

Landmarks Preservation Commission  
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LP-0803

LYCEUM THEATRE, 149-157 West 45th Street, Borough of Manhattan.  
Completed 1903; architects Herts & Tallant.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 998, Lot 8.

On July 24, 1973, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Lyceum Theatre and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 34). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Seven witnesses spoke in favor of designation. The representative of the owner spoke in opposition to designation. The Commission has received many letters and other expressions of support in favor of this designation. In 1966, the Commission had held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Lyceum Theatre.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Lyceum Theatre, the oldest playhouse in New York City still serving the legitimate stage, was opened on November 2, 1903, under the management of Daniel Frohman. Designed by the firm of Herts & Tallant, which was noted for its theatres, the Lyceum is admired for its architecture, reflecting the grandeur of the French Beaux-Arts style.

Henry Beaumont Herts and Hugh Tallant had studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. They became well known as the architects of such theatres as the New Amsterdam on 41st Street, the Shubert Theatre on 44th Street, the Follies Bergere on 46th Street, and the Brooklyn Academy of Music, in addition to the Lyceum. Their designs displayed the ornate character of the Beaux-Arts style which created a special atmosphere--contributing to the excitement of the theatre. The extensive facilities and mechanical innovations were equally noteworthy features of their theatres.

Daniel Frohman had organized the Lyceum Stock Company in 1886 at the old Lyceum Theatre on the west side of Fourth Avenue between 23rd and 24th Streets. Although Frohman had hoped to continue with a stock company at the new Lyceum, theatrical fashion had changed to a preference for long-running productions instead of repertory, and the new Lyceum's policy conformed to this trend. The playhouse was opened with a production of "The Proud Prince" starring E. H. Southern. The first new play to have its premiere at the Lyceum was J. M. Barrie's "The Admirable Crichton" with William Gillette.

The fine facilities of the theatre and Frohman's management made the Lyceum one of the most successful and profitable playhouses on Broadway. Such illustrious actors and actresses as Billie Burke, Jeanne Eagels, Ethel Barrymore in "A Doll's House" and "The School for Scandal," John Drew, Alla Nazimova, Ina Claire, Leslie Howard, Judy Holliday, Basil Rathbone, Maurice Evans, and Charles Laughton starred in the productions on the Lyceum stage. Hits such as "Junior Miss," "The Late George Apley" and "Born Yesterday" are some of the plays that were presented at the Lyceum.

The Phoenix Repertory Theatre organization now has its offices in the building.

The writers of the day were lavish in their praise for the new theatre when it opened. "The New Lyceum Theatre is quietly rich in tone, and, while individual, at the same time displays the strictest regard for the essential groundwork and grammar of architecture," wrote Abbott Halstead Moore in the Architectural Record in 1904. One of the newspaper critics wrote: "In general arrangement and decorative treatment the architects, Herts & Tallant, have developed a building fitted to become the home of the drama. The gray limestone facade, with its composite order [and] its enriched window openings, strikes the keynote of dignity and richness."

The theatre building, which occupies a wide site on the north side of West 45th Street, is visually dominated by a row of tall ornate columns rising above a soaring canopy which protects the entrances at street level. These columns, which are fluted and banded, terminate in elaborate composite capitals, and support a massive entablature spanning the facade. The frieze is enlivened by heads in the form of theatrical masks. Tall French windows set in three-centered, richly decorated arched enframements open up the wall between the columns. A wide ornamental frieze adorns the wall above these windows.

Above the entablature is a balustrade serving as a balcony for the three central pedimented windows of the "penthouse"--now used for offices--which Mr. Frohman occupied as his residence, reputedly one of the first in the City. A sloping mansard roof above the penthouse with six oval dormer windows encloses a former rehearsal hall and, with its crestings, effectively crowns the theatre.

This theatre, with its vast array of technical innovations, its high stage house, and its many shops and storerooms, extends through to 46th Street. It represented the fulfilment of Daniel Frohman's dream of what a theatre should be. With its rich array of architectural details, the theatre is visually dramatic and recalls an exciting era in American theatrical history and of the theatrical world at the turn of the century.

#### FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Lyceum Theatre has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Lyceum Theatre is the oldest playhouse in New York City still serving the legitimate stage, that during its illustrious history many notable actors and actresses have appeared there, that it was designed in the ornate Beaux-Arts style by the noted theatre architects Herts & Tallant, that it contains extensive and innovative theatrical facilities, and that the building is visually dramatic, creating a special atmosphere contributing to the excitement of the theatre and recalling an exciting era in American theatrical history.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 63 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Lyceum Theatre, 149-157 West 45th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 998, Lot 8, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.