys	5931 Market St	1914	W. H. Hoffman and Co.	Demolished	
Diamond Theatre	2117-23 Germantown Ave	1922-23	Neubauer & Supowitz	Standing	
Earle Theatre	11th and Market	1924	Hoffman-Henon	Demolished	
Egyptian Theatre (Bala Theatre)	163 Bala Ave, Bala Cynwyd, PA	1927	Hoffman-Henon	Standing	
Enright Theatre	Pittsburgh, PA	1928	Hoffman-Henon	Demolished	
Erlanger Theatre	21st and Market	1927	Hoffman-Henon	Demolished	
Jefferson Theatre	2217-2223 North 29th St	1913	J. D. Allen	Standing	
Locust Theatre	228-36 S 52nd St	1914	Stuckert & Sloan	Standing	1922
Logan Theatre	4732-42 N Broad St	1924	Hoffman-Henon	Standing	
Market Street Theatre (333 Market)	333 Market St	1912	W. H. Hoffman and Co.	Demolished	
Mastbaum Theatre	20th and Market	1929	Hoffman-Henon	Demolished	
Palace Theatre	1214-16 Market St	1919	P. J. Henon	Demolished	
Princess Theatre	1018 Market Street	1911	Unknown	Demolished	1919
Regent Theatre	1632-34 Market Street	1918	Henon & Boyle	Demolished	
Sedgwick Theatre	7133-43 Germantown Ave	1929	W. H. Lee	Standing	
Stanley Theatre	19th and Market	1921	Hoffman-Henon	Demolished	
Stanley Theatre	237 7th Street, Pittsburgh, PA	1928	Hoffman-Henon	Standing	
Stanton Theatre (originally Stanley)	16th and Market	1914	W. H. Hoffman and Co.	Demolished	
Warner Theatre (Embassy)	Atlantic City, NJ	1929	Hoffman-Henon	Standing	

Appendix G: Nominations to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places involving Movies and Movie Theaters

1826 Chestnut St: **The Aldine Theatre**, nomination withdrawn February 11, 2022, nominated by the Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia; Kevin Block, author

2117-23 Germantown Ave: **The Diamond Theatre**, designated November 8, 2024, nominated by the Keeping Society; Oscar Beisert, author

228-36 S 52nd St: **The Locust Theatre**, designated November 9, 2018; nominated by Noah Yoder

1910 Chestnut St: **The Boyd Theatre**, designated August 8, 2008; nominated by the Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia; John Andrew Gallery, author

2301-03 N Broad St **(Jules Mastbaum residence)**, designated November 9, 2018; nominated by the Keeping Society; Amy Lambert, author

1608 N 15th St: **Siegmund Lubin House**, designated August 9, 2024, nominated by the Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia; Matthew Havens, author